The Women's Hammam: A Lived Place of Feminine Culture & Representation in Maghrebi Literature & Film

PhD in French Studies

Department of Languages and Cultures

Assya Belahmar Louazani

December 2023

Declaration: I confirm that this thesis is my own and the use of all material from other sources have been properly acknowledged.

ASSYA BELAHMAR LOUAZANI

Acknowledgement

I start this thesis by dedicating it to the persons who have been alongside me throughout this memorable journey, who have pushed me forward and inspired me in more ways than one.

To my husband and soulmate Zoheir, who, as I have said times and times again, deserves an honorary Doctorate for the part his has played from the onset of this incredible journey: thank you, you are my rock. To my son, my everything, Ilyan: funnily enough, you have made this research work much more tedious than it was supposed to, still, I wouldn't want it any other way; I love you and I hope Mommy has made you proud.

A special thank you goes to my brilliant supervisors, Sophie Heywood and John Mckeane: truly, no words could ever suffice to extend my gratitude and appreciation to you both for being here throughout this process and for your unwavering support.

To my wonderful parents and siblings, and to my incredible second family, my in-laws: thank you all for being part of my life and for your endless encouragements and prayers.

To end this dedication, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues but also the faculty members who have been part of this in one way or another, I am grateful to you all.

Abstract

This study analyses Maghrebi Francophone Postcolonial literature and films by Algerian female authors such as Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar, and filmmaker Rayhana Obermeyer who expose the feminine condition in post-independence Algeria, during and after the traumatic Civil War. The focus of the study revolves around the space used to depict this feminine condition, the homosocial women's hammam. Based on the notions of 'lived space' by French geographer and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, and Luce Irigaray and Deborah Jones's 'parler femme' and 'women's oral culture', I argue that these feminist Algerian women's writings all specifically use the historically exoticized hammam as a lived space to create an emancipated microcosm for their female characters in a patriarchal society – a female-exclusive microcosm where Algerian women gather, socialize and finally feel free to express their taboo and repressed thoughts and desires, and to explore and nurture their bodies like nowhere else.

Through Djebar, Sebbar and Obermeyer's Maghrebi insider lens, and mine, I explore how these representations of the women's hammam disclose realities that go further than Orientalist imagination and hegemonic patriarchal discourses could have ever grasped. These writings provide an account of the Algerian women's socio-political condition, their physical and spiritual awareness, but also their solidarity in the face of male adversity from an insider's rendition of the presumed exotic setting where it all takes place, the hammam – a place where all the senses are embraced, and where the hammam's lived experiences nurtures and discloses both the lived female bodies and the women's minds/voices in an oppressive postcolonial Algeria.

Contents

Introduction:

> *« Le **hammam** s'est imposé du point de vue philosophique et ancestral comme lieu cathartique de mise à nue. Dans ma société, le hammam est un des rares lieux où une femme peut aller sans réprimande. »*[1]

Women's writing and filmmaking in Algeria are artistic and political tools possessing a subversive dimension, on the one hand because they qualify as feminist acts which make a historical contribution to the advancement of women's voices, portrayal, and ensuing perception, and on the other, because they serve to denounce, question, and challenge the social system and power structures in place that oppress them. By representing historically suppressed voices, women's writing and filmmaking contribute to rebel against the hegemonic domineering discourse.[2] The pivotal space on which this research revolves is the Maghrebi Hammam, as an historical architectural establishment and an ancestral ritual and experience for Maghrebi-Muslim women which allows a unique feminine culture to be nurtured and disclosed in writing and film.

Introducing the Maghrebi Women's Hammam:

In the Arabic language, the term hammam is connotes both the word *hamim* which means private, and the verb *hamma* which translates to taking a bath, making it a unique name which implies private bathing. Farouk Omar Asli and Radhi Jazi define it simply as

1 'Anecdotes Du Film À Mon Âge Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer - AlloCiné'.
2 Assia Djebar, Vaste Est La Prison (Albin Michel, 1995).

'l'établissement spécifique où on se lave à l'eau chaude'.[3] In most established writings from historical Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Battuta, we find a direct confluence between the city and the hammam, as it occupies an important place in the architectural fabric of the Arab-Muslim city. Islam has united under one doctrine an immense power with diverse architectural techniques and practices. Each Muslim city has its own personality, its own style. However, this diversity of spatial configurations converges towards a singularity: within any city, the mosque and the hammam are almost always built side by side for hygienic and religious reasons.

Islam raised the importance and value of cleanliness, until it made those who purify themselves beloved by Allah, when He says in the Qu'ran: 'Allah loves those who repent and loves those who purify themselves'. The Muslim prophet further stresses this in one of his chronicled sayings (*hadith)*: 'Cleanliness is half of faith. (Sahih Muslim Vol. 2, No.0432). (35)'.[4] Indeed purity is part of faith because it is considered among the conditions for the validity of acts of worship such as prayer, pilgrimage, and touching the Holy Qur'an. It is also necessary for the one standing before God to be pure in soul, pure in body, and clean in clothes; it is vital to purify oneself after sexual intercourse, menstruation, and postpartum, by washing, pouring water, and rubbing during a bathing session, called *ghusl*.

There are two types of ablution: *ghusl* is, as established, the purification of the whole body, and the second ablution is *wudu* which is the purification of the face, hands, and feet, performed before each of the five daily prayers. While there are washing areas

3 'HAMMAM | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary'.
4 Muslim saying as quoted from Ali Muhammad Bhat and Aijaz Ahmad Qureshi, 'Significance of Personal Hygiene from Islamic Perspective', IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 10.5 (2013), 35–39 (p. 35).

provided by *masjids* (mosques) for regular ablutions (*wudu*), the hammams located near *masjids* are used by those who wish to purify the whole body, out of necessity or not. Effectively, many of the prophet's *hadiths* have been narrated about the virtue of ablutions on Friday, the Muslim holy day:

> The best day that the sun has risen upon is Friday. On it Adam was created, on it he entered Paradise, and on it, he was expelled from it. And the Hour will not be established except on Friday.[5]

On the importance of performing purification rituals such as those performed inside the hammam, the Prophet also says: 'Whoever performs *wudu* on Friday, then he will receive the blessing, and whoever performs *ghusl,* then *ghusl* is more virtuous'.[6]

In Islam, the bathroom serves several functions. Besides providing a space for ablution before prayer, it provided a place for general hygiene, and the social functions of the community. Simple washing rooms with basins are provided separately for regular ablutions for prayers (fully clothed), while the hammam itself is reserved for *ghusl,* thus washing the whole body intimately.

We find in the genealogy of the hammam the imprint of the ancient Roman, and its operating principle drawn from it: three rooms, in each of which the temperature progressively rises so that the body gradually becomes accustomed to it. The organization of this building is no different from that of the ancient thermal baths (*thermae*), except for the introduction of running water in hammams. [7] As it were, the roman baths were built with pools for total immersion of the body, however, this led to

5 Jami` At-Tirmidhi, '[What Has Been Related] About the Virtue of the Day of Jumu'ah (Friday)', in The Book on the Day of Friday - - كِتَاب الْجُمُعَةِ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) - Book 4, v. 488.
6 At-Tirmidhi, v. 497.
7 O. Carlier, 'Les Enjeux Sociaux Du Corps: Le Hammam Maghrebin (XIXe-XXe Siècle), Lieu Pérenne, Menace Ou Récréé.', Annales (Paris, France : 1946), 55.6 (2000), 1303–33 (p. 1303).

hygienic issues and many preferred washing with running water. Ahmed Bouguarche explains:

> C'est sur les ruines des thermes romaines que les hammams ont été construits au fur et à mesure que l'islam se développait vers le Maghreb et L'Andalousie en introduisant quelques petits changements tels que la peinture des portes, les inscriptions tirées du Coran au-dessus de ces mêmes portes, ainsi que l'introduction de l'architecture Arabo-Musulmane, par exemple les arabesques.[8]

Having established why the hammam was introduced and became conventional in Islamic civilizations and its importance in the fabric of Islamic values and rituals, it is also necessary to discuss how it has evolved up to the present day, as a symbol and as an establishment that accommodates its users and conforms to their specific needs. Indeed, 'the hammam institution is capable of negotiating the transitional social, architectural, and cultural changes occurring in today's Arabo-Islamic societies'.[9]

Incontestably, the Maghrebi hammam conforms to specific gestures and cultural codes taking place in a space open to everyone belonging to the same sex and is therefore considered public. At the same time, the bathing experience is synonymous with nudity, and thus, the hammam harbours in privacy the naked women's bodies.

According to Spivak in her *In Other Worlds* (1987), the feminine space is associated with the private sector (it provides examples of emotions, sexuality, domestic relations, or even certain religious practices) while the masculine space falls within the public

8 Ahmed Bouguarche, 'Le Hammam; Sexualité, Purification et Régénérescence Dans l'oeuvre d'Assia Djebar', in L'Eau: Source d'une Écriture Dans Les Littératures Féminines Francophones., ed. by Peter Lang (New York, 1995), p. 210.

9 Said Graiouid, 'Communication and the Social Production of Space: The Hammam, the Public Sphere and Moroccan Women', The Journal of North African Studies, 9.1 (2006), 104–30 (para. 128).

domain.[10] As it were, the public women's hammam reunites both characteristics: open to all women without exception – including foreigners – , and the private, because reserved precisely for women, giving them their privacy between them to flourish freely. Spivak examines the deconstruction of masculine / feminine spaces to conclude that the exploration of a space which allows the marginalized subject to express themselves through a confrontation between the two gendered spaces gives birth to a zone of freedom through which the excluded being can finally express herself, essentially then, summing up the role of the women's hammam. [11] Inevitably, the openness of the women's hammam to the feminine public and the harboured privacy they experience as women in a patriarchal society enmeshes this experience in *homosociality* and mixity amongst women. The concept of *homosociality* refers, in this study, to the formation of social bonds between women that are not of a romantic or sexual nature, such as friendship, mentorship and so on, which nurtures female bonding experiences and female empowerment; this concept will be used throughout the study on the women's hammam, which includes delving into symbolic socialization – crystalized inside this space.

The homosocial bonding performed in the women's hammam is in a form of intimate discussions and sharing of life stories and sociopolitical opinions, but also in the form of shared experiences and activities in an all-female friendly milieu. This is in direct contrast with the outside world in countries such as the Maghreb when governed by patriarchal and fundamentalist doctrines, which creates a segregated atmosphere where women are mainly reduced to the domestic sphere, unless veiled and behaving in a non-provocative manner.

10 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essay in Cultural Politics (Routledge, 1987), p. 103.
11 Spivak, p. 103.

The terms private and public seem obvious in their everyday usage, yet are polysemous, which is necessary as soon as one considers the geographical, cultural, and social context which characterises these terms in relation to spatial configuration. In many cases, privacy and intimacy interchangeably presuppose spaces sheltered from the gaze of others and even, sometimes, without phonic intrusion and therefore a separation from the external environment and all that this entails. The private is the place from which self-organisation and self-awareness takes shape. Similarly, inside the hammam's intimacy female exclusivity and privacy translates to a liberation from political and social pressures impelled by the patriarchal executive power, which then has no authority inside the hammam and consequently, no control or scrutiny over women.

In the Maghrebi Arab-Muslim context, literature and cinema pertaining to this specific geographical setting place great emphasis on the geographical, social, religious, and political separation between men and women, and public and private which proves an equal use of collective public spaces unattainable. Rabah Belamri, for example, explicitly exposes this gender separation and illustrates how spaces in Algeria are either masculine, or feminine. In the public 'masculine' spheres, some exceptions are given to females who are either elderly or still in their girlhood, thus 'dédouanées' desexualised females. Women who did not belong to such categories utilise such 'masculine' spaces by covering their bodies and wearing veils to avoid reprimand:

> Le *filadj* [village] était le domaine masculin par excellence. Hormis les fillettes et les vieilles, dédouanées par l'âge, les femmes n'y avaient pas droit de cité. Si elles devaient s'y aventurer, poussées

> par une raison majeure, elles le faisaient en coup de vent, camouflées sous leurs voiles.[12]

In such patriarchal societies as the Maghreb, spaces are gendered in a range of ways which can differ in accordance with both the diversification of user identity, but as well as cultural, social, and political ideologies practices inherent to the environment in which these same identities are constructed. Although this varied gendering potential of spaces predictably challenge worldwide binary constructs of male vs female and public vs private present in the Maghreb where the male is synonymous with the public sphere while the female, on the other hand, is automatically relegated to the private sphere; this binary gender construct of environments may however also be subverted and altered through lived experiences, and homosocial encounters inside such gender-specific places as the public hammam, which challenge such limitations.

The Maghrebi hammam is a space in which social and religious norms (Islam is also based on gender-specific rules) have been challenged by means of privatized spatial experiences and rituals by the female bathers inside this public space. The hammam is a space of enjoyment of the body, a place of religious practices and rituals, and a social institution. As Asli and Jazi explain while quoting the Muslim scholar and encyclopaedist Abu Mash'ar al-Balkhi, one of the first Muslim scholars to lay the foundations of what might be now called « Islamic psychology » and one of the first to have introduced the term spiritual medicine to describe psychological, mental, and spiritual health. One of his most notable manuscripts is Masalih al-Abdan wa al-Anfus [Sustenance for Body and Soul] and it is where he discusses the benefits and importance of the hammam, which is still cherished to this day.[13] Undeniably, the hammam serves to combine 'la pureté de

12 Belamri Rabah, Le Soleil Sous Le Tamis. (Publisud, 1982), p. 60.
13 For more on this see Malik Badri's Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's Sustenance of the Soul: The Cognitive Behavior Therapy of a Ninth Century Physician, 2013)

l'intérieur du corps à celle de son extérieur. Il en résulte une satisfaction psychique, car l'être humain aime la propreté et déteste les mauvaises odeurs, il aime ce qui est beau et propre. L'homme […] sort du hammam léger, gai et de bonne humeur... le hammam lui procure la joie de vivre pour le corps et l'esprit.'[14] It is this evocative experience and the multifaceted benefits that combine physical and spiritual resulting from the hammam lived experience that makes it a unique and perduring space which is still talked about and entrenched in everyday life in the Muslim Maghreb.

In *Sexuality in Islam,* Abdelwahab Bouhdiba argues that the hammam has also always been intimately linked to female anatomy because it carries an important erotic charge generated by the sexual fantasies that are nourished from early childhood, fantasies that even the bodily configurations of this spatiality of intimacy – hot room, cold room, and anteroom – strongly animate:

> The hammam is a sexually overestimated place. It may be a uterine environment. It is so psychically and oneirically […] but it is so physically and topographically. Its labyrinthine form is highly significant. […] One descends into the hammam as one descends into hell. […] To plunge into the hammam is to plunge into increasing heat and to isolate oneself increasingly from the outside world. […] A mystery accompanies this [hot and cooling] 'stream', which comes from a hole, traverses a hole, and plunges into a hole.[15]

14 As quoted by Farouk Omar Asli and Radhi Jazi, 'The Hammam in Manuscripts and Ancient Works of the Arabic Medical Literature', Revue d'histoire de La Pharmacie, 56.358 (2008), 177–88.
15 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, Sexuality in Islam, ed. by Alan trans by. Sheridan, Sexuality in Islam (London: Saqi Books, 2013), xx, para. 170.

The erotic dimension of the body echoes the sexual aspect of the hammam. Indeed, hot water, wetness, steam are all elements strongly implying feminine anatomy and sexuality, which makes it a sensual space. More so, this comforting liquidity is associated with the mother, with the protective uterine space where the social and cultural restraints are inoperative because, during the hammam session, the woman reconciles with her body, with her nudity found, without worry about male voyeurism.

