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Images of Sheherazade [1] Representations of the Postcolonial Female Subject

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ABSTRACT *This article attempts to analyse the construction of the postcolonial female subject by using both postcolonial and feminist theories. The purpose is to create a methodology applicable to the analysis of the writings by women authors in different parts of the so-called Third World. Drawing from rarely mentioned works by Latin American and North African authors exemplifying postcolonial writing I intend to build cultural bridges between these geographical areas, based on certain similarities regarding the representation of both the colonial and patriarchal oppression. The paper also points out the problematic role of cultural essentialism while argues for an expanded understanding of the possibilities of female subject construction by suggesting that female writing praxis needs to be reexamined in the light of postcolonial theory.*

"When you say Man," said Oedipus,
"you include women, too. Everyone knows that."
She said, "That's what you think."
Muriel Rukeiser

In this article I would like to focus on the representation of the female subject, the "gendered subaltern," (Spivak) by woman authors in the postcolonial world. In an early essay, "French Feminism in an International Frame" Gayatri Spivak attempts to define the role of the author and address the tension manifest in the representation of the postcolonial female subject:

> "I see no way to avoid insisting that there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? But who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss? Indeed, it is the absence of such unfeasible but crucial questions that makes the 'colonized woman' as 'subject' see the investigators as sweet and sympathetic creatures from another planet …" (1987, p.150).

How may the female subaltern be represented? What kind of representation would counter the images of the co-called Third World women that appear in the world media, or in Hollywood where women from India, the Arab world or Latin America are often

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represented with exaggerated exoticism. To answer these questions I will use concepts developed by different theorists that customarily are called postcolonial. Postcolonial theory was not developed by a unified group of theorists, quite the contrary, those who wrote about the postcolonial come from many different parts of the word (India, Australia, South Africa, US, etc.) representing diverse experiences and their writings cover a "wide range of theoretical concerns" (Mills 1998, p.98). Postcolonial theories deal with a great variety of issues, such as the formation of (post)colonial discourse, cultural hybridity, racial métissage, representations of the subaltern. They are all tied, in one way or other, to the effect of colonization on cultures and societies. This effect does not cease to exist with the physical withdrawal of the colonizer, but its influence is felt indefinitely in a so-called postcolonial state. John McLeod (2000) gives a valuable overview of the development of the main tendencies in postcolonial theories. He scrutinizes fundamental texts, such as Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that lead to the development of "colonialist discourse theory" that was the focus of studies by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak as well (Bhabha, 1984; Spivak, 1993). Although essential to the work of these critics, the term postcolonial has been used *per se* for the first time in Bill Ashcroft's celebrated study, *The Empire Writes Back*, (1989a) which deals mainly with cultural interactions in colonial societies. In a more recent work Ashcroft defines postcolonialism as follows:

> Post/colonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquest, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of the empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities. (1998, p. 187)

The relationship between knowledge and the operations of power is a cardinal issue in postcolonial theory and it was at the core of Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a seminal work admittedly informed by Foucault's writings. Sara Mills refers to Said as a "post-colonial discourse theorist" in an informative article, "Post-Colonial Feminist Theory" and states that he "analysed the way that Europe in the nineteenth century represented many of the cultures with which it came into contact through imperial expansion; he argued that the West produced these other cultures as the Other to a Western norm" (1998, p. 98). Said assigned an important role to exoticism in the discursive representation of the Orient. Because exoticism is relevant not only in the representation of the Oriental, but in the representation of alterity in general, the usefulness of his theory goes much beyond the Orient and it may be applied to postcolonial representations almost anywhere. According to Said, Western discourse created a particular Orient in order to justify its economic, intellectual and moral superiority over its territory and its subjects. In Orientalist discourse colonial and postcolonial, particularly female subjects tend to be represented by an ambivalence of desire and disdain. They are mysterious yet untrustworthy, sexually arousing yet not quite clean, intriguing and yet uninteresting. Although Said's work is fundamental in postcolonial studies, it has its limitations in demonstrating how sexual difference operates in the production of Orientalist discourse. Meyda Yegenoglu's *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (1998) comes to mind that fills this void. Orientalist representation of women in both colonial and patriarchal writings is created by a discourse whose aim is to justify oppression. According to the concept Trinh Minh-ha put forth in her book, *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) women that live under patriarchy, in addition to being colonized and racially

