



ASSIA DJEBAR'S SO VAST THE PRISON:VALORISING THE WAILING VOICES

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Abstract

Women have basically become prisoners of the never-ending and ever-changing rules and restrictions that society has enforced. This research concentrates on the mechanism of the novel So Vast the Prison by Assia Djebbar whereby it constitutes a thinking that is imperative in the realization of women's perspectives and demands. It is against this that the research considers the value of social and historical movements by postcolonial feminist groups in the Muslim world, and consequently the impacts of these movements on politics and culture. This study seeks to identify the success of rewriting history from a feminist viewpoint as a solution to the issue of gender inequality. It will also seek to break down the position of a woman in her profession, histories, and even in her very skin and how it is a prerequisite to the birth of a new identity.

Keywords: Assia Djebbar, So Vast the Prison, postcolonial feminism, Muslim women, gender inequality, women's identity, feminist rewriting of history, politics and culture, women's perspectives

1.Introduction

In colonial society, women's status was undermined by race, through colonization, and gender, through patriarchy, leading to a separate burden of colonization and decolonization. Once again, there is no significant difference between the colonized and the colonizer when it comes to gender violence. Because the process of liberation in such societies, it is women who must achieve equality first. If colonized men happen to experience the face of colonization, they tend to introduce colonized women as their equals, and both resist occupation and colonization together. However, when liberation is achieved, society becomes skewed again. Men who consider themselves masters tend to destroy the existing bonds between partners. The process of female oppression in the name of patriarchy makes men take the position of colonial masters over women. The past few decades have witnessed the development of postcolonial feminist thought. It is these postcolonial feminist scholars who capture the complex, multilayered work of gender and sexuality at the intersections of nationalism, colonialism, racism, and location in the politics of war and militarization.

This is a socio-political, cultural, and intellectual movement focused on the concept of women's oppression and liberation in colonial and postcolonial societies.

The works of Algerian director and writer Assia Djebbar have a clear historical dimension. Three specific aspects of her personal history are significant. First, in historical, ethnic, and autobiographical terms, her writing sheds light on Algerian women's society. Furthermore, her writing illustrates the deep pain felt by colonial society (France). Her position and culture within the French-imagined culture, as well as her desire to have a national, free Algerian culture, like her other Algerian counterparts, are also central themes.

Assia Djebbar, in her novel *So Vast the Prison*, focuses on the Algerian Civil War era. She also addresses postcolonial Algerian issues, with a specific focus on colonization and gender relations. Each section of the novel deals with a different form of imprisonment. The feeling



of being trapped mostly arises from the sense of women feeling violated and humiliated in relation to the inequality and insecurity of their roles. Broadly speaking, Muslim society is patriarchal, where women resent being reduced to victim status through oppression caused by ignorance. At other times, they are aware of their oppression without complaint, believing in what is called security. In such a society, the relationship between the two sexes tends to be unhealthy, as the foundation of unity is fear. The overall 'balance' of this declared societal dynamic is disrupted. Women cannot place themselves greedily, and are fully oppressed by the fear of expressing themselves, which could potentially lead to physical violence.

It is explained that women are irrational and merely passive participants, while they are part of and represent half of the world. There is no progress in women's conditions in postcolonial captivity. They simply learn to replace one ruler with another. This creates an imbalanced society because the balance between the sexes is disturbed, and women are the sufferers of these actions where they have no voice. Thus, *So Vast the Prison* brings women into the historical context to have a significant role in the preservation of culture and language and to have a fulfilling life in the contemporary world. This novel shows that women have always been the drivers of change, such that they have surpassed the erosion of their culture to the next generation. Researchers will analyze the personal, social, and historical significance of women's contributions in all fields. Therefore, the researcher will address the following:

a) In the world of fantasy or reality, a man's speech always dominates. Even in books, male authors have ignored the contributions of women throughout human history. All so-called history, in one way or another, is a highly elevated history written by men, and for men.

b) Unfortunately, the customs and traditions of societies around the world have always been a major barrier to women, hindering their ability to fulfill their potential. A woman's role in any field they occupy should not be questioned because their contributions are essential. Furthermore, the conventional norms of what is called a male-dominated order, which is still not married to the idea of a civilized society, is a very serious violation. Muslim society must immediately break free from the impasse it is stuck in, moving towards the empowerment and liberation of women that is needed.