The hammam enables women to express themselves and enjoy the bathing experience with other women they identify with and experience mutual restraints with, the hammam thus, constitutes a homosocial space par excellence.[16] Additionally, the fact that Algerian women discuss their personal and intimate lives with their female companions forms the essence of the homosocial bond performed in the hammam. The women's hammam is a public space accessible to women of all ages and social backgrounds, 'où se retrouvent les femmes du palais et les femmes du peuple.'[17] A significant aspect of the hammam resides in its quarters' intimacy, a private space for Muslim women to abandon their veils and restrictive clothing, considered extensions of Algerian women's confinement.[18] The female body and the space it occupies, namely the hammam, are at the center of this study. Its exclusivity has veiled the stories of the female hammam in mystery.

The women's hammam has known many objectifications in several forms over the centuries: narrations, speeches, literary and visual representations (literature, paintings, photographs, cinema, etc.), practices, rituals, etc. The hammams thus imagined in creative

16 For further reading, see Michael Flood's 'Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women.
17 Leïla Sebbar, Les Femmes Au Bain (Paris: Bleu Autour, 2009), p. 20.
18 Diane M Huddleston, 'The Harem : Looking Behind the Veil', 2012, p. 6; Margaret Topping, 'The Proustian Harem Source : The Modern Language Review', Modern Language Review, 97.2 (2002), 300–311 (p. 305).

productions came into conflict with those that women inhabited, created, and frequented in their everyday life. This microcosm controlled by women in the great ocean of patriarchal societies dominated by men was a space of intrigue and desire for control and invasion. Men's desire to make their way through this forbidden space has manifested itself in the form of voyeuristic exotic representations.

In « *Le Hammam » à Travers Des Manuscripts,* Farouk Omar Asli and Radhi Jazi give an interesting and informative historical account of the origins of the hammam – also referred to as 'bain à étuve' – and the benefits it has, especially due to the hammam's medicinal properties, which contributed in its rootedness and perenniality. Asli and Jazi enlist and expose some of the most important manuscripts written by Muslim scholars during the medieval ages such as Al Bakhi, who contributed greatly to the advancement of medical research and one of the first who brought light to the medicinal properties that the hammam bestows on the human body.

In Muslim Maghrebi culture, women go to the hammam to cleanse and purify their bodies, the main purpose of a traditional bath respite, but also to socialise and exchange with other women in the intimacy of the hammam gendered quarters. Because for these women, going to the hammam is an important and unmissable ritual and one frequently practiced: every Friday for the majority, during the weekend and right before *Salaat Djumuaa*, (Friday Muslim Prayer).[19] The gendered enclosed quarters are the place where women allow themselves more freedom with their bodies and words:

> [La femme] se dévoile, se libère du voile et découvre à la fois [son] corps et celui des autres. À l'extérieur, les femmes ne sont que des

19 During Islamist preponderance throughout the Algerian Civil War, extremists had forbidden the hammam to women, unsuccessfully, because of the nudity and the alleged debauchery such a 'unregulated' gendered space could motivate.

> fantômes mobiles qui se déplacent en rasant les murs ; au bain, loin des yeux de l'homme, elles ont un corps.[20]

As a centuries-long establishment and tradition then, the hammam, sometimes referred to as Turkish/Moorish bath, has been studied and explored in various fields from different perspectives and different levels of empiricism. Comprehensive investigations and documentations have been and are continuously conducted to attest to the significance this place holds, some of which I will delve into in the following sections. As its more universal appellation implies, mentions of 'hammam' are more often than not used to allude to the actual Turkish public baths, especially since the hammams as we know them in Arab-Muslim countries were mostly 'recreated' from the Ottoman empire's traditional baths.[21] Due to this prevalence, and the pioneering nature of the Turkish hammams, the majority of scholarly works on the hammam reflect on the establishment belonging to the Turkish-Ottoman culture, society, and history, more so than the specific subject of my study, which is the Maghrebi women's hammam. My endeavour in this study of the Maghrebi women's hammam in Maghrebi literature and film is to add to the scarce scholarship available on this ancestral symbolic space, and to highlight its key role in Maghrebi women's everyday life and identity – translated in such narratives but given less prevalence in academic investigations.

20 Ahmed Bouguarche, p. 49.
21 Carlier, p. 1303.

Academic Scholarship on the Hammam:

In his 'A Critical Reading of the Ottoman-Turkish Hammam as a Representational Space of Sexuality' (2016), Turkish scholar Burkay Pasin reads the hammam as a 'representational space of sexuality' by conducting a comparative study where he examines the hammams represented in cinema and in touristic hammams, such as hotel hammams.[22] While Pasin's study is informative and marks an interesting approach to this intriguing space and its historical resonance with sexuality, eroticism and sexual awareness/affirmation in Orientalist and neo-Orientalist media, it does however lack ambivalence and inclusivity culturally and geographically – probably owing to the scarcity of evidence-based argumentation and peer-reviewed sources to substantiate it.[23] Pasin interestingly clarifies that in present times, Turkish hammams have assimilated a more modern, Westernised version of this ancestral space, which saw the 'gendering forms become either redundant or commodified through heteronormative literal, visual and audio-visual media' and tourism, in a still largely patriarchal Turkish society. In this instance, the Turkish hammam is rendered a heterosocial space (just like a café would be, except that nudity of some kind or another is offered to the male visitors' gaze) coming in direct contrast with symbolism of the intimate homosocial and private traditional hammam.

On the other hand, in 'The Women's Quarters in the Historical Hammam, Gender, Place and Culture' (2011), Elif E. Akşit contributes to scholarship around the hammam

22 Burkay Pasin, 'A Critical Reading of the Ottoman-Turkish Hammam as a Representational Space of Sexuality', Metu Journal of the Faculty of Architecture, 33.2 (2016), 121–38.
23 Pain based his investigations and used sources solely from Turkish and Western manuscripts and magazine, not considering the sometimes-clashing views from both or the possibility of including more ambivalent, more inclusive sources that would clarifies some aspects of Muslim society, which Western thought wouldn't necessarily quench.

through a combination of a sociological and historical exploration of its ambivalence and the agency of the women it hosts, but also complements her study with a first-hand personal investigation of the challenges faced by women on their way to the hammam. Through her interviews and observation-based study, Akşit also examines the public 'male' sphere and how these gender-relations affect the women when negotiating their way through both spheres to reach the female-exclusive space of the hammam, but also why this bathing feminine space will eventually provide them with safety and intimacy inside it. Akşit's study brings forth elements that make up the hammam's role in Muslim culture, but it does not however, consider the actual hammam experience once the threshold is crossed by women. That is, after the women negotiate the outside patriarchal milieu and its challenges – a limitation that is fortunately remedied by other studies, on the Maghrebi women's hammam, carried out by Valeria Staats and Said Graiouid, among others.

Graiouid's 'Communication and the social production of space: the hammam, the public sphere and Moroccan women' does also investigate the journey across the outside sphere and its relation to the female visitors on their way to the hammam but, along with Staats's 'Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women's Baths in Morocco', both maintain focus on what goes on inside of the Arab-Muslim hammam itself. Both Graiouid and Staats give a brief but refreshing account of the Arab-Muslim hammam and its importance to women belonging to this society. Although Graiouid's approach is from a Maghrebi male perspective with limited access to first-hand exploration of the women's hammam, the sociologist does not make obvious this limitation due to the investigations conducted with the female hammam visitors; although one must highlight that his interviews with the other gender in a patriarchal

conservative setting is not extensive and conclusive due to disinclination of participants, for diverse reasons (timidity, modesty, lack of interest or incentives). Graiouid also makes appreciable use of well-established secondary sources (F. Mernissi, N. Saadawi, A. Belarbi A. Bouhdiba, Buitlaar) to further corroborate his observations, arguments, and analyses. Graiouid analyses and interprets three masculine literary works around the theme of the Maghrebi women's hammams to finally draw out the disparities in each depiction of this forbidden space. What's interesting is that Graiouid chose Ahmed Sefrioui's *La boîte à merveilles* (1954), Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Harrouda* (1973), *l'Enfant de Sable* (1985), and Abdelhak Serhane's *Messaouda* (1986) as male perspectives of the women's microcosm, to clearly highlight each work's depiction of it – which I reference in this study myself. Graiouid's chosen male corpus makes an interesting contribution to his own investigations of the enigmatic women's space, although as a man having limited access to the women's hammam for first-hand investigation. I find it important to note however, that Graiouid's study would have greatly benefited from an analysis of feminine texts too, to help offer a more nuanced perspective on the hammam. This in turn would have also helped enrich his first-hand investigation of the women's hammam, to reflect on the limited data accessible to him as a man, which he collected from the few female informants who were willing to participate in his study.

Valeria Staats on the other hand, as a woman, is granted full access to the safeguarded women's hammam, and so is in a propitious position to give direct testimony of what she personally observes inside the women's private quarters. As in any study, Staats is also faced with limitations while conducting her research: She is a Western woman, and consequently does not have the necessary cultural and linguistic familiarities

and conceptions in order to fully grasp and tangibly communicate her observations. She discloses in her article:

> With a functional Moroccan Arabic level, I could converse with women in the bath on most topics but surely missed nuances, cultural references, and lots of unfamiliar vocabulary. My observations come from my love affair with the experience of bathing at *hammams.* […] The baths intrigued me, and I could only experience them through my cultural lenses, those of a middle-class, white, Christian-raised North American woman.[24]

Another limitation to Staats' study is her dismissal of concrete data collection from fellow Moroccan female bathers themselves to corroborate her personal observations. She relates herself: 'I did not systematically investigate public baths nor formally interview Moroccans about them'.[25] Although limited in primary data, Staats too makes this limit less palpable by the extensive background research and secondary data she uses to inform her study. She cites interesting studies such as A. L. Croutier's 'superficial' and 'privileged' hammam accounts in one of the chapters in of the book *Harem: Behind the Veil* (1989), where she labels the hammams linked to the harem quarters in Turkey as 'an erotic distraction for harem masters',[26] before observing herself, first-hand, how the hammam is 'an indispensable social outlet' in Maghrebi society.[27] Staats conducted her observations through her own experiences living in Morocco for a few years, and her own visits to the traditional hammam. She explains why in her opinion the hammams are still

24 Valerie Staats, 'Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women's Baths in Morocco', Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, 14.3 (1994), 1 (p. 15).
25 Staats, p. 15.
26 Alev L. Croutier, Harem: Behind the Veil (1989), as cited by Staats, p. 17.
27 Staats, p. 15.

popular, while most modern households are equipped with their own baths – she acknowledges: 'Inside the women's hammam endures a socially important, pleasure-giving environment for those who go there, and that is why it thrives'.[28]

Although Staats recognises the importance of the women's hammam in Maghrebi culture, she concludes her study, however, with a predisposed inference: that as a gendered space where socialising occurs, the Maghrebi hammam still contributes to the seclusion of Muslim women by 'help[ing] keep women in their proscribed place' – while it is this 'gendered' attribute that contributes in its association with felicitous connotations thanks to its safety and welcoming atmosphere.[29] Although Staats' generalising claim might be tangible when considering the gender separation in the outside sphere or the domestic spheres such as the family home or harem makes a fathomable judgement, saying so about the Arab-Muslim hammam , is to infer that only if mixing with the other gender inside the hammam – where bare bodies bathe, separation from the male gaze and homosociality is longed for – is the only way towards women's emancipation in the Maghreb.

Graiouid, however, challenges Staats' conclusions first by divulging the difficulties encountered when doing his research on 'the most private of women public spaces' because Maghrebi women's 'resistance encountered in the study of this exclusively feminine space is also to be taken as an epitome of women's resistance to the dominant patriarchal structure'.[30] Graiouid reiterates once again his views on the social and

28 Staats, p. 16.
29 Staats, p. 18.
30 Graiouid, p. 106.

political performances of the hammam tradition in the Arab-Muslim Maghreb by declaring in his own conclusion:

> Communities know that 'the hammam is a good place to live in' and, more importantly, they have to remember that 'if, no matter what, life is still good in Arabo-Islamic societies, it is thanks to the hammam'. Generations of Moroccan women have made the journey to the hammam. For them, the hammam carries more than the functional role of bathing. It is their window on the outside world, a place where they can meet friends, establish network relationships, chat, gossip and exchange news and information. In the words of Montagu, the hammam is 'women's coffee house'.[31]

As we have established in this first section of the study, the hammam represents more than an architectural premise and one cannot interpret it without consideration for its history, the 'topophilia' associated with it, and the lived experience that takes place inside it for the women which this intimate homosocial space nurtures.

When it comes to feminist discussions related to the women's hammam in contemporary Maghrebi women's writings, there are lacunas in the abundance of such research on it and on its significance, in Maghrebi women's everyday life and in their writings on it. The women's hammam is of particular interest here because it is characterised as a homosocial microcosm of female lived experiences, as it is where Maghrebi women negotiate their womanhood and express their subjectivity inside its safe and welcoming premises.

31 Graiouid, p. 128.

Forbidden to men, even more so to foreign men, artists gave free rein to their imagination to portray this place full of secrets. Indeed, the hammam – as equally mystical as the harem – is arguably the best-known controversial Eastern institution, and its cultural, social, and political significance is still largely misunderstood. The harem, meaning forbidden and sacred, is also defined as the Muslim women's private quarters, historically associated with the Ottoman Empire and the sultans' harems, also called haremlik in Turkish (while selamlik referred to the males' quarters); it is where the sultan's wife, concubines and children would inhabit. The harem itself contains its own private bath, or hammam.

There a multitude of differences between the harem and the actual hammam we focus on in our study here. For one, the separate bathing premise has its own principles and socialisation: women are exclusively amongst themselves to perform the bathing rituals, as their bodies are bare to do so. The harem on the other hand has some exceptions for men: The sultan is given access to the harem to meet his wife, children, and concubines, but the sultan also assigns to the harem male servants, called Eunuchs, to protect and serve his women; Eunuchs are essentially castrated male servants who do not qualify as a masculine threat to his harem, as they now lack their natural sexual needs.

Unlike the harem again, and with the absence of any male figure inside it, the hammam gives a lot more liberty to women, and the solidarity, homosociality, and free speech amongst women is much more preponderant.

The other important differentiating aspect between the concept of harem and hammam in this study in particular, is that the Maghrebi hammam studied here is no longer part of any private harem but is instead an independent public institution and business where women of the entire community meet, socialise, and bathe without any social difference.

Undeniably, Orientalist representations of Eastern women, inside the harem, and the hammam more specifically, have essentially helped spread a one-dimensional racial and sexual label attributed to women in specific zones of the world such as the Maghreb.[32]

Orientalist Representations of the Hammam:

During the 19th century, the hammam, as an enclosed space 'surrounded by impervious walls and heavy locked doors' to protect Muslim women from male strangers, was 'understood to be definitely tied to the space in which [women] reside', and is thus what essentially fueled this Western imagination.[33] A certain attraction for the (supposed) exotic stupor of such places as the hammam or the harem and the easy and unbridled sexuality that it seems to offer luxuriously made it a prime Orientalist subject. Many painters such as Ingres, Delacroix, Giraud or Gérôme have thus represented it in their works.

The French Orientalist artist Delacroix will be referenced throughout this thesis (as one example amongst many) because he is referred to and written back to by Algerian women authors Assia Djebar and Leila Sebbar whose narratives will be examined in this study. During Delacroix's famous visit to Algiers in 1832, the artist declares in his correspondence with Auguste Jal, critic for the newspaper Le Miroir and former correspondent for Le Constitutionnel:

> Vous avez vu Alger, et vous pouvez vous faire une idée de la nature de ces contrées. Il y a ici quelque chose de plus simple encore et de plus primitif; […] j'ai bien ri des Grecs de David […] Si l'école de peinture persiste à proposer toujours pour sujets aux jeunes

32 Edward Said, Orientalism (Penguin Books India, 1994), p. 147.
33 Ziad Bentahar, 'Beyond Harem Walls: Redefining Women's Space in Works by Assia Djebar, Malek Alloula and Fatima Mernissi', Hawwa, 7.1 (2009), 25–38 (pp. 25, 26).