marginalised are found in a double, even triple bind. Minh-ha does not really develop this idea in her book, she merely suggests that a Third World woman who is a writer, for example, "is bound to go through the ordeal of exposing her work to the abuse of praises [sic] and criticisms that either ignore of overemphasize her racial and sexual attributes." (6) In an article written several years later Minh-ha raises the question of the "she/other" who is "not a foreigner but foreign" and insists on equality with a difference. "She knows she is being different while at the same time being Him. Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in an undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out" (1995, p. 218). Minh-ha touches upon the idea of fluidity related to identity, not unlike Shohat and Spivak, who also suggested fluidity as opposed to fixed categories that would reduce identity to essentialist notions.

Minh-ha's "double/triple bind" might offer an important link between the marginalisation of women by both colonization and racism, in addition to patriarchal oppression. The issue here is the distinction between oppression and repression. The examination of this question must begin by distinguishing between "other" and "Other." In Lacan's theory the "other" designates the other who resembles the self that the child discovers when it looks in the mirror and realizes that s/he is a separate human being. The "Other" is the one that has been called the *grande-outre* by Lacan in whose gaze the subject gains identity (1968). "Other" is regarded as the repressed part of the psyche, and "other" as the oppressed groups and individuals. From the point of view of the colonizer, there may in truth be no fundamental difference; from the point of view of the oppressed, however, this is to negate their entire experience. As Hartsock notes, the field of operations of this "archeology" is the site of the ruins of the Enlightenment (1990, p. 35). Thus, it is not surprising that the other can be found there only through gaps and absences. The other is silent, s/he is spoken for by the colonizer (or by the male in patriarchy). There is a need to uncover other sites to find both a living presence and vital alternatives. That is being done as a consequence of postmodernity, the dissolution of canonical borders that allows for the inclusion of voices that have been previously silenced. Hartsock concludes: "The point is to develop an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world … Other possibilities exist and must be (perhaps can only be) developed by hitherto marginalized voices" (1990, p. 36).

The marginalisation of the female other is a chief issue in Spivak's work because of the tensions inherent to her deconstructive-feminist-diasporic postcoloniality and her assumption that in the so-called Third World discourses are also inspired by various forms of deconstruction, namely, de Manian, postmodern and subaltern studies. Spivak proposes a postcolonial critique and textuality in which "you take positions in terms not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding", in fact, an "incessant re-coding of diversified fields of value" that will result in the "deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial" (1990, p. 222). Like that of Minh-ha, Spivak's image of a postcolonial identity places the danger of assuming a fixed identity, such as that of a woman, a subaltern, a person of color, etc. Thus postcolonial theory makes its fundamental shift from essentializing (fixed) notions of identity to more fluid and "nuanced" representation, that "allows for movement, and mobility" (Shohat 1992, p. 109).

Representation of women has been particularly problematic in colonial and even postcolonial texts, because the colonial/imperial context imposed a hierarchical thinking in which patriarchal values find a fertile soil. In her article, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" Chandra Mohanty analyses the construc-

tion of the so-called Third World Woman as "a singular monolithic subject" in Western feminists' texts. For Mohanty the central problem occurs when Western feminists employ "women as a category of analysis" based on the notion of a shared oppression. This is problematic because it assumes that women are a coherent group or category prior to their entry into the social, cultural and family structure. According to Mohanty, any analysis of women needs to be based on "particular local contexts". At the same time meanings and explanations need to be given "according to the socio-historical context" (1988, pp. 62, 74, 87). It is clearly problematic to represent women as the other and to consider them to be a homogeneous group as they are considered and represented by both the colonizer and the male. It may be added that most of the colonial discourse is produced by male writers. Colonial self-representation tends to emphasize masculinity in opposition of "other, seemingly weaker forms of 'native' masculinities" (Mills 1998, p. 99) that, in turn, were played off against an even weaker entity, the feminine. This is a very important issue because, as Anne MacClintock points out, "imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" (1995, p. 6). That is why representation of the gendered (post)colonial subject is often done in terms of resistance and survival.