In this novel, what emerges for me is the liberation of women's voices, thus freeing them from the patriarchal prison imposed by silence. In the early pages of this novel, the narrator's mother-in-law (Isma) refers to her husband as an enemy (p.37), which in turn becomes the enemy of all men. It is clear that women, to defend themselves, must do a lot of work to defend themselves because men are violators of women's rights.

Assia Djebar is unafraid to discuss herself and her gender. The entire substance of her novel is her childhood, some of her marriages, literary activities, her life as a filmmaker, her female friends, her female lineage, ancestors, and figures in Algerian history. She does not hesitate to narrate all dimensions of her life, whether the episodes she recounts are specific or more general. She primarily focuses on gender issues, which, in her creative works, are one of the most valuable elements rooted in themes within national, historical, and postcolonial discourse.

In *So Vast the Prison*, she tells the stories of women who have been lost and buried within the pages of history. This includes the tale of a cursed love, the lives of heroic women in history, mothers resisting French colonization and the sadness and sacrifice that accompanies it, women in traditional Algerian society, and finally, but certainly not least, the story of Yasmina, which ends in blood.

Assia Djebar, in this case, has provided the foundation for the world of a woman and that of a man in this context. Her study focuses on women who possess and assert different and independent personalities. The question is not whether a woman has become like a man, or whether such an identity is the opposite of a man's identity. Instead, the role that women must



take is independent of men, and built independently of the social image. Women in this novel present to the world an identity that does not allow society to limit them to male-dominated activities and choices.

2. Literature Review

Postcolonial feminism criticises nationalist discourse, as well as Western feminism, by drawing attention to the fact that women in colonised societies are colonised twice: by the imperialist domination and by local patriarchy. Mohanty (2003) cautions on the homogenisation of the so-called Third World women by Western feminism, and Spivak (1988) question whether the subaltern can speak or not reminds us of how colonised women continue to be silenced. In the Muslim societies, Ahmed (1992) shows how women were used as sources of cultural authenticity in the process of liberation movements but were effectively marginalized into subservient roles after attaining independence. Within this context, *So Vast the Prison* by Djébar can be interpreted as a revelation of this perpetual marginalisation in which Algerian women are presented not as the beneficers of decolonisation but as the victims of reinforced patriarchal control and in which the structural continuity of the oppression in both colonial and postcolonial settings can be identified.

The writings of Assia Djébar serve as counter-histories to reclaim the experiences of women systematically removed in the history of colonial and nationalism. Through her conflation of autobiography, oral testimony and communal memory, she creates what Mortimer (2005) proposes as female genealogy, which places women as the creators of cultural retention and not as mere victims. In *So Vast the Prison*, such a practice of remembering is consistent with Hirsch's (1997) concept of postmemory wherein the trauma of previous generations is re-experienced and is passed on through storytelling. De Meyer (2011) adds further that Djébar moves the forgotten women into the historical limelight, that the personal narratives of love, loss, and confinement are connected to the general memories of the sacrifice and endurance. In this way, Djébar reconstructs the Algerian women not in the periphery of the past but at its core, against the erases that were inflicted by the patriarchy and colonialism.

Conscious silence is the order imposed by patriarchy of postcolonial societies, as women are forced to either shut their eyes or to take the abuse as part of keeping the cultural safety. This paradox can be explained with the help of the concept of the patriarchal bargain presented by Kandiyoti (1988) according to which women should obey the patriarchal norms as the survival strategy but not as the acceptance. Nevertheless, silence is not a neutral state: Trinh Minh-ha (1989) views it as submission and latent resistance at the same time, whereas Cooke (1993) views it as a conversion of silence to defiance among Arab women. Djébar depicts this duality in *So Vast the Prison* as women characters alternate between the muteness of fear and narrative reappropriation that states agency. The novel thus highlights the gap in becoming the rebel when one speaks up, revealing the gendered oppression in addition to providing resistance avenues in the highly patriarchal set up.

At the center of Djébar work is the creation of female subjectivity outside of colonial and patriarchal worlds, and this theme is echoed in Bhabha (1994) theory of hybrid identities and Butler (1990) theory of gender performativity. Whereas nationalist movements tend to diminish women into beacons of national chasteness or pride, Djébar demands that women have their own way of building their own identities, independent of men and tradition. According to Wing (2000), her characters are unable to be subjected to symbolic appropriation because they reclaim agency by utilizing personal experiences of marriage, betrayal and memory that can never exist outside of Algeria's larger historical struggles. Identity is a constant bargaining process in *So Vast the Prison* since women do not allow themselves to



have their existence prescribed by the male dominated society but develop independent subjectivities that define new forms of cultural and political affiliation.