> nourrissons des Muses la famille de Priam ou d'Atrée, je suis convaincu, et vous serez de mon avis, qu'il vaudrait mieux pour eux infiniment davantage être envoyés comme mousses en Barbarie sur le premier vaisseau, que de fatiguer plus longtemps la terre classique de Rome.[34]

Delacroix expresses here his effervescence for the scenery he is met with in the newly conquered 'Barbarie' (North Africa), reminiscent for him of a beautiful living antiquity under one's grasp, and one that could replace the visit to Rome. Rome was the destination of ambitious young artists who would prove themselves by painting the canonical subjects of the heroes and heroines of the ancient world, set against the landscapes of Rome and its environs.

The artist's impression of living antiquity is the result of the Orientalist movement established under the Restoration, the philhellenic movement, and the start of the July Monarchy during the conquest of Algeria. North Africa offered new subjects and thereby made any real contact with Rome or Greece unnecessary; Delacroix goes on to declare:

> It is beautiful, it is like Homer's time, the woman in the gymnasium took care of her children, spun wool, embroidered the most marvellous fabrics, this is the woman *as I understand her.*[35]

As a known 'poet-artist' (as coined by Charles Baudelaire), Delacroix's classicized appreciation and interpretation of this vibrant and revived Antiquity and its Homeric women undeniably stemmed from the artists' life-long influence and appreciation of

34 Lettre à Auguste Jal, Delacroix, Eugène. Correspondance générale, (tome 1. Paris : Plon, 1936). p. 327-328.
35 Delacroix in Correspondance, October 17, 1853, II, p.92, as quoted in Petre, p. 40; Nasseri, p. 76. [My Italics, for emphasis].

Greco-Roman mythology and classical art which have inspired many of his journal entries, correspondences, and paintings. By contemplating his choice of words in describing Homeric/North African women per his understanding of them, Delacroix stresses his fascination with the women's crucial role inside the gynaecium: nurturers of children – future generation of heroic (or not) men and women, but also weavers of wool and embroiders – an often-underestimated traditional activity that coins them as powerful creators and feminine storytellers as Anne-Catherine Schaff suggests.[36] In *The Iliad,* for example, through textiles and textile art – which Delacroix refers to when describing Homeric/North African women 'the women – too often sidelined, too often silenced – become creators, and agents both of a narrative and within the larger narrative of an oral epic'.[37] Comparing North African women to Homeric women, as ideal feminine figures, is for Delacroix a way of expressing admiration for these women and what he envisions is their crucial role in Maghrebi societies.

What is intriguing, however, is that in his own rendition of "Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement" (discussed in this study in chapter three) compared to Homeric women, do not accomplish any notable activity inside their harem, other than relax and smoke narghiles. What Delacroix does, however, is bring attention to an imagined harem interior and the women they shield through a poetic image.

Seemingly sharing with Homer his fascination and admiration of the other sex, Delacroix also shows his penchant for tragedy, displaying lyricism and melancholy in his picturesque illustration of "Les Femmes d'Alger" – previously demonstrated in his "The Barque of Dante" painting in 1822 –, which for Paul Cézanne, 'enters the eye like a glass

36 Schaaf, Anne-Catherine, 'Woven Words in the Iliad: Gender, Narrative, and Textile Production in the Scholia of the Venetus, A Manuscript.', *College Honors Program*, (2022), p.06
37 Schaaf, p.06; Schaaf, p.08.

of wine running into your gullet and it makes you drunk straight away'.[38] For Baudelaire, Delacroix's painting of the women of Algiers inside their harem is a poetic tragedy reflected through the colours chosen by the artist, but also through the eyes of Delacroix's "Femmes d'Alger". Baudelaire contemplates Delacroix's art, and acknowledges:

> En contemplant la série de ses tableaux, on dirait qu'on assiste à la célébration de quelque mystère douloureux: *Dante et Virgile, Le Massacre de Scio, le Sardanapale, Le Christ aux Oliviers,* […] Cette mélancolie respire jusque dans *Les Femmes d'Alger*, son tableau le plus coquet et le plus fleuri.[39]

Baudelaire elaborates in more detail on Delacroix's poetic rendition of "Femmes d'Alger" and explains:

> Ce petit poème d'intérieur, plein de repos et de silence, encombré de riches étoffes et de brimborions de toilette, exhale je ne sais quel haut parfum de mauvais lieu qui nous guide assez vite vers les limbes insondées de la tristesse.[40]

Delacroix's dramatic strokes and colours have decoded a 'tristesse' and evoked a long-standing silence that has been historically experienced by these women, and which has persisted during French colonial rule and after independence in 1962.[41] It is this maintained silence and unspoken tristesse, transmitted in one of the earliest visual

38 As cited by Prodger, Michael, 'Damnation, Dante and Decadence: Why Delacroix is making a hero's return, (2016).
39 Baudelaire, Charles, 'Salon de 1846', in *Œuvres Complètes, II*, 1889, p. 440.
40 Baudelaire, p. 440.
41 For more on this, read: Smail-Salhi, Zahia, 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 190.190 (2008), 79–101; Deventer, Rachel Van, 'L'Agentivité et La Naissance de La Femme-Sujet Dans La Littérature Algérienne Contemporaine', *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 72.8 (2012), 2812–13; Bentahar, Ziad, 'Beyond Harem Walls: Redefining Women's Space in Works by Assia Djebar, Malek Alloula and Fatima Mernissi', *Hawwa*, 7.1 (2009), 25–38.

representations of Algerian women offered by Delacroix, that has enthused a vocalisation for Algerian female writers such as Assia Djebar and Leila Sebbar; Djebar recognises:

> L'Algérienne, scripteuse en plein brouillard, pas encore maîtresse de son mouvement ni de ses jours, de sa fièvre et de sa flamme au-dedans de son cœur, l'Algérienne est libérée du face-à-face. Face-à-face de l'amour venu d'ailleurs, reparti ailleurs. Elle y trouve la force, ou la vulnérabilité, de se vouloir enfin face à elle-même, modèle et peintre à la fois mais d'elle-même [...] Le regard disparu du peintre lui servait d'aiguillon pour se dresser, ou pour défier.[42]

In *"Veiled Vision: Assia Djebar on Delacroix, Picasso, and the Femmes d'Alger"* (2003), Emer O'Beirne confirms the role historical male representations, offered by the likes of Delacroix, have played in inspiring Djebar and others to react and write back:

> Djebar sees that assertion of female presence - albeit silent and initially passive - through the other's gaze as the bedrock of a future voice. She goes so far as to assert that women's writing in Algeria emerged in reaction to the experience of the gaze of European male painters, after these departed.[43]

According to Edward Saïd, Orientalism is defined by the way the West looks at this geographical, historical, social, and political space that opposes it. It is the games of domination that create borders and, by the same token, define spaces.[44] We find this idea

42 Djebar, Assia, *Ces Voix Qui m'assiègent ...En Marge de Ma Francophonie*, (Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2018), pp. 82-83.
43 O'Beirne, Emer, 'Veiled Vision: Assia Djebar on Delacroix, Picasso, and the Femmes d'Alger', *International Journal of Phytoremediation*, 21.1 (2003), 39–51, p. 41.
44 Said, p. 72.

in the selected works of Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar, in the denunciation of a doubly restricted feminine space: by the gaze of Westerners and by the gaze of men in their respective countries which will be addressed in chapter three of this thesis. Malek Alloula too inscribes the colonial agenda in his *Le harem colonial* where he examines this imaginary and the underlying question of domination and power dynamics. Similar to the representations of Orientalists, the postcards Alloula reflects on echo this desire to fully possess the colonized country and its people.[45] The painter on one side and the photographer on the other symbolize therefore together the conquest of 'the final bastion that resists colonialism by creating a world that is imagined to be behind harem walls, and this pseudo admission into women's space stands for the completion of colonization and the achievement of the colonizer's desire of penetration'; because they have defied the sacred boundary imposed on them by the colonised people. [46]

The women's hammam more specifically, has been object to countless Orientalist depictions due to its intimate nature, and its sacred privacy because of the nudity it requires for bathing sessions which has made it even more desirable to penetrate and behold ("Pool in a Harem" (1876) or "Femmes au Bain" (1898) by Jean-Léon Gérôme, for instance).

It is important to make clear that what sets Orientalist works on intimate spaces such as the harem and the hammam is that these artists have transgressed a prohibition to paint these women and their most intimate space, through the image, by 'penetrating' a space forbidden to them and making visible what was sacred and kept intentionally invisible to the public; the artists and their infiltratory representations put them and their spectators in a situation of voyeurs. The women painted in their environment in Orientalist art are

45 Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem, ed. by Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich, Translated (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. xxi.
46 Bentahar, p. 33.

not able to refuse the penetrative gaze of Westerners who translate and interpret what they see and imagine what they can't see. The painters' brushes and the gaze they offer underlie a form of submission to man.

Infatuation with the 'mystical East' was accompanied with countless striking stereotypical views on this new-conquered land and its people, especially their way of living and their traditions. One striking account of a Westerner on Eastern traditions was shared in a newspaper in the *British Medical Journal* in 1861 where the journalist expresses his opinion on the possible adaptation of hammams in Britain; he declares:

> The [hammam] may be adapted to the mental and physical constitution of those lazy Eastern voluptuaries, who have cost us so much trouble and so many lives, and the well-fed and fatted contents of their harems. […] but healthy men of business and of sense in this country will, we venture to prophesy, never consent to the dissipation of time and matter involved in the idea of a periodical Turkish bath.[47]

During his short stay in Algiers, Delacroix's experience was described by a colonial customs inspector Leopold Victor Poirel who helped give him access throughout the city and its hidden dwellings as he confesses: 'Delacroix spent a day, then another in this harem, a prey to an exaltation which translated itself into a fever which was hardly calmed by sorbets and fruits.[48] The exotic terminology used by the French officer to describe the

47 Malcolm Shifrin, Victorian Turkish Baths (Historic England, 2015) as cited by Efterpi Mitsi, 'Private Rituals and Public Selves : The Turkish Bath in Women ' s Travel Writing : Women Negotiating , Subverting , Appropriating Public and Private Space Private Rituals and Public Selves : The Turkish Bath in Women ' s Travel Writing Efterpi Mitsi', September, 2019, p. 60.
48 Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Orientalism in 19th-Century French Painting, Department of Art History, U. C. Berkeley, 2009, p. 9; Zoltán Petre, 'The Romantic Eugène Delacroix and Orientalism', Astra Salvensis, 1.2 (2013), 27–42 (p. 40).

Orientalist French artist's experience and euphoric reaction is a further testament of how the West viewed and fantasised about its conquered lands and its people, especially their harem – a symbolic forbidden women's space. Forbidden and thus mysterious, these Eastern women were objectified and stigmatized as passive odalisques, leisurely, and exotic, who were generally considered inferior to women from the 'powerful Occident'.[49] It is this one-sided elitist discourse, and the lack of ambivalence found in Orientalist representations, that the women's voices selected for this study aim to de-exoticize and rewrite. In 1832, Delacroix desperately sought to capture portraits of the intriguing Algerian women:

> The women so far are unapproachable; I don't understand their jabber and they are very fickle. I'm scared to death of starting something again and not finishing it. It's too bad, there are some pretty ones but don't want to pose... [sic] The figure, even in Algiers, is getting more and more difficult to obtain.[50]

Malek Alloula further discusses this rejection felt by the colonial artists who sought to portray Algerian women who were 'unapproachable' and inaccessible:

> Drapée de son voile qui la vêt jusqu'aux chevilles, l'Algérienne décourage le désir scopique (le voyeurisme) du photographe. Elle en est la négation concrète qui confirme à celui-ci un triple rejet. Celui de son désir, de l'exercice de son «art» et de sa place dans un milieu qui n'est pas sien.[51]

49 Said, v. 147.
50 Delacroix, as quoted in Petre, p. 41.
51 Malek Alloula, Le Harem Colonial: Images d'un Sous-Érotisme, 2nd edn (Paris, 2001), p. 7.

This rejection only fuelled further Orientalists' voyeuristic desire and fantasy to penetrate forbidden women's spaces, and to assuage it, the artists resorted to their own interpretation of these forbidden spaces and the women they concealed from them. As physical and metaphorical obstacles to colonial imagination, private women's quarters and their impenetrable walls have taunted the colonizer, reminding them that they can only own a part of the space they have conquered and intend to occupy, these private places stay sacred, beyond their physical grasp – which resulted in their mystification and becoming imagined spaces, fantasized by Orientalists and neo-Orientalists alike. At the same time, these architectural and cultural staples of the Islamic civilization have gained symbolic political and cultural characteristics as it reflects the limits of Western power and the impenetrability of Eastern society, but also, when it comes to the unique Maghrebi Women's hammam, it further represents an emancipated private space for women because it is forbidden to all men – without exception.

Motivation of this study:

Away from the exoticized voyeuristic interpretation of private women's quarters, i.e., in Algerian women's writings and films, the hammam serves as a safe haven for women where feminine lived experiences and perspectives are disclosed, as they navigate the complexities of womanhood and everyday life in a society still dominated by oppressive patriarchal norms. This study serves as a bridging contribution, as I seek to synthesise Muslim/Islamic feminism with established Western feminist conceptions. My aim will be to avoid the stigma often associated with Islam from dualistic perspectives, as they each pertain to Islamist fundamentalism and far-leftist Islamophobia. I essentially extrapolate points of convergence in what feminism fundamentally is: i.e., shining light on the feminine cause and denouncing oppression, while implementing Islamic values which are

also grounded in feminism. My own approach in this study, as stated earlier, is motivated by pioneers like Fatima Mernissi, consists of reading the voices inside the Maghrebi Hammam as they are written by contemporary Algerian women film directors and writers, voices which are deeply imbued with the political and religious struggles that govern our Maghrebi society, constantly seeking a new space of expression, challenging politico-religious restraints, feudal misogyny, and trauma. This process is aided by my linguistic abilities, ranging from Arabic to French and English, alongside my cultural familiarity as an Algerian woman, and thus, insider to this culture and geographical setting myself.

In an interview given by the Algerian woman filmmaker Rayhana Obermeyer when asked about the hammam, the main setting of her first feature film *A mon âge je me cache encore pour fumer,* she declares:

> Le hammam s'est imposé du point de vue philosophique et ancestral comme lieu cathartique de mise à nue. Dans ma société, le hammam est un des rares lieux où une femme peut aller sans réprimande.[52]

The filmmaker posits here a poetic description of what the hammam, as a private women's space, represents for Algerian women. Indeed, the hammam procures a safe place of disclosure, a complete 'mise à nue' away from the restraints or reprimands of the patriarchal society in most Arab-Muslim societies, such as Algeria. Unlike any other place, women feel safe enough inside the hammam to externalise their uncertainties and hardships encountered every day in a therapeutic 'cathartique' manner.

52 'Anecdotes Du Film À Mon Âge Je Me cache Encore Pour Fumer - AlloCiné'.

What interests me most in this endeavour is to examine the different representations of the women's hammam offered in contemporary Maghrebi writings by Assya Djebar in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, *Les femmes au bain* by Leïla Sebbar, the film *A mon âge je cache encore pour fumer* by Rayhana Obermeyer, and finally *Chroniques d'un enfant du hammam* by the Maghrebi male author Karim Nasseri.