Sara Mills insists on the fact that postcolonial theory "has been a rather masculinist field" (1998, p. 99), although she admits that many of the best theorists have been female. She mentions Spivak and Anne McClintock, but the list may also include Ella Shohat, Benita Parry, Sara Suleri, Helen Tiffin, Elleke Boehmer, Ania Loomba, Leela Gandhi, Chandra Mohanty, Jamaica Kinkaid, Barbara Christian, Debra Castillo, Françoise Lionnet, and it would still be incomplete. It seems that postcolonial theory has been more inclusive of female critics than other areas of theoretical investigation. This may be due to the parallel perceived between male and colonial domination that leads naturally from feminist to postcolonial inquiries [2].

In what follows I will discuss representations of the postcolonial female subject in two areas of the so-called Third World: Latin America and North Africa because of the unlikely yet real similarities that may be observed between them. Sheherazade's name is included in the title not only because of its iconic reference to feminine resistance and survival, but also because it serves as a cultural bridge between the areas I would like to address. In North Africa, not surprisingly, there are numerous references to Sheherazade in the writings of women authors. According to Lucy Stone McNeece "[I]n addition to the *Koran*, one of the books deeply embedded in the Maghrebi imaginary is the anonymous *The Thousand and One Nights*, in which the heroine, Sheharazade, tells stories to the Sultan in order to stay alive" (1995, p. 64). In Latin America as well, there are abundant references to the Persian princess in similar vein. In Isabel Allende's *Eva Luna* Sherazade also appears in the context of women telling stories to save lives: "… dijo entonces a Sheherezada: Hermana, por Alá sobre ti, cuéntanos una historia que nos haga pasar la noche" (1987, p. 8) [3]. Sheherazade is a paradigm for women who successfully resist male domination to save and to give life. A Mexican writer and critic, Margo Glantz characterizes Sheherazade in the following way: "Shahrazad es la imagen más absoluta de la vitalidad: es un ser que se prodiga y habla por todas sus bocas pues por la primera da a luz todos los relatos y por la segunda pare todos los cuerpos que el sultán engendra en ella"(12) [4].

In *Paralelismos transatlánticos: postcolonialismo y escritura femenina en América Latina y Africa del Norte*, a book I wrote a few years earlier, I propose that feminine discourse has to be "decolonized" of patriarchal discourse, just like postcolonial states would have to rid themselves of the legacy of colonial powers. With an obvious reference to Spivak's much quoted article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson rephrase the

question put forth by Spivak: "Can any subject speak? Or every subject is spoken for and thus colonized by processes constitutive of the human condition, from the psychological and biological to the economic, political and discursive" (1992, p. xiv). Within the historical frame of colonization and decolonization what is being reclaimed "is a series of regulative political concepts, the *supposedly* authoritative narrative of the production which was written elsewhere, in the social formation of Western Europe" (Spivak: 1993, p. 60).

Because the colonized subject is effectively stripped of agency [5] women writers (and their male counterparts) tried to develop a language of their own and often turned to autobiography or to other types of memoralistic discourse as their genre of preference in their representation of the female subject. Teresa de la Parra's *Memorias de Mamá Blanca* (1929), or the monumental *Autobiografia* (1979–1984) by Virginia Ocampo, or Katia Rubinstein's *Mémoire d'une fillette illettrée d'Afrique du Nord à l'époque coloniale* (1979), or *Histoire de ma vie* (1968) by Fadhma Amrouche, or *Jacinthe noir* (1947) by her daughter, Taos Amrouche [6] would be works that fit in this category. Autobiography as a genre permits women to write in the contestatory mode, not only as women who challenge the patriarchal discourse, but also as (post)colonial subjects refuting the colonial frame of representation. This position is diametrically opposed to that of George Gusdorf. In his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" he proposes individualism as the sole motivation for autobiographical writing, that is "a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" (1956, p. 29). However, this individualistic concept of the autobiographical self poses a serious problem as far as the post-colonial female articulations of the subject are concerned. The model of a separate and unique selfhood favoured by many Western critics (like Gusdurf) ultimately establishes a critical bias *vis-à-vis* the autobiographies written by women, particularly Third World women. Susan Stanford Friedman gives two reasons for the inapplicability of the individualistic model. According to her, the model does not take into account the group identity for "women and minorities" and moreover, it ignores the "differences in socialization in the construction of the male and female gender identity" (1988, p. 72).