3. Methodology

The given research is based on the approach of a qualitative, interpretive, and textual analysis to explore the novel *So Vast the Prison* by Assia Djébar. Given that the study subject is the appreciation of the representation of women oppression, identity and agency in a postcolonial society, the methodology depends on close reading and critical interpretation of the novel by using the postcolonial feminist theory. The research does not focus on the use of numerical or statistical information but rather on thematic, discursive and narrative trends that mirror the socio-political as well as the cultural realities of Algerian women in the colonial and postcolonial context.

3.1 Tools for Data Collection

Textual analysis of the novel *So Vast the Prison* is the main instrument of data collection in the given research. The passages of texts are not chosen at random, and it is possible to note that they are chosen on the basis of the theme of gender, patriarchy, memory, silence, and identity. Besides this, secondary sources in the form of scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Assia Djébar, postcolonial feminism, and feminist literary theory are also employed to support and contextualise the analysis. The combination of primary and secondary texts makes the concept of the multi-layered interpretation of the literary techniques and feminist interests of Djébar possible.

3.2 Rationale

The importance of using textual analysis can be explained by the fact that the research problem aims to question the role of Djébar as the incarceration of women in the patriarchal and colonial institutions. The qualitative approach to the study gives the opportunity to deepen analysis of the symbolic, cultural, and historical backgrounds of the novel. The interpretation of texts allows one to know how literary discourses not only mirror but also challenge dominant discourses. This paper redresses these silences, erasures, and repressions by using postcolonial feminist reading techniques to show that women are historically marginalized by literary and historical practices especially in Muslim culture.

3.3 Sample

This paper will use the novel *So Vast the Prison* (1995) by Assia Djébar as the sample as it is explicitly addressing the topics of colonialism, patriarchy, gender oppression, and female identity. In the novel, special care is given to the passages that unveil the personal struggles of women, memories as a group, and how they were positioned in the Algerian history. The sample is further enhanced by relying on the supporting critical literature by postcolonial feminist scholars and past studies on Djébar that offer an interpretive approach and academic discussions are pertinent to the study.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The theory that will be used in this study is Postcolonial Feminism that focuses on the intersection of gender, race, colonialism and nationalism. Postcolonial feminism brings out the notion of double colonisation where women are oppressed by colonialists as well as by the indigenous patriarchal systems (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988). This framework is especially applied in the analysis of the image of Algerian women provided by Djébar since it helps to understand how the voices of women have been suppressed not only in colonial discourse but also in the nationalist projects. In addition, the framework also involves the views of other scholars like Ahmed (1992), who criticizes how women are manipulated as a symbol of culture, and Butler (1990) whose interpretations of the gender performativity can be used to explain how women reconstruct their identities in the novel. A combination of these theoretical



approaches makes it possible to read *So Vast the Prison* as a more subtle exploration of the feminist re-exploration of history and critique of the prison of the patria.

4. Analysis

Women writers like Djébar who was also Maghrebi were alienated twice. On the one hand it was a linguistic alienation (i.e. using the language of the colonizer) and on the other one it was a social alienation embedded in the gender as women could neither write nor even tell a narrative, Women quest of identity is a recurrent motif in Djébar. From an early age, she was inline fascinated with the concepts of freedom and identity, but she also understood the burden associated with such ideologies. It was important for them to reclaim their voices, for them to be heard and understood, to be an active participant in history, rather than solely be an observer. This was the revolution for both the women, and for the writers. Literary works were produced to reestablish the self, the identity, the community, the ignored, and the sounded narrative, but most importantly, to restore the elk. Djébar and her protagonists were educated, free, and were in control of their destinies. This brought unprecedented changes in the value and position women were regarded as. To Djébar, such women were meant to symbolize the women of Islam, and the emerging threads of the feminist movement. Amna, whom was the wife of an algerian police officer was an open active feminist, as was Suzanne, who was an intellectual from France. In addition, we also had Salima and Hassiba, who were both revolutionaries, and of course, the Touma, who was studying at the university.