The women's hammam is given central attention in these narratives because it is equally central in Maghrebi women's everyday life. Although sacred and intimate in Arab-Muslim countries, revealing it and the women inside it – including the female writers themselves – is considered a transgression and a subversive gesture in a patriarchal setting, the female authors, however, are not deterred from speaking freely and disclosing their truths and their lived bodies who are witness to them, quite the contrary. The symbolic meaning and importance of the hammam is translated in Algerian women's writing, which is integrated to almost every piece of their writing. Assia Djebar, for instance, writes about the hammam in almost all her novels in some way or another; references to this ancestral space can be found in *Les Alouettes Naïves* (1967), *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement* (1980), *l'Amour la Fantasia (1985), Ombre Sultane (1995), Vaste est la Prison (1995), Ces Voix qui m'assiègent (1999), Nulle Part dans la Maison de Mon Père* (2007).

My first choice for this study was already clear when it came to examining canonical authors of Algerian feminine literature, namely, Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar – as I found a real gap when it came to highlighting the important place these insiders' perspective on Orientalist representations of Algerian women, such as themselves, in the Maghrebi

hammam, while also denouncing the patriarchal oppression and obsession over control that persisted even after Algerian independence in 1962.[53]

While there is extensive academic discussions on canonical Algerian women writers such as Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar, most overlook the importance the women's hammam plays in their writing and how it defines womanhood and women's experiences as it is always referred to in their narratives in one way or another; the major works that consider Djebar and Sebbar's voices, Western or from the Arab World focus on themes such as identity, exile, sexuality and embodiment, gender relations, and de-colonialism; while some of these themes are intrinsically linked to the women's hammam lived experience, which I delve into myself, focus on the hammam and how these social, political and phenomenological factors contribute to it are often overlooked.[54]

53 For more discussions on Maghrebi writings about the dual women's oppression in colonial and postcolonial contexts, see : Touria Khannous, 'The Subaltern Speaks: Assia Djebar's La Nouba.', *Film Criticism*, 26.2 (2001), 41–61; Brinda J. Mehta, 'The Rituals of the Female Body', in *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (Sycaruse University Press, 2007), p. 318; Zahia Smail-Salhi, 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 190.190 (2008), 79–101; Rachel Van Deventer, 'L'Agentivité et La Naissance de La Femme-Sujet Dans La Littérature Algérienne Contemporaine', *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 72.8 (2012), 2812–13; Lindsey Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2008); Brinda J. Mehta, 'Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices against Violence', *Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices Against Violence*, 2014, 1–282; Brinda Mehta, 'Fractures Historiques, Trauma et Résistance Dans l'écriture Féministe Algérienne : Maïssa Bey, Assia Djebar et Leïla Sebbar'; Edward Still, 'Representing the Algerian Woman in Francophone Literature of the Late-Colonial Period : Une Dissymétrie s'évoque', 2016.

54 For some of the major works on canonical Algerian women writings, see: Benjamin Stora, 'Women's Writing between Two Algerian Wars', *Research in African Literatures*, 30.3 (1999), 78–94; Sarah Davies Cordova and Rafika Merini, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of Their Works*, *World Literature Today* (P. Lang, 2000), LXXIV;; Meredeth Turshen, 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?', *Social Research*, 69.3 (2002), 889–911;; Caroline Rohloff, 'Reality and Representation of Algerian Women : The Complex Dynamic of Heroines and Repressed Women', *French and Francophone Studies*, 2012; Samuel Teets, 'The Work of Assia Djebar : (Re) Imagining Algerian Women ' s Embodied Experiences', 2014; Dalal Sarnou, 'Hybrid and Hyphenated Arab Women's English Narratives as a New Coming-of Age Literature', *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 6.2 (2014), 51–59.

Existing scholarship on Maghrebi women writers:

Critics and theorists across disciplines and geographies have been working for several years to make the works of Maghrebi women better known and understood. In *Le Rouge aux Joues: Virginities, Sexual Prohibitions and Gender Relations in the Maghreb* (2013), the French sociologist Isabelle Charpentier explores in a transdisciplinary perspective borrowing from the sociology of literature and gender practices women's writings and testimonies from Algeria and Morocco, through the works of Maïssa Bey, Leïla Marouane, Nina Bouraoui, and of course, Assia Djebar, and Leïla Sebbar, among many others. Questioning the theme of sexuality and the strategies of *prise de parole* of the writers who approach this subject, Charpentier sheds new light to the 'diversity of positions' and 'writing practices' as these reflect and affect social practices in Algeria and Morocco.[55] It is necessary to note the particularly well-documented bibliography of this study as it brings together reference works in the fields of literary theory, anthropology of the body, theories of publishing and reception, the study of the Maghrebi literary space, as well as on history, sociology, and the place of religion in the Maghreb. The first and second theoretical sections devoted to the field of anthropology and sociology of the body and sexuality are particularly interesting as these present us with a stimulating series of works on the theory of gender and sexuality. Some come from Western theory with Judith Butler, or even Michel Foucault; others come from the Maghreb and the Middle East with the works of Fatima Mernissi and Leïla Ahmed. Isabelle Charpentier's work demonstrates bibliographic richness and topicality, while focusing on the edition, distribution, and

55 Isabelle Charpentier, *Le Rouge Aux Joues: Virginities, Sexual Prohibitions and Gender Relations in the Maghreb* (PU Saint Etienn, 2013), p. 54.

reception of the studied corpus, to issue a 'judgment' on the subversive strength (or not) of a literary work.

Although the following work does not exclusively focus on women writing as does Charpentier's, Jane Hiddleston's work entitled *Writing After Postcolonialism: Francophone North African Literature in Transition* (2017) is nonetheless of great influence. Located at the border between theory, history, and literature, it questions the status of Francophone literature within North African society and this, up to date with the theoretical currents of postcolonialism and world literature. Starting from the observation that we cannot reduce contemporary literary, even cultural, productions of the Maghreb only to that of societies emerging from the colonial experience, still trying to free themselves from the shackles of a dominant Western thought, Hiddleston suggests we redirect our gaze to focus on the political role of literature within the Maghreb, especially in times of conflict. Not that Hiddleston denies the importance of the deadly colonial legacy and the excesses that resulted from it, but the author pleads for a vision that goes beyond the problematic sectors of post-coloniality in the context of the political dissidence movements that have traversed North Africa after Independence. Hiddleston reflects in this study on the status of Francophone Maghrebi literature since the 1980s, examining the relevance for that of categories such as postcolonialism and world-literature. Hiddleston nuances these theoretical frameworks which, according to her, remain poorly adapted to contemporary North African literature. Distancing herself from a certain universalist and teleologic conception of world-literature, Hiddleston favours a relational practice between the literary fields which would place Maghrebi work in a dynamic of constantly evolving exchanges. The focus of her study revolves around a wide-ranging corpus with heterogeneous appearances, with authors as diverse as Ben Jelloun, Assia Djebar, Kamel Daoud, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Leïla Sebbar, grouped around conceptual questions that

cross the works from one another such as - "Why write?," "Writing for Others," "Rewriting the past", "Literature as translation" to mention but a few –, the chapters endeavour to bring out from these texts a theoretical framework adapted to their critical reading. To do so, Hiddleston examines the multiple strategies used by the authors to implement the dynamics of exchange, first through their essays and non-fictional writings, then within their novels. The apparent heterogeneity that presides over the organization of the chapters also contributes to this same dynamic, bringing into dialogue, sometimes unexpectedly but always enlightened, texts from different countries and various periods. Given its ambitious specifications - since it is indeed a question of thinking about North African literature after postcolonialism – this work, however, would have greatly benefited from linguistic diversity of the corpus, especially since the author exclusively analyses Francophone works with regard to the question of polyphony, which could lead one to believe that only this literature would have the capacity for such linguistic properties. Likewise, in the rest of the work, the absence of contemporary Arabophone literature - a field of production which is nevertheless in full effervescence - might signal that only Francophone texts are exemplary of the dynamic and 'democratic' aesthetic, which Hiddleston wishes to highlight. The author herself recognizes in the conclusion, when she returns to the linguistic question, that the separation of literary fields according to the linguistic paradigm is today 'somewhat superficial'.[56]

Fatima Mernissi is one of the inspirations when it comes to Muslim feminist scholars who devoted their lives to reflection, debate of ideas and academic production. With an academic career which placed her among the most prominent intellectuals and female writers in the Maghreb and the Arab world, Mernissi is the symbol of canonical

56 Jane Hiddleston, *Writing After Postcolonialism: Francophone North African Literature in Transition* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pp. 260–61.

feminine thought which produced a subtle harmony between tradition and the evolutionary progress of societies. She put forward a bold reading of religious scripture to demonstrate how it was manipulated by men in order to ensure their supremacy over women to ensure their control over the symbols of power. She chose to place her reflection within the framework of religious thought, a highly sensitive area, by drawing her arguments directly from authentic religious precepts. As a Maghrebi sociologist and writer, she introduced a bold approach: defending the position of women within a society governed by patriarchal power and facing the ideological confrontation that makes women culturally subordinate in hegemonic considerations. It was necessary for her not to offend her worldwide readership, but instead build a bridge of exchange allowing constructive reflection around female identity in the Arab-Muslim Maghreb.

Through the audacity that characterized her writings, Mernissi helped bring to light subjects that had long been ignored or misinterpreted by all those considered Outsiders, Westerners and Maghrebi men alike. We owe her the materialisation of an Islamic Feminist current in a certain number of Arab-Muslim countries, a current which bases its advocacy on equality between the sexes, on the refusal of the patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'anic text, My own approach in this study has similar tropes and motivations, where some aspects of the selected writings touch upon the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society in which they are set, a supposed rule that follows Islamic law as its guiding principle, which, as we will see in the following chapters can be perverted for personal gain.

Encouraging the effort of feminine *Ijtihad* (positive intellectual evolution/reformation) and more broadly, the process of historical authentication, the first remains the major aspect that one recognises in Marnissi's life work. She focuses in a more systematic way her analyses and her approach to women's rights and the situation

of women from the religious references of the Muslim cultural order. Expressing more and more clearly her disillusionment with the Western model of women's liberation, she affirms that the oppression of Muslim women is not the consequence of Islam but of its interpretation. To do this, she combines history with linguistics to contextualize, relativize and deconstruct the dogmas developed from sacred texts. Reminding the amnesia of contemporary Muslims who experience gender equality as a foreign phenomenon even though it was discussed during the lifetime of the prophet, Mernissi concludes the introduction to this work with a call to:

> raise the sails! Those of the souvenir-ship, but first of all those of our contemporaries who disguise the past to veil our present from us'.[57]

She also affirms that Islam authorizes the flourishing of self-determination and female autonomy, taking the example of the wives of the Muslim Prophet, notably Lady Khadija then Lady Aïcha (RA), even going so far as to describe the prophet as a feminist. The Introduction to the second edition of *Women in Moslem Paradise* written in Delhi in 1987 is one of the texts where Fatima explains her relationship to feminism. From the outset, she states in her preface: 'being a feminist, within the framework of our contemporary theocracies, it is the right of women, as believers, to claim total responsibility for the understanding of scripture by rejecting the claims of bureaucratic religious authorities of the unelected authority', thus linking her feminism to her status of believer, but also to the legitimacy of the democratic struggle.[58]

57 Fatima Mernissi, Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam, ed. by Mary Jo Lakeland (Perseus Books Publishing, 1991), p. 10.
58 Fatima Mernissi, Women in Moslem Paradise (South Asia Books, 2002), p. 13.

It is therefore important that this study and others in the future take up the research avenues started by Mernissi and other Islamic feminists to continue, enrich, and continuously update them as present realities evolve. By reappropriating past history to reinvent and reconstruct it, by listening to the present, and by being open to the world without dogmatic *a priori* or exclusion, research will further develop alternative approaches, harmoniously integrating the Universal into the Specific, and thus lay the foundations for more inclusive and harmonious scholarly discussions.

I expand in this study on existing postcolonial scholarship on contemporary Maghrebi writings such as Mernissi and Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's *Sexuality in Islam* (1985), Zahia's 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar' (2008), and Ziad Bentahar's 'Beyond Harem Walls: Redefining Women's Space in Works by Assia Djebar, Malek Alloula and Fatima Mernissi' (2009).[59] Bentahar offers an intersting reading of Maghrebi writings that discuss Orientalist artists and how they have tried to represent Maghrebi women 'as [they] understood [them]' while he reflects on Djebar and Alloula who offer counter-Orientalist and de-colonial readings, with Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger* focusing on Orientalist paintings and Alloula's *Le Harem Colonial* focusing on the other hand on photographs (both which

59 For some examples of existing post-colonial scholarship on Maghrebi women's writings, see: Zahia Smail-Salhi, 'The Occidental Mirror', in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. by Ian Richard Netton (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), p. 321; Brinda J. Mehta, 'Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices against Violence', *Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices Against Violence*, 2014, 1–282; Tobias Hübinette, 'Orientalism Past and Present : An Introduction to a Postcolonial Critique', *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies*, 13 (2003), 73–80; Sophie Nicole and Isabelle Tanniou, 'Decoding Identities in "Francophone" African Postcolonial Spaces: Local Novels, Global Narratives', March, 2015; Lindsey Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2014); Bentahar; Sarah Davies Cordova and Rafika Merini, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of Their Works*, *World Literature Today* (P. Lang, 2000), lxxiv; Rachel Van Deventer, 'L'Agentivité et La Naissance de La Femme-Sujet Dans La Littérature Algérienne Contemporaine', *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 72.8 (2012), 2812–13; Brinda Mehta, 'Fractures Historiques, Trauma et Résistance Dans l'écriture Féministe Algérienne : Maïssa Bey, Assia Djebar et Leïla Sebbar'.

I also discuss myself here).[60] Bentahar also highlights the importance of Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass,* which for him, gives the study a necessary interpretation of the harem as the author herself experienced it in her childhood, thus 'rectifying' stereotypical Orientalist representations.[61] Bentahar argues how these Maghrebi writings give an account of such private spaces, which are generally associated with 'domestic seclusion' are in fact 'limited' 'colonial' interpretations, while he attempts to emphasise their importance in such Maghrebi writings.[62] He builds on these revised interpretations to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the complexities of gender relations in North Africa, dispelling in the process common assumptions about harems solely being associated with physical confinement. Although Bentahar does not necessarily focus on the hammam, his reading offers a rich basis on Maghrebi private womens' spaces which I build and add onto in this study by shifting the focus entirely on the controversial intimate space, the women's hammam – historically linked to the harem and which Djebar considers as 'la seule rémission du harem. [...] un substitut du cocon maternel'.[63]

Although the hammam represents a centuries-long ancestral cultural heritage to Algerians and Maghrebi women in general, it is not necessarily put in a prominent position in Maghrebi literature and cinema which would attest to its true importance in Algerian women's everyday life – this is also noticeable with the lack of scholarship on it –, for different reasons: whether it is a fear of cultural disassociation by foreign readers, or perhaps even more paralysing, out of fear of government censorship due to the

60 Delacroix in Correspondance, October 17, 1853, II, p.92, as quoted in Petre, p. 40.
61 Bentahar, p. 25.
62 Bentahar, p. 26.
63 Djebar, Ombre Sultane, pp. 217–18.

hammam's intimate and sacred nature in Arab-Muslim culture. As a direct consequence, an insider feminist reading and investigation on the women's hammam are unfortunately just as scarce, and thus, direly needed.