Due to marginalisation the writings of entire groups of women were excluded from the formation of the canon given their lack of access to power (in more concrete terms, to the publishing industry). Hazard Adams shares this idea: "Whether a text is written by a man or a woman has nothing to do with its admission to or absence from the literary canon on the basis of antithetical criteria. But it certainly does matter, at least at this time, on the basis of the power criteria" (1988, p. 755). In this sense, both the writings by so-called Third World authors and writings by women have been "ignorada[s] por la crítica, marginalizada por el mundo editorial" (Araújo 1990, p. 40) [7].

The patriarchal models of power relations between the sexes in the two geographical areas of my inquiry display more similarities that one might think. It is not the means of male domination that are similar but its tradition. It is not the religions that are the same, but the role religion plays in patriarchal oppression. Irony and transgression are two ways of countering patriarchy in women's writing. If we think of Blanca Sol's transgression of "everything that is considered decent" in 19th century Peruvian society by becoming a madame of a bordello in Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera's novel (published in 1889!) or the fundamental irony in Angeles Mastretta's *Arráncame la vida* where excessive *machista* values prevalent in post-revolutionary Mexican society are carefully deconstructed, or Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (1990), where they are transgressed and ridiculed, we will not be surprised reading *La Soif* (1957), or *Ombre Sultan* (1987) by Assia Djebar where transgression is the only female reaction to

patriarchy that brings ultimate liberation (in spite of repeated retaliations women must suffer along the way).

Postcolonial representations of history are crucial for establishing a self-identity, both individual and collective. In *Les Mots et les choses* (1966) Foucault described the combination of discourses, assumptions and values that distinguish historical periods as the epistemological paradigm governing what is considered truth or knowledge at the time. He concludes that there is no History with capital H by which a linear development of historical events is understood that points to a better future. This idea of historical progress is tied to Modernity. In the postmodern period history is conceived through different versions of the same event narrated by voices belonging to a wide array of sources. This idea has been wonderfully applied in Assia Djebar's *L'amour la fantasia* (1985) which is a type of counter-history, much like Gioconda Belli's *La mujer habitada* (1988) is. In both novels there is a parallel representation of the was that lead to colonization and the war that would lead to liberation by two pairs of female narrators. There is a noticeable difference in the way male and female writers see war. Elias Khoury, a Lebanese writer compares Beirut devastated by the war to a prostitute that offers herself to anyone. On the other hand, Ethel Adnan, also Lebanese, applies a sexual metaphor as well to talk about the destroyed city as a victim of violation. (Accad 1990, pp. 1–2; Marx-Scouras 1993, p. 175)

By re-telling a story in different ways and by different voices, a case may be made for counter-history as opposed to the official history. While representations of the official history tend to be national, rational, written, and logocentric, counter-history is oral, intuitive and emotive, inspired more by individual experience. Women writers show great sensitivity toward subjects left out of official representations and readily create the other "versions" of history. This palimpsestic modality of writing appears in a powerful metaphor in *L'amour la fantasia* where the author quotes the diaries of Eugene Fromentin a traveller in Algeria in 1852 as the country was being colonized by the French.

> … au sortir de l'oasis que six mois après du massacre, empuait, Fromentin ramasse, dans la poussière, une main coupée d'une Algérienne anonyme. Il la jette ensuite sur son chemin. Plus tard, *je me saisis de cette main vivante*, main de la mutilation et du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le *qalam* [8] (1985, p. 255). [9]