She also 'was' an intersectional feminist 'who' insisted that the mark of 'woman' 'could not' be used as a universal 'sameness' (Minh-ha, 1989). The reason why Min 'ha' could provide testimony, is 'because' as 'she herself stated' 'Every' tactic, if 'I' may borrow 'the' phrase, 'has' a purpose and 'in' this case 'the' purpose is for 'me' 'to' re-evaluate my situation, 'and' thus 'I' begin adequately pondering over 'the' idea that 'the' personal is 'the' cultural and historical 'and' political 'at' the same time. What this self reflexive interrogation, as 'I' have just 'put' it entails, 'is' not 'the' inquiry that used to be, 'who' is this 'but' 'when' 'where' and 'how' 'I' 'am' (so and so). It means 'I' remain unconvinced 'of' 'the' so-called strategies 'that' have 'never' integrated 'the' strategies of displacement.

In this context, the question of displacement is also a question of the identity: there is no substantive 'me' to revert to, no totality of being that constitutes the woman, the woman of colour, the writer, but a nexus of identifications in difference, and or provisional and contingent, arbitrary closures, which negotiate the prospects for politics and identity (p. 43). In fact, identity being no longer canonized as the patriarchal and colonial space, but, rather, fluid and shifting in order to position itself within a new celebrated space. This 'new' celebrated space can be described as the 'third space' which is the dynamic space of constant flux of the hybrids and the flux of the nomads by Homi K Bhabha. Bhabha is of *Signs Taken for Wonders, Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817*. In such a system of disposition, as I have proposed, the position of difference and otherness, or of the space of the adversarial, is, within such a system, never out of the frame or, unconditionally, oppositional to the site of otherness.

It is positioned on the contours of the limit of authorization, that is, on the surface of what I have termed disposal-as-bestowal and disposition-as-inclination (p.32).

They are only too late of course, in their professional lives, even the lives of heroines, of revolutionary chiefs, of writers, of instructors, of pupils, etc, to discover their escape routes out of the social and patriarchal net. Djébar creates a female space that is an spectator space and a space of authorship where she reinvents historical and national Algerian discourses. *So Vast the Prison* touches a general female voice that tells the actual historical accounts of the people of Algerian women on the subjective women platform in fictitious and non-fictitious modes of



expression. Djebbar wants to possess a long repressed identity and in her poetics the subaltern is talking in the context she is recounting the narratives that the patriarchal and the colonial have gagged over its history in the form of the objectified Algerian woman where the struggle of the subalterns in the Algerian independence struggle is indeed not present in the official record. To do that she goes back to the "harem" to the closed houses and to the safe windows. She conveys a message to the women locked and chained behind the veils in the harem There is incisiveness and they do not actually interact much with the outside world. She gives the unveiling of the inner women, domesticity, emotional and social dogmas in which decisions are made. She offers the women access to the world of words and subjectivity, Djebbar is faced with the challenge of overcoming the socio-cultural and intellectual hiatus that occurs due to the patriarchy and the political, cultural and theoretical landscape of institutions. In the case of *So Vast the Prison*, Djebbar felt the urgency to write down a collective and communal memory because Algerian women feared that such a memory would become irreparably lost. This has been clarified in her book *Remembering the (post)colonial Self Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djebbar* to have brought about the understanding that Djebbar is overly aware of the impermanence of a literature that is forgotten in the annals of time that this fear of writing erased by time is indicative of some underlying existential anxiety about being forgotten (Djebbar 2008). The desire to ensure that they will be remembered is a well-known fact because one of the main reasons why people write literature is this strong desire (p. 116).

Assia Djebbar has done all she can to recover the Algerian women history and now we can listen to the voices of the Muslim subaltern, Women of Algeria specific and to the Muslim women in general felt liberated as Djebbar succeeded to create a space where their voices are heard and they are reverberating. They were in the depth of history and Djebbar took them to the next epoch of history that is narrated with the word of pride and strength. The protagonists of Djebbar symbolize all Muslim women who were once put into silence or were oppressed or deported to the vaults of silence and oblivion. The concept of writing and righting Algeria through the lens of her women is among the primary themes of the literature of Assia Djebbar. The women voices are represented and the struggle they experienced in the French colonial regime and the post colonial era is a burden too heavy and so burdened Djebbar in her poetics. She is not only an Algerian woman, but a writer who disrupts the premises of male discourse in the meaning of patriarchy and colonialism. Djebbar had the knowledge that the Algerian liberation struggle has not ended with the termination of colonialism but that there was still another struggle that has just started with women in independent Algeria. In her essay, *the eyes of language*, Djebbar talks of the end of the road of returning and returning to the broken Algerian history in an attempt to reawaken the stories of women. She has written: Thou hast always haggged with thy country, and art illagged. You want to quit it,--and you want not to quit it, you want to forget and not to remember it, to curse and to praisese it... Yes, up to the limit as you can go you agree to live... until you reach your own land again at the end of your travels... look[ing] once more at this country, and its tragedy, and its blood, and to consider its betrayal, its martyrdom, its curse (p. 785).