In recent articles published in Arabic about artistic censorship in Algeria, titled 'النقاش حول الرقابة على الأفلام في الجزائر تجدد للمجتمع حظر للإبداع أم حماية' [Ban on creativity or protection of society? Renewed debate on film censorship in Algeria] (2023) and the other 'سينمائيون يمتعضون من الرقابة الرسمية على الأفلام في الجزائر' [Filmmakers resent the official censorship of films in Algeria] (2018), journalists question and bring attention to the restrictions faced by Algerian filmmakers when it comes to their freedom of speech and artistic productions, declaring:

> منع مجموعة من الأفلام من العرض في المهرجانات بالجزائر يتسبّب في حرمان الجمهور من أعمال تصور ماضيه وحاضره بآراء ناقدة ومتنوعة وتغذي التفكير الديمقراطي
>
> [Preventing a group of films from being shown at festivals in Algeria deprives the public of works that depict its past and present with critical and diverse opinions and nourish democratic thinking.][64]

This reaction comes in direct conflict and opposition with the official decree from the Algerian Ministry of Culture and Arts. Such an agenda then, is what makes taboo artistic productions rare, and/or inaccessible because of this censorship.[65]

64 'Maghreb Voices', حظر للإبداع أم حماية للمجتمع... تجدد النقاش حول الرقابة على الأفلام في الجزائر [Ban on Creativity or Protection of Society? Renewed Debate on Film Censorship in Algeria], May 2023;
'Middle East Online', سينمائيون يمتعضون من الرقابة الرسمية على الأفلام في الجزائر ['Filmmakers Resent the Official Censorship of Films in Algeria'], September 2018.
65 Guy Austin, Algerian National Cinema, Algerian National Cinema (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Meredeth Turshen, 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?', Social Research, 69.3 (2002), 889–911.

The restrictive authority exerted on subversive artistic productions results in limited creative freedom and financial resources to produce works that tackle taboo and intimate subjects such as the women's hammam. One filmmaker that has dared to portray the women's hammam, and the naked women inside it, a first in any Arab-Muslim film, is Algerian filmmaker Rayhana Obermeyer, whose film is part of my selected works. For Obermeyer, it is doubtful whether *A mon âge* will ever be screened in Algeria, her home country, if censorship is maintained:

> My movie is forbidden in my country because I speak about women who express themselves freely. They respect women only if they wear the hijab. Anyone who wears pants or shirts with half sleeves is considered a prostitute.[66]

By portraying nudity and sensitive subjects in Arab-Muslim countries, as in Algeria, Obermeyer was constrained to film *A mon âge* in a hammam in Thessaloniki (Greece), rather than in an Algerian hammam 'parce qu'il était impossible de le filmer en Algérie [...] en raison de la nudité présente dans le film'.[67] However, regardless of the filmmaker's national lack of support and funding for her film and its censorship, Obermeyer stays resolute and explains that she will continue to spread awareness of the women's condition and oppression in Algeria no matter what: 'Personne n'en veut en Algérie. Mais une fois qu'il sortira des salles françaises, je ferai en sorte que les Algériens le voient en le mettant moi-même sur internet!', which she has done, and this research endeavour is a direct impact of the filmmaker's initiative.[68]

66 Archana Ravi, 'It's My Right to Smoke: Rayhana Obermeyer', DECCAN Chronicle, 2017.
67 Fabienne Bradfer, 'A Mon Âge, Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer Violent et Drôle, Intime et Cru', Le Soir Magazine, 2018.
68 Samia Messaoudi, 'Rayhana: « A Mon Âge, Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer »', 2017.

Lack of funding and especially the oppressing censorship of artistic productions such as Obermeyer's film are the reason why there is significant lack of scholarship, especially in the Maghrebi/ Arab-Muslim geographies, on such interesting works, and thus why my study is a necessary contribution in order to bring light to them.

Although still taboo in Arab-Muslim culture, sexuality is one of the major themes tackled in Maghrebi literary productions – as is the case in the chosen narratives for this study; although less prevalent in filmic and visual productions, which again makes Obermeyer's *À mon âge* an exceptional production, by an Arab woman featuring nudity of Arab women. Nonetheless, it continues to be a subject of controversy.[69] Repression and censorship are, as discussed earlier, increasingly giving way to the public debate that questions the role of women and the patriarchal nature of the social order. It is above all in these arts, however, that the representation of sexuality as a cultural malaise specific to the contemporary Muslim world reminds us of what Michel Foucault proposed in *History of Sexuality* wherein:

> If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it, and talking about its repression, has the appearance of a deliberate transgression.[70]

In the Maghreb, a sexual 'pathology' manifests itself in the many artistic representations and it is exploited to evoke the consequences felt when the subject faces the repression of

69 Kaya Davies Hayon, Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film; Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, Sexuality in Islam, ed. by Trans by Alan Sheridan, Saqi Books (London: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975); Walter S. Temple, 'Transitions Within Queer North African Cinema', Screen Bodies, 2018; Rita A. Faulkner, 'Vaste Est La Prison: Assia Djebar Tracing a New Path - Writing the Algerian Woman out of Her Confinement', Journal of North African Studies, 13.1 (2008), 75–89.
70 Vern L. Bullough and Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, The American Historical Review (Gallimard, 1985), xc, p. 13.

desire and the manipulation of his identity by external forces. This transgression, the act of exploring sexual issues or exhibiting sexual identity in a culture of modesty suggests that in the Maghreb, postcolonial self-determination is trying, through artistic production, to achieve a new resistance that will challenge sexual and political taboos, which will be one of the major aspects I consider throughout this study. Indeed, the importance of sexuality is felt in the West and in the East, and the number of studies on the female subject and on sex in general in Maghrebi society and cultural production reflects the interest in joining various political controversies relating to this topic.[71]

In *Sexuality in Islam,* for instance, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba provides us with a thorough and bold study of the place and function of sexuality in Arab-Muslim societies. It is a question of a reflection on the reciprocal links of the sexual and the sacred in Islam. Based on the Qur'an, the hadiths and the Fiqh, his study consists of two parts: Entitled 'Islamic Vision on Sexuality', the first affirms that sexuality in Islam designates a process of renewal of creation built on a rigorous bipolarity: the feminine and the masculine. In this part, the author addresses the question of Islamic prohibitions. He distinguishes lawful relations (halâl) from illicit relations (harâm); legal marriage (nikâh) adultery / consanguinity / incest (zinâ) in Islam.[72] In his second chapter entitled 'Sexual Practices in Islam', the author evokes eroticism, enjoyment, and refined pleasures in the Arab-Muslim civilization.[73] Abdelwahab Bouhdiba relates the hammam to the Islamic religious scripture, the Qur'an, and investigates Islamic laws and interpretations of this space and what it represents in Muslim culture. In an Islamic approach, Bouhdiba essentially exposes the spiritual importance of the practice of bodily purification (ghusl) from what

71 Farouk Omar Asli and Radhi Jazi, '« Le Hammam » à Travers Des Manuscrits et Autres Ouvrages Anciens de La Littérature Médicale Arabe', Revue d'histoire de La Pharmacie, 95.358 (2008), 177–88.
72 Bouhdiba, xx, chap. 2.
73 Bouhdiba, xx, chap. 11.

is thought to be defilement due to sexual acts. Bouhdiba argues that, in Islam, sexual pleasures and licit carnal interaction represent a 'symbolism' of paradise and a 'benefit' from God, hence the 'sacrament' of marriage, and should not thus be perverted when expressed in this regard.[74] Much like Fatima Mernissi and Ahmed Bouguarche, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba estimates that due to the misogyny and negation of women's status in patriarchal Arab-Muslim societies, these have steered away from genuine Islamic principles which regard women highly, and instead confined them to a dual role, to the detriment of all other key roles women play: as an object of enjoyment and as a procreator.[75] This conception is indeed epitomised in Nasseri's male perspective and rendition of women inside the hammam, and it is exposed in the women's narratives in this study as the female characters, each offer their own everyday realities and challenges – this will be discussed later on in this study. Such socio-anthropological discussions included throughout this study provide culturally-sound considerations of Maghrebi social, political, gender, and spatial (public-male / private-female) relations, which enable a closer examination of conceptualizations engrained in the fabric of this Maghrebi culture which affects it and is affected by it – this inclusive of the artistic productions emanating from it, which we consider in this study. These interpretations demarcate the complexities of how Islamic conceptions and cultural attitudes affect the understanding and use of places, such as the Maghrebi hammam. Each gender encounters varying degrees of acceptance and rejection within both the private sphere of home life and the public sphere. Moreover, Islamic principles introduce specific guidelines for both genders when it comes to respecting each gender's space: women's movement in predominantly male public spaces need to show modesty, while men are expected to show restraint and

74 Bouhdiba, xx, pp. 91; 112; 122.
75 Bouhdiba, xx, p. 261.

lower the gaze when encountering women in outside spaces but are forbidden access to any female space if they are not a *harim* (a direct blood relative one cannot marry: brother, father, uncle…etc.). This in turn gives preponderance to an environment that allows women to exclusively gather in female-centric public spaces such as the hammam, away from men, *harim* or not, due to the private rituals taking place inside it and the intimacy required to complete them. That is why it is essential to incorporate a religious standpoint to better understand women's arrangement and experience with the hammam in Maghrebi Muslim societies throughout this thesis – unfamiliar to many, foreign to this culture.

It is the awareness of existence of such gendered spaces and of the control society has over them that seems linked to the identity evolution of the main characters in the works of Djebar, Sebbar, Obermeyer and Nasseri. The characters, as we will see, all navigate the dynamics and roles made necessary by gendered spaces as dictated in Arab-Muslim societies, i.e., spaces traditionally occupied for the majority by men and controlled by them as opposed a space designated for and controlled in turn by women, the women's hammam. The selected narratives all describe this opposition of spatial gender dynamics: associating the intimate private space of the hammam with the feminine, and public space, the street, coffeehouses, with the masculine. This cultural association is identical for female authors such as writer Assia Djebar, and Leïla Sebbar, and filmmaker Rayhana Obermeyer, but it is also found among male authors, such as Karim Nasseri, who's a brief intruder inside the women's space.

Importance and Aim of this study:

The clear importance of the hammam in my Maghrebi culture and everyday life has prompted me to conduct a feminist reading of the ancestral hammam in Maghrebi literary and filmic productions that have dared to represent it in a conservative Arab-Muslim cultural setting. The chosen textual and visual writings I have chosen to expose in this study shape representations of the hammam and their characters' experiences and social interactions inside it, the most intimate and taboo considering it is taking place in our traditionalist culture. Thus, due to the sanctity of the feminine intimacy inside the Muslim Arab hammam, and of the women's bodies it nurtures, it is then no surprise that representations of this female-exclusive space in literary, but also especially cinematic productions (in Algeria more particularly) are closely monitored and occasionally censored by the ministry of culture which has a strict agenda.

Through the women's writings I have selected for this study, I first explore how Djebar and Sebbar equally denounce and challenge the dominant narratives and stereotypes imposed by Western Orientalism, and how both authors, in turn, advocate for a decolonial approach that reclaims the voices and agency of Algerian women.

I also explore how the authors' works engage with the Maghrebi hammam and the harem as sites that have been historically exoticized and fetishized, especially in Orientalist representations. This endeavour will show that these hegemonic masculine representations not only distort the reality of Algerian women's experiences but also contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal structures and power dynamics that restrict women's freedom and agency. I address here how both authors draw on personal and collective experiences, as Algerian women, to expose the Orientalist gaze that objectifies

and reduces Algerian women to over-sexualised, over-adorned mute objects, but also, relatedly, I reflect on how the two prominent authors equally deplore the patriarchal gaze and control exerted on Algerian women in a postcolonial context, in a post War-of-Independence, and mid-Civil War Algeria. It is essential to observe how the authors reflect on Algerian women's present by reminiscing on these latter's contribution to independence from the colonial power, of a glorious past as war heroines, and how these same combatants have been abandoned, marginalised, and stripped of their rights and the promise of an equal role in a modern post-colonial Algerian society, repeating thus, the colonial man's legacy.

For this study, I examine Djebar and Sebbar's *Femmes d'Alger* and *Les femmes au bain,* but felt it necessary to also include other mentions from different narratives from both authors that are also pertinent to the study which treat themes explicitly on Orientalism and the hammam, its role, and the experiences of the female characters inside this women's hammam. Some of these other writings are Djebar's *Ces Voix qui m'assiègent (1999), Ombre Sultane (1995),* and *Nulle Part dans la Maison de Mon Père* (2007)*;* for Sebbar, while I mainly focus on *Les Femmes au Bain* (2006)*,* I also include relevant references to her *Shérazade* trilogy: *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982), *Les Carnets de Shérazade* (1985), *Le Fou de Shérazade* (1991) in which the author aims to rewrite Orientalist illustrations to represent Algerian women's subjectivity and agency, defying stereotypes and exoticism.

My choice to incorporate and conclude this study with Obermeyer's film stems not only from the desire to highlight the filmography of the Algerian woman - which so far is very rare - but also to investigate an intimist filmic representation of the women's hammam

and the women who gather inside it and experience it.[76] Obermeyer's *A mon âge* is a yearned-for and propitious contribution to what Malika Laïchour Romane designates as, the 'cinéma de l'intime', because the film touches upon its main components: the 'privé, […] l'expérience vécue', and the 'liens d'un individu à un autre, à d'autres', all while filmed inside what I construe as an experienced/lived women's hammam, based on Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and his notion of 'éspace vécu', for the hammam for Maghrebi women is our experienced 'corner of the world' where 'we inhabit our vital space, in accord with all the dialectics of life, how we take root, day after day, in [this] corner of the world'.[77]

Chroniques d'un enfant du hammam written by Karim Nasseri in 1998, a Moroccan male writer who is mostly unknown in academic discussion, is an interesting addition to the women's writings because it represents an ambivalent perspective on the sacred women's hammam as experienced by a pubescent male who, due to his child-like figure, strategically passes as a legitimate, gazeless child in order to gain access to the hammam, accompanying his unknowing female relatives to their weekly hammam session. This male representation gives an account of a masculine discourse with a misogynistic outlook on the opposite sex of his society and the sexualising gaze towards them which Djebar and Sebbar criticize, and amend together with Obermeyer. This masculine perspective is important to highlight also because it pertains to a Maghrebi male who's familiar with the customs of the Muslim-Maghrebi people, and how it is in fact a great

76 For some important discussions on Algerian Women's filmography (although not exclusively on women filmmakers) see: Guy Austin, Algerian National Cinema, Algerian National Cinema (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Maria Flood, 'Women Resisting Terror: Imaginaries of Violence in Algeria (1966–2002)', Journal of North African Studies, 22.1 (2017), 109–31; Carrie Tarr, Reframing Difference, Reframing Difference, 2019; Sheila Petty, Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film, by Kaya Davies Hayon, Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 2021; Malika Laïchour Romane, 'Le Cinéma Algérien: En Quête de l'intime', Pensee, 384 (2015), 67–78; Mildred Mortimer, 'Reappropriating the Gaze in Assia Djebar's Fiction and Film', World Literature Today, 70.4 (1996), 859; Moore.
77 Romane, p. 73; Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space: (Orion Press, 1957), p. 4.

taboo to illicitly penetrate such a sacred women's space, let alone have sexual intent and fantasies about it. Nasseri's interpretation of the women's hammam will also serve to animate a second discussion, in the last chapter (chapter five) of this study, which is a comparative reflection on the different perspectives and multi-layered aspects offered in each of the writings selected for this research in relation to the women's hammam.