Violence, wars, political oppression, economic marginalisation, dictatorships in the (post)colonial world do not come without a price. Exile is a sad consequence of the various forms of violence that create yet other patterns of cultural hybridity by displacement. According to Homi Bhabha "it is from those who suffered the sentence of history -subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons" (1992, p. 44). Exile, be it for political or economic reasons, create similar traumas in immigrant communities. Writing by *Beurs* [10] constitutes a good example of how an exiled community (by using the word community I do not mean to imply that it is a homogeneous group) acquires hybrid identities with conflicting elements that are particularly hard to deal with for the new generation that are born in the "new country" (in this case, France) and do not have a stable sense of belonging. They are the "in-between"s, not quite accepted by either the French, or the North Africans because culturally (or in some cases, racially) they do not belong completely to either group [11]. Conflicts caused by this continuous identity crisis often lead to rebellion, which is particularly well represented in Mehdi Charef's film (based on his novel), *The au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983). The title is an evident takeoff on the *théoreme d'Archimed*. The cultural

strategy of the film is to respond to French racism and the cultural marginalisation of the Beurs by deploying stereotypes in such a way as to undermine their power and by manipulating language with the inclusion of Arabic argot and accent, to challenge the sway of traditional conventions. Such female subjects are to be found in the works of Leila Sebbar, who herself is of mixed cultural heritage. Her novels, *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (1984), and *Le chinois vert de l'Afrique* (1984) in addition to her trilogy, *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982), *Les carnets de Shérazade* (1985), and *Le Fou de Shérazade* (1991) are chronicles of the cultural homelessness of young *Beurettes* (female *Beurs*) in France.

In Latin America a many works depict the circumstances of the exile, motivated mostly by the dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone during the 70s and the civil wars in Central America during the 80s. Most of them (those written by men as well) command women for their courage in the struggle against the dictators and the military establishment. One example comes from the book of Luis Vitale, who himself was a prisoner in one of the concentration camps in Chile during the Pinochet regime. "No es la primera vez en la historia contemporánea que las mujeres presas dieron muestras de su capacidad de resistencia ante 'situaciones limites', en el umbral de la muerte por torturas fisicas y psicológicas" (1975, p. 32) [12]. The best-known example of the resistance is the movement of the Argentine "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" that fights for learning the fate of their disappeared children and grandchildren, a movement, that in fact, brought down the dictatorship of General Videla. Antonio Elio Brailovsky comments: "Today we know that those kerchiefs in the streets stopped the disappearances and that there are many Argentineans who owe their lives to these Mothers circling the Plaza de Mayo" (1992, p. 88). Many writers took up the representation of the dictatorships because of the collective trauma suffered by their society. Some of them chose to fictionalise their experience, or that of others', like Marta Traba, in *Conversación al sur* (1981), or Adriana Lassel, in *Le sang l'âme et l'éspoir* (1986). Many writers however, in an attempt to give voice to the voiceless, chose testimonial discourse that represents a collective identity like Alicia Partnoy did in *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina* (1986), or Nora Strejilevich in *Una sola muerte numerosa* (1997), or Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la memoria* (1985); although Menchú's role as a writer may be disputed by some -as its content was by David Stoll- due to Elisabeth Burgos' involvement in the writing process.

It is important to mark the differences between autobiography and testimonial writing, especially if the testimonial account is mediated, like it is in Menchú's case. Autobiography is generally rooted in the chronological account of a life. In testimonial writing, however, a collective experience is described emphasising the fact that it was shared by a group of people. Beyond the role of chronicle writer the author of a testimonial account often speaks from a moral position for representing a group experience.

Female experience is embodied in the female subject. As said before, women in (post)colonial cultures have been termed 'the twice colonised', both by the imperial and the male social order. As such, women and the colonised are seen as sharing an experience of oppression and subjugation that has constructed their very beings. Feminism however also has a problematic relationship with postcolonialism. For instance, postcolonial nationalists protesting against the atrocities of imperialism see feminist efforts at liberating women from patriarchy as a kind of betrayal of nationalist and patriotic agendas. As an example, I would like to refer to *La Soif*, Assia Djebar's first novel published in 1957 during the Algerian War (1954–1962). Its topic, a love triangle and the disintegration of a marriage, was heavily criticized by Maghrebian critics at the

time. They accused the writer of "betraying her people" for writing about "frivolous" themes (Marx-Scouras 1993, p. 172; Mortimer 1983, p. 8). On the other hand, in her defence, Abdelkebir Khatibi suggests that *La Soif* is a revolution in itself for openly treating female sexuality that had been a taboo in Maghrebian literature (1968, p. 50).