Djebbar as a film and literary theorist stresses that the cinema and the literary works of women pay honour to female voices that in turn create spaces or positions of cinematic and literary authorship, yet these voices are reliant upon the female that in the first place occupies cinematic and literary positions as spectators.

Djebbar is the best-known and perhaps the most influential Algerian author whose impact on Algerian and French literature is considered as vibrant and very in demand. What is applauded and confirmed as an aesthetic enterprise and implacable feminist energy is her literary approach.



She is particularly commended as she emphasizes on the creation of different, provocative and in most instances controversial, portrayal of Algerian society and history.

So Vast the Prison is presented as colossal tapestry that crosses collective and often feminine experience of the cultural geography of Algeria, usually based on archival source or oral memory, and alludes to the particular experience of Djébar growing up and living her own life in colonial Algeria. Djébar has a tendency to make use of various records and documents in her works and reinvests or remake their subject-matter, her style in the interweaving of the source material in her novels has been modelled after the metaphor of the palimpsest. To many critics, her opus is considered to be reconsideration of the meaning of the identity characteristics in the general, national context of Algerian identity. So Vast the Prison provides a series of experiences extended to the readers as Algerian, experience, and still, and yet this is feminist Muslim and human peculiarities which cannot be denied.

The novel is in a suspenseful tension with the de-centring simultaneously of the national identity that is male-female, Arsh-Berber, Arabic French, even as the larger context of nation is retained, even enhanced, especially in the passage that moves back in history to reinstate and absorb the pre-national figures into the national presentation of mythical figures.

Since Algeria is in a way a real and solid passage of representation as a representative of a collective identity and a community, inhabiting geographical space and a political-historical existence, one may assume that Djébar prominence is entirely involved in the process of engagement and reconstruction of the nationalistic discourse because she deals with issues of broader scope and extent that has a tendency to encompass the geographical and cultural boundaries of homeland. Her work is in a conspicuous position of endorsing and negating or promoting nation-centred forms of identity. She identifies ways of enslaving the women in the national and postcolonial texts not by abandoning them but by feminizing them.

The So Vast the Prison by Djébar suggests a new consciousness of the past experiences, identities that have been systematically and conventionally overlooked and stifled, and at times even choked out of life altogether (as in the case of women) by claiming female agency in the social process of writing history, by insisting on the bringing into life of this greater awareness and greater consciousness. In this text, one can find no ready-made answers to the Algerian and Muslim socio-political issues. It condemns the dualistic value structure in France, Algeria and Muslim world and it does not want to be rescued towards one identity. In her quest herself of returning to Algeria she problematises the idea of the homeland in the sense that Algeria could not be washed into one unity because there were contradictions in its culture and politics. Her fugitive status becomes an important process of redefining a self-identity that contains a broad spectrum of the worldviews.

Using the autobiography genre, she indicates the inseparable nature of the individual and the collective, and advances the postcolonial hybrid identities within a society that appreciates differences and tolerates complexities. The differences no longer appear before the readers of the works by Assia Djébar in the context of disapproval but on the contrary the differences are valued and welcomed as they help form a new image of Muslim women in general and Algerian women in particular. Djébar sheds light on the peculiarities of tortures of women their long, torturous and frustrating way to the struggle against the power of the patriarchy. They are forced to go on a long painful process in which they are molding themselves into a space.

Irigary (1993) has attempted to provide the answer to the question of the sexual difference by analyzing the mechanisms in the presence of which thought and language whether they are related in descriptive sciences or in the descriptive sciences described (descriptive sciences described) are gendered. She has narrated how woman has been so far thought of as a place a



place that has been colonized, occupied by the aggressor, man, has provided the prospect of a third possible space, which could be occupied by woman and man:

In her book *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (p.20) she writes: A world to be created and re-created so that man and woman may either again or finally live and amuse themselves together in a place sometimes. They have to be, everybody, she adds. This space is analogous to the space of woman which will be opened by the writings of Assia Djébar which will not arrive at a reversal of displacement of the space of man nor even at fusion to a space of sameness, but at the creation of a distinct and specific space which will also hymnize all the differences.