In the Muslim-Maghrebi world, the Hammam embodies the sole emancipated microcosm for women, where raw female voices do not fear to question any religious, sexual, or political conflict, while fearful and silenced outside of it. It is seen as a temple that educates the senses, awakens, and expresses desire, prepares and cares for / from the meeting of the bodies. A sanctuary of purification, corporal and spiritual nudity, it is also the lived space where the forcefully concealed is finally disclosed. Diana Labontu-Astier accordingly describes it as a feminine safe haven, reminder of life '*in utero'*:

> Un espace féminin fermé, protecteur et chaleureux. D'où la sensation de bien-être et de sécurité. [Il] symbolise la liberté retrouvée pour quelques heures car la sortie hebdomadaire au hammam est une tradition, malgré la réclusion quotidienne. Plusieurs fragments décrivent l'atmosphère de ce lieu privilégié rappelant la vie *in utero*. Le corps féminin s'accorde un certain repos; il s'ouvre aux autres à travers la parole la plus banale qui raconte les peines, à travers les soupirs qui (re)créent des liens et suscitent la solidarité.[78]

78 Diana Labontu-Astier, 'L'Image Du Corps Féminin Dans l ' Œuvre de Assia Djebar' (Université de Grenoble, 2012), p. 235.

Similarly, Assia Djebar describes in her novel *Ombre Sultane* (1987) the experience of the women's hammam and the atmosphere prevailing in it – building on the stereotypical notions of enclosure and imprisonment readily associated with it in the West:

> [Un] refuge du temps immobilisé. L'idée même d'air close, et donc de prison, se dissout ou s'émiette. […] Hammam, seule rémission du harem […] Dissoudre la touffeur de la claustration grâce à ce succédané du cocon maternel'.[79]

The study addresses the two main forms, contemporary Algerian women's feminine writings and filmmaking, which are orchestrated through the women's hammam to represent the women who occupy it, and how these women occupy it, but also how they express themselves and their bodies, while negotiating their womanhood and agency inside this homosocial lived space in an Arab-Muslim Maghrebi context. I explore the cultural trauma and gender politics enmeshed in such our particular historical and cultural context, to elaborate on the complex relations between men and women in a postcolonial Algeria before and amid the Civil-War, which saw an unprecedented Islamist upheaval and the terror that ensued from it.

I use a decolonial introspective feminist lens to study the selected voices from the Maghreb about the women's hammam. This approach undertakes a holistic and exhaustive discussion on the women's hammam and all its aspects, as it relates – in an unparalleled manner – to women's subjectivity and womanhood, their everyday life, and their subversive women's voices, as it relates to the historical context of the selected narratives.

79 Assia Djebar, Ombre Sultane, Albin Mich (LGF, 1987), pp. 217–18.

Through their women's writings, the female authors vindicate their objective to write back to historically 'hedged' representations which have limited women's subjectivity and agency, or as it were, occultations, which 'has maintained currency despite the fact that it presents distorted and static images', but also their contemporary oppressors and silencers, their male compatriots.[80] This study focuses on the historical marginalisation and mutism suffered by Muslim Maghrebi women, a double alienation perpetrated by the colonial man and by their male compatriots post-independence, which then makes these women 'the colonized of the colonized.[81] In order to take back control of the discourse about / representation of Maghrebi women and their agency, it is necessary to first expose the origins of this double oppression to be able to be liberated from the hegemonic patriarchal narrative and 'rewrite' it because,

> being written within the recurring oppression paradigm requires that Muslim women must deconstruct the political and social realities that limit the ways their identities and experiences have come to be known before they can rewrite these scripts.[82]

The subject of male / female relationship is, at least in part, known to be linked to sexuality and the balance of power established in and through the sexual relationship. Following the erotic gaze of the settler, Algerian women faced that of the Arab man. The double colonialist and patriarchal domination, criticized and denounced by Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar and Rayhana Obermeyer as will be shown in this study shows that the veil of patriarchal society takes over from the colonial veil. The women presented by authors

80 Jasmin Zine, 'Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation', American Journal of Islam and Society, 19.4 (2002), 1–22 (p. 18).
81 Smail-Salhi, 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar', p. 83. '[This dual otherness, positions these women in a state of double subjugation both under the colonizer and the colonized, thus giving them the status of ''the colonised of the colonised.'']
82 Smail-Salhi, 'The Occidental Mirror'; Zine, p. 18.

Djebar and Sebbar tackle this double masculine gaze, that of the colonizer and that of the Arab man and seek to free themselves from it, while all three women's narratives place the issue of this veiling/censoring in relation to the question of the gaze and claim the right to see, to be seen and to be visible in society, but also to express one's voice freely. Veiling and seclusion are indeed metaphors of the invisibility of women in the collective memory of their country, but the female characters of the selected corpus produce a feminine culture inside the gendered space of the hammam which allows them to subvert this seclusion into a self-disclosure, in and through writing and film.

While focusing on contemporary Maghrebi literature and films, the study is carried out through comparative readings of the selected source voices, as I expose distinct similarities and disparate elements in their characters' experiences and disclosures – as a collective sororal community but also individually –, characterisations, and cinematic/literary techniques which come into play when representing the hammam's lived experience. For the women's voices, intertextuality will help to show how these *écritures féminines* and their *parler femme* have evolved in postcolonial Algeria, exposing in the process the evolution of representations of the hammam as a space, and the representation of Algerian women and their experiences in that specific space. Nasseri's masculine representation of the women's hammam, on the other hand, serves as a key point of comparison then, as a neo-Orientalist masculine representation, which the *écritures féminines* of Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer reproach and continue to discredit.

Writings on the women's hammam and Algerian women's womanhood and lived experiences inside it will reveal in this study the complex and multifaceted traits of such representations. These writings relate Algerian society, its women, and their historical revolution, from coloniality to post-coloniality, in a homosocial women's space from which masculine presence and hegemony are cast out. The evolutionary nature of the

women's representations of the hammam chosen for this study lies in what I argue to be a gradual, increasing level of disclosure and projection to conclude, through the last chain link of representations selected here – which is Obermeyer's 2016 film. This most recent representation, as I will argue in this study, is a mimetic projection which highlights a multi-sensory, multi-faceted disclosure of Algerian women, their womanhood and lived experiences, and women's historical *non-dits*, disclosures which were censored especially during the Silent War, i.e., the Algerian Civil War (during which the film is set).

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Methodology:

For the purpose of this study, I interpret the hammam, a women-exclusive safe space as inspired by the notion of 'éspace vécu' (lived space) forged by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard which for him associate welcoming 'intimate space(s)' as places of 'felicity' and disclosure – or 'profound roundedness', as opposed then in this study to historically flat representations of Maghrebi women:

> images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside. For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round.[83]

Building then on Bachelard's theoretical discussions of lived, intimate space, I use the theoretical tools developed as much by human geography and phenomenology as by feminist literary theory (especially by thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and Deborah Jones). Irigaray and Jones' concepts of 'parler femme' and 'women's oral culture', a subversive feminine discourse nurtured solely in '[des] lieux de femmes entre-elles', i.e., intimate homosocial female spaces, enables me to detect and analyse the discursive techniques that are proper to such an intimate lived space as the women's hammam in the Maghreb.[84] This dual approach allows me to investigate both the lived space of the women's hammam in the selected texts, but also the female characters' lived experience as they

83 Bachelard, p. 234.
84 Luce Irigaray, Ce Sexe Qui n'en Est Pas Un, Les Cahiers Du GRIF, Collection Critique (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), v; Deborah Jones, 'Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture', Women's Studies International Quarterly, 3.2–3 (1980), 193–98.

inhabit/experience the hammam and how they negotiate their womanhood and express their subjectivity inside it, in a patriarchal society. It is important to further highlight that the selected narratives are set in a patriarchal post-colonial context, writing about (and back to) Algeria's colonial past and Orientalist tropes that tried to define Algerian women's voice and being. The narratives also write about the most oppressive period in Algerian history, the upheaval of Islamist fundamentalism, which resulted in its Civil War (also referred to as the Black Decade) between 1992 and 2002. The combined readings chosen for this study will reveal thus, in a gesture of confluence, the spatial-experiential, sociocultural, and discursive devices integral to the women's hammam. This dual reading proposes to direct research towards a study of feminine authorship that Bachelard does not reflect upon but which Irigaray and Jones compensate for, essentially emerging thus as a linkage of Western critical readings in human geography, feminist and literary studies, while borrowing a more contemporary perspective through the prism of Islamist feminist thought and Maghrebi 'écritures féminines' including women's filmmaking, adding to the male interpretation of it represented by Maghrebi writer Karim Nasseri's *Chroniques*.

Drawing on the aforementioned theories, I first argue that Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer put in flesh and dialogue women in search of emancipation from patriarchal misogyny but also Islamist oppression during the Civil War in Algeria, a period that is known for its violence and discrimination against women, and the 'culture of silence' that ensued during and after it, thus enforcing an *omertà* on Algerian people, especially on the Algerian intelligentsia. Such representations of Maghrebi women and the socio-criticism found in Maghrebi female literature and cinema have then operated precisely so that the Algerian woman is no longer silent or cooperative through her silence. This study focuses

then on the representation of the Maghrebi women's hammam, the women who occupy it, and how these women occupy it, express themselves and their bodies, and how they negotiate their womanhood and agency inside this homosocial lived space in an Arab-Muslim Maghrebi context. In order to justify the multidisciplinary nature of the object of research, a conceptual framework, based on the theories of lived/experienced space, and of 'parler-femme' of second wave feminism will be discussed here.

The choice of a multidisciplinary conceptual framework was motivated by the following reasons. First, the fact that this research and the majority of existing scholarship on this topic and selected writings are discussed in a Western cultural environment foreign to that of my socialisation which is Maghrebi (Algerian), which in turn led me to consider the importance of integrating the perspective of Arab Muslim social anthropology of the Maghreb. To do so, I pay special attention to the inner-workings of Arab-Muslim Maghrebi society and governing patriarchal system, and how in turn these culture-specific imbricated mechanisms dictate gender relations, and therefore, the oppression of women. This *mise-en-context* will in turn rationalise and put in perspective, even for outsiders, the importance of having a protective and welcoming female-specific space for these oppressed women. A continuation to the discussions in the introduction and the first chapter of this study on the Maghrebi women's hammam, this contextualisation and native perspective will allow new readings and interpretations of the hammam experience, as a lived experience for women. What is more, these women express themselves in their own particular Arabic Algerian dialect, where some older illiterate women cannot speak any other language than their own native Algerian Arabic dialect, others express themselves in a more modern hybrid Algerian dialect; which merges Algerian Arabic, French, and sometimes Spanish words and expressions. As noted in the previous chapter, most of the existing scholarship discussed find the language and

cultural barriers with which one faced as outsiders particularly challenging. As an Algerian myself, I read the corpus of my study, in which the female characters express themselves using Algerian dialects, without referring to translations. I make use throughout this study of Arabic sources, some of which have never been translated. In light of all this, I aim to promote linguistically rich – and now accessible – materials through socially relevant, and culturally appropriate interpretation for a broad international readership, by combining Arabic, French, and English sources.

The second reason for this choice of approach has to do with the fact that certain themes such as the homosociality of the women's hammam, and the unique feminine discourse inside this latter, have never been studied before. Although the themes of unveiling, and female sexuality and bodies (in our case, in Islam) have been widely discussed by Western researchers (M. Segarra, M. Ardizzoni, M. Elizabeth, K. Bullock, MacMaster, T. Lewis, and V. Staats to name but a few), most have not considered the necessity of discussing how their native referents define the role of such topics in their social, cultural, and religious context. More precisely, this need is not met when reading Maghrebi women's writing, especially in relation to the role of the women's hammam and the correlation of such themes as homosociality and feminine discourse relevant to Maghrebi womanhood within this crucial feminine space. It is safe to say then that the role and importance of the unique space of the women's hammam in the daily lives of Maghrebi women is underestimated, although customarily integrated in Maghrebi women's cultural productions.[85]

85 For more on these women's cultural productions on the hammam or with clear references to it, see : Assia Djebar's *Les Alouettes Naïves* (1967), *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement* (1980), *l'Amour la Fantasia* (1985), *Ombre Sultane* (1995), *Vaste est la Prison* (1995) ; *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (1999), *Nulle Part dans la Maison de Mon Pére* (2007); Nina Bouraoui *La Voyeuse Interdite* 1991; Fatima Mernissi *Dreams of Trespass* (1994); Fériel Assima *Rhoulem* (1996); Malika Mokeddem *Les Hommes qui marchent*

Such research is therefore open to criticism from a methodological point of view because the discussions lack cultural familiarity with the subjects of study, given that it does not reflect on the reality of the Muslim Maghreb environment, its culture, social practices and policies, and the history that forged this culture and its artistic productions this way. Although some refer to the historical context when analysing the writings that have emanated as a response or coping mechanism, they do not reflect on the other components that make that society, its inner-workings, and idiosyncrasies which shape its history and its contemporary literature.

Feminism in the West saw itself developing as a movement aimed at confronting the sexist system which sought to organise society following patriarchal, gendered norms. It then developed as an ideology that stands in dialectical opposition against all misogynistic practices and ideologies. The political actions undertaken by the feminist movement in the quest for the recognition of women's rights have seen the transformation from ideological feminism to socio-political feminism, a theory aimed at the liberation of women from male supremacy and the resulting exploitation. From the theoretical application of its ideological underpinnings to the disciplines of sociology and psychology, feminism has articulated itself as a holistic ideology concerning the nature of women's oppression and subordination to men.

Patriarchy is defined by its structure and its ideology: it consists, initially, of a structure of social institutions where certain male individuals or groups are granted a high status in the hierarchy, while certain other feminine individuals or groups are relegated to an inferior status. And, secondly, it consists of an ideology bringing together

(1997); Meriem Hachimi *Hammam Lalla Taja* (2004) ; Leïla Sebbar *Les Femmes au Bain* (2006) ; Karin Albou *Le Chant des Mariés* (2009) ;Rayhana Obermeyer *À mon âge je me couche encore pour fumer* (2016)*;* Mounia Meddour *Papicha* (2019).

a system of ideas which perpetuate the cultural acceptance of patriarchal beliefs and obsession with maintaining this ideology and control over female subordinates. This ideology is performed at different levels: 'macro, meso, and micro levels: state and economy; institutions and organizations; households, families, attitudes, and interpersonal relations'.[86] An essential element of patriarchal ideology as it pertains to domestic patriarchy – as opposed to governmental / social / public patriarchy – is the hierarchical relationship between 'the man of the house' and his female relatives, a relationship that continues to lay the foundations for male supremacy and female subordination in society.[87]

Although similar and universal in some respects, the absence in Western feminist debates of an in-depth anthropological vision of the historical and cultural factors of Arab-Muslim patriarchal systems distinct from those prevailing in the West, has often led to Western feminism being judged as emerging from, and thus, ultimately reflecting imperialist and neo-colonialist ideologies (Gelles and Loseke, M. Tavakoli, Leïla Ahmed, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, El Khattat, among others). In fact, in some cases of more progressive Western feminist debates, these have been widely criticised and sometimes rejected as they supposedly consider someone emancipated, only after they adhere to Western principles of freedom, through total unveiling, and through Western cultural, religious, and ideological integration (Kemp; Ahmed; Khayatt).

86 Valentine M. Moghadam, 'Gender Regimes in the Middle East and North Africa: The Power of Feminist Movements', Social Politics, 27.3 (2020), 465–85 (p. 469).
87 Sophia Lina Meziane, 'Invisibility and Dis-Identification of Algerian Women:Feminist Jurisprudence Eyes on the Legal Provions Related to Personal Status and Criminal' (American University in Cairo, 2023), p. 11.