Woman writers have been unlayering the palimpsest of the patriarchal and the colonial narrative by engaging their ambiguities, filling their voids, transgressing their taboos, interrogating their in-between(s). The female body as an object of writing, is transformed into the female subject writing its own text(s), thus repositioning women's role as producers of history and of culture.

A feminist and postcolonial approach applied concurrently are useful tools to analyse women's writing in different areas of the world. Sara Mills stresses in her article that the development of post-colonial feminist theory, indeed, has brought about a "worlding" of feminist theories, as they "moved from a rather parochial concern with white, middle-class, English-speaking women to focus on women in different national and cultural contexts" (1998, p. 98). Ashcroft also considers useful the intersection of postcolonial and feminist theories and suggests that a "cross-fertilization of ideas" would be a positive outcome of this encounter (1989b). However, we must recognize that neither the terms nor the methodologies are unproblematic. As Sara Mills puts it: "in examining the role of white women in the colonial context, it may be possible to more clearly delimit the ways in which these stereotypes have played a part in the construction of the parameters for subject positions…." (1998, p. 109). The strategic importance of any identity claim is critical in the formation of the postcolonial female subject. Three aspects play a role in the production of this self-knowledge, the political, the historical, and the cultural. Postcolonial societies inherit the trauma of colonialism that subjects people to a cultural displacement. Homi Bhabha connects the idea of cultural; displacement to the broader issue of cultural and national identity (1994, p. 145). Thus the nation "becomes liminal signifying space that is internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense location of cultural difference" (1994, p. 145–148). Gender identity is to be included in the discussion of the "discourses of minorities" as it also contributes to the formation "the heterogeneous histories". The fragmented or hybrid nature of the postcolonial female subject demands its construction through subversion of both the colonial and the patriarchal discourse. These "deconstructive moves" within the texts are used to dismantle master narratives inspired by Eurocentric discourse and, at the same time, to challenge the logocentric categories upon which colonial and patriarchal discourses are based.

NOTES

[1] Spelling varies mainly because *One thousand and One Nights* originates from cultural traditions (Indian, Persian, Arab) whose languages use different alphabets.

[2] This assumption constitutes the focus of my book, *Paralelismos transatlanticos* (1996).

[3] And [she] said to Sheherazade: Sister, blessing of Allah upon you, tell us a story that will get us through the night. (All translations are mine, unless it is indicated otherwise.)

[4] Sherazade is the image of the most absolute vitality: is a being who speaks through all her mouths, through the first one she brings to light all of the stories and through the second one she gives birth to all of the bodies the Sultan engenders in her.

[5] This is precisely what Spivak is talking about in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* when she says: "I don't want a theory of essences. We have enough of those" (1993: 15). However, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, Mills concludes: "what she [Spivak] wants is a theory of agency and strategy" (1998: 104). She defends this position by talking about a "strategic essentialism" supposedly advocated by Spivak.

[6] Please note that Fadhma Amrouche's *Histoire de ma vie* (1968) is a posthumus publication. That is why her daughter's autobiographical novel was published much earlier in 1947.
[7] ignored by critics and marginalised by the publishing industry.
[8] *Qalam*: (Arabic) pen, originally bird feather, for writing.
[9] "Fromentin picks up out of the dust the severed hand of an anonymous Algerian woman. He throws it down again in his path. Later, I seize on this living hand, hand of multilation and of memory and I attempt to bring it the *qalam*" (226). The translation comes from Assia Djebar: *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*. Translated by Dorothy S. Blair.
[10] "*Beur*" is the label used to refer to the children of North African (Maghrebi) immigrants to France, previously known as "second-generation immigrants". They are not immigrants in the traditional sense of the word, for the *Beur* generation consists of children born into involuntary minority status, with none of the dreams and illusions that prompted their parents to leave North Africa in hopes of a better life. Their literature, which became known in the 80's, reflects a profound crisis of identity of people caught between traditional (Maghrebian) and French cultures whose values often clash.
[11] Another example of a group caught between two cultures belonging entirely to neither is the so-called *Pachucos* of California who are of Mexican descent and were born in the U.S. A good illustration of their culture is the film *Zoot Suit* (1981) by Luis Valdés.
[12] This is not the first time in recent history that women prisoners manifested their capacity of resistance in 'extreme situations' at the threshold of death caused by physical and psychological torture.

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