Through the lens of postcolonial feminism, Assia Djébar tackles the issues of resistance and politicised identities within the framework of the tradition of Maghrebian female writers. Women literate such works of writers as they attained subjectivity since they became the speaker subjects in the historical and literary productions which reduced them to the level of objects. This allows them the space to counter-negotiate the pressurisation, whenever needed, to reverse the existing notions of the common and the traditional power structures.

Through the lens of poetics, Djébar attempts to reimagine and reshape the notion of identity pertaining to a newly born Maghrebian and a Muslim woman. The crux of this priming necessity to formulate a new self is sociologically, politically, and ideologically driven. The lives of women have historically been retarded and 'store housed' behind the safekeeping of the solid heavy cloak of patriarchy and colonialism. Djébar acts as a sort of one-way window, through which the multiple voices of women who had been silenced for so long are freed and articulated. Thus, in the Maghreb and Islamic world, Djébar is able to constructively correct the narrative of Algeria, redefining these voices and accounts. By her tactics, women are able to claim and assert their presence in all of the narratives in which their voices are ethnocentrically and forcibly silenced.

5. Findings and Conclusion

5.1 Findings

The paper has found that *So Vast the Prison* by Assia Djébar reappropriates the histories of silenced women, by placing them in the center of the Algerian cultural and historical discourse. The discussion reveals that female characters in Djébar are of various origins; they can be militants and teachers, mothers and wives, and even other characters who are not on the margins like prostitutes, but forms of resilience and change. All these characters oppose the twin colonisation of both the colonial institutions and native patriarchy and declare their identities which are fluid, dynamic and not meant to be confined. Offering a plurality of women experiences, Djébar disrupts the homogeneity of the nationalist discourse and prefigures women as the bearers of cultural continuation and social transformation.

The results also illustrate that Djébar narrative practice serves as a spectator-authorial space in which Algerian women reassert subjectivity in storytelling. Based on oral traditions, autobiography, and archival sources, Djébar reclaims the voices that were erased by the colonial, as well as by the patriarchal systems. By so doing, she creates a feminist counter-history in which silence is turned into testimony. The paper also finds that Djébar adheres to postcolonial feminist critics like Trinh T. Minh-ha, Spivak and Bhabha, as her texture is open to hybridity, displacement and indefinite identity. This forms what Bhabha calls a third space, in which Algerian women will be able to bargain their multiple identities without being allotted essentialist definitions of nation, culture, and gender.

Also, the results reveal that Djébar was preoccupied with continuity and memory. Her anger at cultural and historical erasure is also the motivating force behind her literary work, as it guarantees that the sacrifices and achievements of Algerian women would be recorded and passed down the generations. That is why *So Vast the Prison* is considered as an archive and



resistance, as they store the stories of women in relation to being forgotten by history. The writings of Djébar thus break down binary systems of value, male/female, coloniser/colonised, French/Algerian and offers hybrid, inclusive identities that are respectful of difference and yet not dominated.

5.2 Conclusion

The study will find that *So Vast the Prison* by Assia Djébar is a breakthrough in the genre of postcolonial feminist literature because it does not only reveal the levels of oppression faced by Algerian women but also creates the discursive spaces in which women can speak, act and reestablish their identity. The work by Djébar shows that post-colonial liberation did not equal post-colonial women liberation as they were still trapped in patriarchal systems. Nevertheless, her series of innovative narrative tricks (combining autobiography, oral testimony and fiction) make sure that the subaltern is actually speaking, and in the process, turns silence into action. This paper confirms that the feminist vision that Djébar articulates is not unique to Algerian women alone but can be emulated by Muslim women across the world providing examples of resistance, endurance and cultural survival. Her textual productions disrupt the fixity of identity and suggest instead the mobile, shifting subjectivities based on memory, history and difference. In a final decision, the contribution made by Djébar is that she can rewrite Algerian national and cultural past by focusing on the voices of women, which are no longer peripheral in terms of their involvement in historical recollection and identity construction.

Reclaiming the role of women in national and postcolonial discourses, *So Vast the Prison* illustrates that literature can be used as a memory-making, as well as a liberatory measure. As such, the poetics of Djébar not only offer a critical re-inscription of Algerian history, but also a more general feminist approach to intersections of gender, colonialism and identity in the postcolonial societies.

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