Arab-Muslim Maghrebi Family Systems and Women's Conditions:

The breadth of extremist religious and socio-political concerns to oppress women in Arab-Muslim societies like Algeria operate in a multitude of institutions and behavioural conventions and is far too substantial to be left out from discussions on works emanating from these particular contexts. In Arab-Muslim societies such as Algeria, patriarchal social norms are set through state laws and codes of regulation, such as the Family Code. This code is founded upon the family men's honour, which in its turn is partly dependent on the female relatives' virtue. The concern for women's purity and its control is at the forefront of conservative societies as in the Maghreb, because it is intrinsic to the belief in the transmission of moral qualities through physical and spiritual heredity. Among the rules that govern the transmission of honour from one generation to another, the honour linked to the social position of the kinship group is transmitted in the male line, while the honour resulting from sexual modesty passes through women. The lack of chastity in women therefore endangers the family honour accumulated by the ancestors. It is imperative to note however that in the scriptures of Islam, modesty is however encouraged for all Muslims, irrespective of any gender distinctions. However, most present Muslim societies do not judge men's sexual promiscuity as severely as that of women and is only rarely seen as a 'contaminant' of the family honour. Yet, both genders' honours are mutually intertwined in the sense that female honour, if not defended, can be held to be non-existent, and consequently, it is the family honour that is 'ruiné', because the male next of kin failed to preserve it.[88]

88 Isabelle Charpentier, *Le Rouge Aux Joues: Virginities, Sexual Prohibitions and Gender Relations in the Maghreb* (PU Saint Etienn, 2013); Nicola Heath, 'The Historic Tradition of Wedding Night-Virginity Testing', *Sbs*, 2018.

Accordingly, the concepts of modesty and sexual virtue in women and those of virility and courage in men articulate the nature of interactions between family members, and between spouses after marriage. These interactions imply a certain causal relationship in the holds that the different concepts have on each other, holds which can be explained by the following premises:

- The social honour of men (courage and virility) depends on the sexual honour of women (virtue) and more particularly, on their sexuality (virginity and chastity), social chastity (presence in sexually divided places) and bodily chastity/ modesty (dresses and behaviour);
- Women's honour (virtue) must be controlled to ensure the preservation of men's social honour (courage and virility) and the transmission of family honour (reputation, and consequently, social relationships and prospects).

Societies which condone and even encourage such beliefs put women in a subordinate status where control and oppression are withheld.

In a similar fashion, the female characters in the narratives selected for this study are exasperated by the oppression exerted on them in their Algerian society, significantly reducing spaces that women have at their disposal in their society for prosperity and safe disclosure. The only exclusive female space where such elements are found is inside the women's hammam, as we have argued in the introduction. As a result, the uniqueness of the hammam, its atmosphere, and the experiences it offers fosters group cohesion – or the creation of a sorority-like community of women – which in turn offers legitimation and a basis for expression in the collective voice, but also allows expressions of one's own body and voice.

During the context of the Civil War in Algeria during the 1990's, countless assassinations and violent intimidations were carried out in an attempt to force a more conservative lifestyle after French settlement's modernisation and secularisation. Throughout the conflict, extremists forced women to veil and cover themselves, but also attempted to forbid them from their sacred hammam visits: 'In Algiers, in 1994-1995, the GIA decreed a ban on the hammam and even machine-gunned one of these establishments.[89] However, women refuted to abandon their hammam sessions and the only respite they had inside it, even if it meant losing one's life, due to the danger they were facing by not abiding to the Islamists' intimidations, and the very visit to the hammam became an act of rebellion for Algerian women:

> [only,] it was to forget the resistance of women [...] to the expropriation of a space won by them from the beginning, and the prosaic – but vital – character of body care [inside it]. [Islamists] have won the battle of the veil, essential in the order of the sign, but lost that of the hammam, decisive in that of the body, by its ability to join the intimate and the social, the mastery of oneself and the control of the public space.[90]

Transitional space by its architecture and the way it is set up, especially its threshold, the hammam, as it were, permits the body to pass from light to dark, and connects and transfers from the outside world to the uterine world:

> Une fois franchi le seuil de la lourde porte, me voici dans ce royaume obscur, aux eaux ruisselantes : univers des ombres dont

89 Carlier, p. 1328.
90 Carlier, p. 1328.

> je rêverais longuement, la nuit suivante, avec sa houle de sons abondants et fluctuants, les mouettes de tant de voix d'inconnues, souvent le corps déjà dénudé...[91]

Once the threshold is crossed, there is typically a small corridor which is a space of transition between the outside world, and the main chamber of the hammam (where women get ready to start their hammam session, and where they lounge after it), as a way of keeping a clear separation, and for the warm ambiance inside to always stay welcoming for its visitors. More than a transitional space from the outer world to a hidden mystical 'royaume obscur', the hammam is also a transactional space which allows women of all ages and backgrounds, children, and new city dwellers to experience it and exchange inside it.

For Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, the 'euphoria' one feels inside it owes to the 'unlimited psychological joy rediscovered in an oneiric setting that flourishes in the hammam, a space where everything can be reconciled'.[92] He characterises the hammam with an oneiric transitional dimension, which nourishes the passage from the outside world towards the intimate and 'concealed', yet liberating, dream-like realm where all the senses intensify, to reconcile the lived bodies and their self-perception. A visit to the hammam implies a total reconciliation with oneself through one's body in a uterine, unique space where feminine bodily well-being gives way to a desire that flourishes freely.[93] On the bathers' journey to an intimate reconnection, women rub and wash their bodies, but they also enjoy and indulge in sensual and relaxing massages.

91 Assia Djebar, *Nulle Part Dans La Maison de Mon Père*, Babel (Actes Sud, 2007), p. 75.
92 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, Translated by Alan Sheridan, *Sexuality in Islam*, Saqi Books (London: Pressses Universitaires de France, 2013), xx, p. 174.
93 Jean Déjeux, *La Littérature Féminine de Langue Française Au Maghreb*, ed. by Karthala (Lettres du Sud, 1994), p. 103; Dani Cavallaro, *French Feminist Theory: An Introduction* (Continuum, 2003), p. 153.

One of the most distinctive characteristics which sets the hammam apart from other urban structures is its architectural design, its outward appearance and the configurations of its rooms and the performances it provides to its visitors. The more conventional hammam typography, for example, can generally be recognized from afar by its panoramic view and its large dome which rages above the city rooftops. Once inside, one is met with the corridor which sets the main entrance apart from the main hall / chamber of the hammam, for thermic isolation and for privacy; upon crossing the corridor, we access the main chamber, where the hammam visitors undress before their bathing session, and where after that, they relax, enjoy food and exchange while undressing or dressing up again in a warm ambiance. This room is a little brighter than the warmer rooms and is surrounded by benches on which visitors sit down to undress, put on a *fouta* (loincloth) to cover their bodies until they cross the threshold of the hot room. As the lounging chamber, it is in this section of the hammam that women spend the longest time, to relax, eat, drink, and chat after an intense, purgative hammam session.
The colder room or *bit al bereda*, which can be compared to the *frigidarium* of the Romans, is separated from the undressing room by a small corridor to prevent cooling. In this small room, women who want to take a breath of fresh air from the steamy and hot atmosphere of the hot room come to sit. Then comes the lukewarm room, which is a fairly large room serving as an intermediary between the cold room and the sweat room, the equivalent of the Romans' *tepidarium*. It is equipped with a large marble table used as a massage table.

The last room of the hammam is the hot room, also known as the steam room or *bit al hammia* and is a possible heir to the *caldarium* in Antiquity. As the hottest chamber in the building, it is distinctive also by its embellishments with granite and marble features throughout, from its massage slabs to its bathing basins. Very few sensory experiences

compare to sitting in the darkened shadows of this *dar al hammia* by its rather high temperature which aids in a hastened blood flow and oxygenation of the brain, while also causing sweating, which in turn dilates skin pores and allows the evacuation of harmful toxins from the body and relaxes every part of it. In this hottest and darkest room, the basins for the bathing ritual of the clients let a thick vapor escape continuously, which in turn helps accentuate the silhouettes evolving in an overheated, entrancing atmosphere. It is the main stop once undressed and ready for the bathing session once inside the hammam; bathers are immediately drawn to the intense heat of the last and hottest chamber. Here, they embark on a journey that involves multiple stays, progressing through the various chambers in a ritualistic sequence: from the main chamber to the cold chamber and finally reaching the hot bathing and massage chamber. This progression creates an immersive experience rich with tradition and profound sensory indulgence.

When it comes to experiences inside such private cathartic spaces, for the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard:

> these retreats have the value of a shell. And when we reach the very end of the labyrinths of sleep, when we attain to the regions of deep slumber, we may perhaps experience a type of repose that is pre-human; pre-human, in this case, approaching the immemorial. But in the daydream itself, the recollection of moments of confined, simple, shut-in space are experiences of heart-warming space, of a space that does not seek to become extended but would like above

all still to be possessed.[94]

Bachelard's concepts of lived/experienced space will especially be interpreted in relation to literary theory, where the women's hammam in the chosen corpus is considered as a lived space – not just a physical location – one which holds significance to the narrator and characters on multiple levels - ideologically, emotionally, and experientially in relation to social and political configurations in a specific geographical context. It is this lived space that 'shelters daydreaming, [it] protects the dreamer, […] allows one to dream in peace', which in our corpus is synonymous with the women's hammam, welcoming women away from outside restrictions and frustrations. Such a conception of space, as lived and experienced, extends then beyond geographical considerations pertaining to classical geography.

It is also important to clarify that implementing my study with the concept of lived space in a discourse on the Muslim Maghreb region entails that it will go beyond the Bachelardian dimension. It is indeed a question of formulating a fundamental difference between the Western concept and its formulation in a Maghrebi context based on an Arab-Muslim culture and norms as regards the representation of the intimate lived space, which for Bachelard represents the 'house'. As it happens, although the woman is associated with the private sphere in the patriarchal discourse, the 'house' does not offer her any intimate space, confining her instead to simple places of domestic labour. The private space associated with the feminine is itself subdivided into female and male spheres, all penetrated and overseen by patriarchal authority. The home would therefore

94 Bachelard, p. 10.

constitute another space of oppression and exclusion for women, as Nancy Duncan explains:

> Paradoxically the home which is usually thought to be gendered feminine has also traditionally been subject to the patriarchal authority of the husband and father. Personal freedoms of the male head of household often impinge on, or in extreme cases, negate the rights, autonomy and safety of women and children who also occupy these spaces.[95]

That is why, in the context of this study, Bachelard's conception of house/home is used as a basis from which I build my own conception of the lived space to refer to the intimate space of the hammam in the Maghrebi vision. Accordingly, then, I argue that the attributes Bachelard associates to lived space are instead used in this study to refer to the attributes of the inhabited women's hammam, where social and cultural practices are performed, and where intimacy, safety, felicity, disclosure, and relaxation prevail, as 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home'.[96]

While Bachelard conceives his topophilia in a verticality where intimacy, felicity, and safety of the house extend from the cellar to the attic, my conception of the topophilia of the women's hammam will be expressed by its horizontality, in relation to its unique topographical configuration (doors, curtains, threshold, and connecting chambers in enfilade, all in the same ground floor, gradually changing from the coldest to the warmest chamber).[97] It is precisely this grounded and labyrinth-like configuration that

95 Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', BodySpace, 1996, 135–52 (p. 131).
96 Bachelard, p. 5.
97 Bachelard, p. 96.

characterises the hammam as ‘intimate’ and ‘safe’, protecting women from scrutiny and allowing gradual physical and psychological disclosure while gradually penetrating the hammam’s interconnected chambers.

The German phenomenologist Otto Friedrich Bollnow later emphasized the ramifications of various 'lived spaces' in direct contrast to each other from a structuralist perspective when contemplated experientially and ideologically. Bollnow presents a comparison between the private space of the house and the exterior space, which for us parallels to the privatised gendered environment of women's hammams as tranquil and intimate, while opposed to the outdoor male-dominated spaces perceived as oppressive and ominous for women. By considering lived spaces as dichotomous, Bollnow’s theory provides foundation for semiotics theorists, such as Lotman and Van Baak, to implement the notion of ‘lived space’ in considering the cultural, ideological, and emotional values and parameters in regard to models of spatiality and spatial oppositions such as inside-outside, central-peripheral, vertical-horizontal. Spatial differences are thus culturally significant. Considerations of the private space, as opposed to the public space, which will be considered for this study, are culturally determined. In the geographical and cultural context of this study for example, the house and the outside space are portrayed in the narratives as a hostile and fearsome space, while the intimate space of the hammam, by excluding the oppressors (men), is experienced as an intimate and reassuring place of socialising and solace.

More recently, Tim Cresswell defines the lived space as ‘the subjective side of place – the meanings that we attach to it either individually or collectively’.[98] Emotional bonds are attached then to places which possess cultural (centuries-long tradition) and social

98 Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 05.

(gendered, privatised) values, meanings, and symbolism, as these spaces exist not only physically but also in the memories, emotions, and interpretations of those who inhabit them – ultimately then culturally and historically influencing and contemporizing them.[99]

The symbolic places par excellence, those which stand out from other places in this respect, are those whose symbolic load is manifest, even essential, in their identification as lived places. As significant lived places are carriers of something other than themselves as material properties, the notion of 'poetics' in association with lived spaces takes all its sense. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard explores, through literary images, the imaginary dimension of our relationship to space, focusing on the spaces of intimate happiness. Bachelard proposes how to better inhabit the world, to free us from the mundaneness of ordinary spatiality and cultivate our 'joie d'habiter' through the powers of imagination and, more precisely, of revery. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard first proposes a series of poetic-philosophical variations on the fundamental theme of the house, from that of the human beings – a true intimate cosmos – moving to 'animal houses' such as shells or nests, continuing to 'houses of things' referring to drawers, cupboards, and chests. In doing so, Bachelard thus commenced a broad reflection on the art of inhabiting the world, involving a dialectic of intimacy (house) and immensity (world around), then of inside and outside, which responds to our dual desire for protective intimacy and expansion towards the elsewhere through daydreaming and imagination. In a way, Bachelard has helped reinscribe the imagination at the heart of the most everyday experience to prefigure spatial sensibility in relation, *inter alia*, to phenomenology.

99 Meg Mundell, 'Crafting "Literary Sense of Place": The Generative Work of Literary Place- Making', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 18.1 (2018), 1–17 (pp. 2–3).

Inhabiting the Lived Space: Experiencing through the Material Body, Reflecting Imagination through Voice:

In reading the lived or experienced space, which is approached from a philosophical and phenomenological perspective as the 'shell' of the experience, one cannot omit to read the 'lived body' which 'dwells' in it.[100] Through this reading, it is almost impossible to avoid the concept of dualism, meaning, one cannot separate the corporeal dimension (flesh) and the reflexive dimension (*cogito*) of the lived body that experiences the lived space. If the hand can make the gesture of messaging, grasping, or touching one in its corporeity, the word – which needs the voice to express itself – touches and grasps one in its personality, in its identity. The 'spoken cogito' as the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty has framed it, is 'to be retained as sign-language of the lived body' for Nietzsche.[101] These observations make it possible to broaden the vision of the physical body by integrating the reflexive dimension. But how then, does one grasp and represent the reflexive dimension of this body, which, by its nature, is elusive? It is here the language dimension that leads to self-awareness and thus leads to the crystallisation of the subject, and this is accomplished through 'parole'. By voicing one's 'parole', our physical being, the locus of our perceptions and our sensations, expresses itself.[102] We experience through our physical body, but we express ourselves, our feelings, our frustrations, experiences, and attachments to a place through language:

> language is a body technique [...] a dimension of bodily hexis in which one's whole socially informed relation to the social world

100 Bachelard, p. 10.
101 Peter Christian Woelert, 'Materialisations of Space: Phenomenological-Archaeological Investigations Concerning the Relations between the Human Organism, Space and Technology', 2008, p. 28; Günter Abel, 'Consciousness, Language, and Nature: Nietzsche's Philosophy of Mind and Nature', *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, 2015, 37–56.
102 Irigaray, v.

> and one's whole socially informed relation to the world, are expressed.[103]

This is then what inscribes our corporeality in time and space, through it we manifest our double relationship with others: a sign of our individuality, it puts us in relation with others; through it, the personal and collective vision of the physical body, which is explained by the social, historical, cultural situation, takes shape, and becomes our 'point of reference', our perspective. This takes on its full meaning when it is expressed and submitted to the judgment of others who shape it, enrich it, or discredit it. Indeed, language also serves to express one's culture, which is in turn manifested through rituals, orality, and myths, is referred to by many, as 'imaginary narratives'. These are the visible symbols of the imaginary into which the body has been inserted. It thus also becomes a symbol of the representations and images conveyed by the imagination.

The body is composed of its physical and reflexive dimensions, but it is easier to assure ourselves of the existence of the carnal side, because it comes from the observation of the individual body, as it can be grasped by the gaze and can be contemplated and described *ad infinitum*. Language comes in to direct us towards a certain interpretation, to give us a unity that is supposed to be that of the whole body, to offer meaning to the 'material support' which is our physical body. Our body thus expresses itself most clearly by its reflective capacity, which is communicated through language, making possible the projection of this physical dimension to consciousness. On this, Hélène Cixous confirms in *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1975):

103 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and the Symbolic Power, Trans. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson*, ed. by John B. Thompson, Polity Pre (Seuil, 1991), p. 86.

> C'est tout entière qu'elle passe dans sa voix, c'est avec son *corps* qu'elle soutient vitalement la "logique" de son discours; sa *chair* dit vrai. Elle *s'expose*. En vérité, elle *matérialise charnellement* ce qu'elle *pense*, elle le *signifie* avec son *corps*.[104]

Accordingly, we use images and the imagination to talk about our body and our being as a whole to make it relatively 'perceptible'.[105]

Imagination, as a place specific to images, has two dimensions: the individual dimension which is linked to the desires and aspirations of consciousness; it is this imagination that creates images with the help of which we invent a new world. Owing to this imagination, this 'daydreaming', the lived body gives itself an opening to something else, to an elsewhere. The other dimension is the collective imagination, that which lists the repertoire of images that constitute culture and finds its expression in shared myths and folklore, reflections of the collective values of a culture.

Through reflexivity and imagination, the lived body is put in relation with the world around and one's own personal experience in this world. This lived body has in it the ideals, the absences, the traumas, everything that forms the experience of an individual subject. Through these concepts, we can put forward the idea that we only have an image of our body, which, thanks to the dynamism of the imagination, encompasses a personal vision and a collective representation, expressed through language, or '*parole*' (voice).[106]

104 Hélène Cixous, 'Le Rire de La Méduse: Et Autres Ironies', *L'Arc*, 1975, 39–54 (p. 47) [My italics, for emphasis].
105 Bachelard, p. 150.
106 Irigaray, v.

In this study, I use this same conception of the lived body and imagination when analysing the lived bodies of the female characters of my corpus in their entirety (i.e., the physical dimension as body, and the reflexive dimension as lived imagination expressed through language). Both dimensions are experienced and expressed inside the hammam: The bodies through their senses and visible traumas, and the lived experiences and imagination through *parole*.

In this next section, I expose the particular type of *parole* that takes shape inside the homosocial Maghrebi hammam, as lived place where the lived body experiences and expresses itself where female exclusivity prevails, and where intimacy and safety from the outside "male" world is at last found and experienced. This is why, and where, a feminist reading of the discursive elements embedded in the chosen women's narratives is necessary to explore this parole and its role in the narratives. Through this particular discourse, I expose how the female authors write back to the prevailing masculine discourse that silences them. My main focus when considering the discursive strategies implemented in the selected women's writings is to answer the following questions: What type of subversive feminine discourse is used in the narratives? why do the authors use the strategic space of the female-exclusive hammam to express it? How does this space help erect and nurture this feminine discourse? And finally, how is this discourse expressed by the female characters?

Feminine Discourse to Voice Feminine Imagination:

Adding then to the previous conception of lived/experienced space, I inform my study with second wave feminist concepts on 'feminine discourse' or 'parler-femme' as offered by Luce Irigaray and Deborah Jones to adapt them to our Arab-Muslim Maghrebi context.[107] This complementary approach, which appeared as a counter-discourse to hegemonic masculine discourse and patriarchal realities of conservative societies, can be adapted to the conservative Arab-Muslim societies in the Maghreb at a discursive level. In order to make these Second Wave feminist concepts adaptable to the realities of Arab-Muslim Algerian women, it is imperative to help bridge the differences in both cultures and ideologies by meeting the need for a contextual social anthropology of Algerian women's realities in the Maghreb and the historical context of their particular situation. As such, I avoid falling into the trap of imposing a ready-made Western-style theory.

This in turn allows contextualization from what is called an emic perspective, as opposed to predominant etic perspectives on Maghrebi cultural productions. An emic approach consists of studying a given society, from within by an 'insider' who gives particular attention to the intrinsic cultural idiosyncrasies that are essential to that society, which 'help[s] readers better understand the internal logic of why people in a culture behave as they do and why the behaviours are meaningful to them'.[108] Etic, on the other hand, refers to an approach undertaken by an 'outsider' looking into a foreign culture to his own.[109] This perspective ultimately accounts for the various ways in which the women's hammam – as locus of feminine culture and subversion for oppressed women – is

107 Irigaray, v; Jones.
108 Tara Bhatt, 'Emic and Etic Perspectives' (India: Lucknow University, 2012); Till Mostowlansky and Andrea Rota, 'Emic and Etic', *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 2020, pp. 1–16.
109 Mostowlansky and Rota.

perceived, experienced, and represented variably by these women who frequent it, including those who write about it, about their experiences and exchanges with all the women of their community. What is interesting to note upfront here is that in the selected women's writings and film, Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer highlight the heterogeneity of their female characters and the ambivalence of these latter's views and experiences – all exchanged and confided with one another inside the hammam, regardless of social status, age, or educational level. The authors themselves confess in interviews how their characters are inspired by existing acquaintances and family members (these will be cited throughout this study where appropriate).

A rigorous understanding of the concepts inherent to women's experiences in the Maghreb, inside and outside the hammam, therefore guarantees, in my opinion, that the corpus is treated from an ontological and anthropological perspective which is intended to be culturally appropriate and relevant. It is important to make clear, however, that this research does not negate or dissociate itself from Western thought, it simply seeks to bridge the contextual differences that lie between the two readings. I argue simultaneously then for a contextual recognition and an effecting of transnational feminism.

The main Western theorists I build my arguments from are the American feminist Deborah Jones, and the French theorists Suzanne Lamy and Luce Irigaray. Although these prominent theorists belong to the second wave and some of their manuscripts were published in the seventies and eighties, their contribution to feminist theory and the advancement in women's studies is still prominent, and still resonates with their research (Askew, Harrington, Bunting-Branch, Shaikh, among countless others). More recent scholarship has undoubtedly been published since about women's writings and the

particular discourse read through feminist theory (J. Guendouzi (2001), C. F. Giuliano (2016), P. M. Spacks (2022)), most either rely partly on the concepts of Second Wave feminism or approach their research using more contemporary approaches that have developed in contemporary gender studies, which do not easily apply to an Arab-Muslim Maghrebi context such as ours. What is interesting to note about such theorists as Irigaray or Jones is that their contemporaneous patriarchal realities, as occidental women during the seventies and eighties can easily be analogous with the realities of Algerian women in the historical context of our corpus. Indeed, Irigaray and Jones have theorised feminine discourse such as 'gossip' and 'parler-femme' as a subversive discourse reified to counter-act the hegemonic masculine discourse which has long defined female speech in a pejorative and 'resentful tone' because it excluded men, while women bonded over it. In the words of Patricia M. Spacks,

> […] men have defended themselves from the dangers they imagine in female talk: by denial and contempt […]. The hidden life of women, rarely onstage, always whispering in the wings, can frighten those who do not share it. What secrets do they tell one another, what power do they conceal? [110]

In this sense, feminine discourse becomes 'a verbal practice' that holds immense value in amplifying women's speech to counter-act and dismantle the historical suppression and oppression of women's identity and agency: [111]

> [T]o go back through the masculine imaginary, to interpret the way it has reduced [women] to silence, to muteness or mimicry, and […]

110 Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'In Praise of Gossip', *The Hudson Review*, 35.1 (1982), 19 (p. 20).
111 Throughout this study, I will refer to Irigaray and Jones's concepts on gossip and parler-femme under the umbrella term: "feminine discourse" when specificity is no necessary.

> attempting, from that starting point and at the same time, to (re)discover a possible space for the feminine imaginary.[112]

As 'repressed entit[ies]', it is imperative then, as Irigaray urges, that 'the female imaginary' be addressed and celebrated.[113]

Feminine Discourse Inside the Lived Women's Hammam:

It is in the selected women's writings of this study that the female characters create, in several manners, a refuge away from the male world, inside what Irigaray calls a 'lieu de femmes-entre-elles' (an exclusive female place), where 'a need for non-integration' is met in order to express themselves without restraint because 'the dominant language is so powerful that women do not dare to 'speak (as) woman outside the context of a non-integration', thus, any environment dominated by men. [114]

It is interesting to note that although the women's hammam is by definition a public bathing space, it is however, privatised for women's use, defying then binary conceptions of what domestic / private and outside / public spaces represent, as the hammam interconnects both conceptions. The fact that the women's hammam is a place of homosociality, from which men are excluded, but is also a public space which defies conservative social norms that relegate women to domestic non-public spaces, makes it a subversive space for women par excellence.

In her thought-provoking essay 'Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture' (1980), Deborah Jones categorised concepts surrounding feminine 'gossip' and its different categories and concepts in relation to dialogical exchanges between women which are

112 Irigaray, V, p. 164.
113 Irigaray, V, p. 28.
114 Irigaray, V, p. 133.

solely created in 'lieu de femmes-entre-elles', where they invent a voice for themselves, in the margins – but above all, intimately. Jones for example defines chatting – which is the main performance for women as they socialise inside the hammam – as 'the most intimate form of gossip, a mutual self-disclosure'.[115] Chatting during such gatherings, she continues, 'provide a continuous chorus and commentary on the incidents of women's daily lives, in an evaluative process that also provides emotional sustenance'.[116]

Irigaray and Jones both agree on the fact that feminine discourse in conservative patriarchal environments is only practiced in homosocial loci, such as the women's hammam, as places devoid of the oppressive male presence and 'masculine discourse'.[117] Although limited to female-exclusive spaces, feminine discourse is subversive for two main reasons: it denounces the role of women as subordinates; and it gives them a sense of coalition and affirmation, at the personal level (expressing oneself), but also at the collective level as women (sharing with one another and being supportive of each other). Patricia M. Spacks and Alexander Rysman examine gossip in this literary and sociological discussion and emphasize the key role it plays, as a subversive feminine discourse, to female communities when it comes to establishing 'female solidarity' 'in a patriarchal society [which] resents it' because 'they (men in control) cannot govern [it]'.[118] Another category of gossip advanced by Deborah Jones, as speech to denounce women's hardships and voicing socio-political criticism is ranting, which she coins as 'bitching'. Jones defines such speech as:

115 Jones, p. 248.
116 Jones, p. 248.
117 Irigaray, ⅴ; Jones.
118 Cheryl F. Giuliano, 'Marginal Discourse: The Authority of Gossip in Beppo', in *Rereading Byron: Essays Selected From Hofstra University's Byron Bicentennial Conference*, ed. by Alice Levine and Robert N. Keane, 1st Editio (Routledge, 1993), pp. 151–64 (p. 157).

> the overt expression of women's anger at their restricted role and inferior status. Overt, that is, in that it is expressed, but in private and to other women only. The anger expressed in bitching is privati[s]ed; women's oppression is not discussed as a general concept, but in the relating of specific, personal complaints. Consciousness-raising in the women's movement is bitching in its political form.[119]

For Jones, bitching is essentially 'cathartic' because women are finally able to express their feelings and experiences, away from male presence and masculine discourse which dismisses women's voices and oppresses them.[120] In such feminine discourse, women do not necessarily need to act on their status as oppressed citizens, still the female characters voice 'their complaints in an environment where their anger will be understood and expected'.[121] The confidences and solidarity of the female characters is essential inside such lived places as the hammam since it fosters respite and comfort as women unite to express their adversities and rant about it together.

The American psychologist Arthur Janov suggests however that such a ranting speech, what he calls 'the scream' (cry, rant), is for him 'both a [cry] of suffering and a cry of liberation'.[122] Indeed, we find that the cry has a therapeutic (Janov) and 'cathartic' (Jones) effect on the being that it involves; a kind of relief that is felt following the force deployed for the production of this cry. Janov confirms that this primal scream: 'marks the end of the struggle' for the women that express it.[123] Nonetheless, the cry itself for

119 Jones, p. 197.
120 Jones, p. 197.
121 Jones, p. 197.
122 Arthur Janov, 'The New Primal Scream: Primal Therapy 20 Years On.', 1991, xiii, 380–xiii, 380 (p. 113).
123 Janov, p. 159.

Janov is an act that requires a 'primal cry' that can be linked to the period of silence and repression of the voice. This cry which touches on the oppressed feminine discourse in a male sphere, is a cry which must arrive at a mature stage (after the primal cry) so that it can be a liberating cry if not the cry can be condemned to total silence. However, it is through this process that the pain is transmitted to the consciousness to be able to communicate and say it. Therefore, this cry which breaks the silence is a cry which transgresses language by the realisation and the installation of the muted word and consequently it is the world which it subsequently transgresses. On this Bachelard asserts that

> A creature that hides and 'withdraws into its shell', is preparing a 'way out'. This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being.[124]

It is crucial then to emphasize how initiating, encouraging, and perpetuating such subversive feminine discourse (of body and voice) for oppressed women in conservative societies such as in Algeria is an act of rebellion and transgression of the modesty expected of women, even in places where male presence and supervision is absent.

To sum up, the subject of my research essentially emerges as a linkage between Western critical readings in human geography, feminist, and literary studies, while borrowing a more contemporary emic perspective through the prism of Maghrebi

124 Bachelard, p. 111.

feminine realities and writings, inscribed in a hybrid Algerian language which fuses French and Arabic/Algerian dialect. Through my interdisciplinary approach, I examine and interpret in the next chapters of this thesis the spatial (public / private), social (man / woman), and dialogical (feminine discourse / masculine discourse) referential models in each selected texts, while bringing out their respective discursive approaches considering the topicality of their themes: patriarchy, oppression, discrimination, heterogeneity, polyphony, subversion; and historicity against amnesia (the War of Independence and Civil War). I will show throughout this study how the women's voices instrumentalise the forbidden and secretive Arab-Muslim hammam to subversively and provocatively represent Algerian women, an experienced place in which these women foster a feminine discourse to liberate their speech and opinions and nurture their oppressed bodies.

In the next section of this study, and in order to bring attention to the issues raised in this study and animate the discussion around the importance of feminine discourse and feminine self-representation, I have chosen, at the outset, to closely examine Nasseri's contemporary insider representation of the sacred Maghrebi women's hammam, a direct result of an illegitimate penetration of this place, reminiscent of the colonial Orientalist's obsession with penetrating the women's hammam and claiming control over what is customarily forbidden to them. *Chroniques,* I argue, is a re-illustration of historical exoticizing male discourse prevailing on the women's hammam and the women it harbours, especially when noting that this text was published in France in 1998 and the author's stolen gaze and eroticised adventures are offered to a mainly Western public, analogous to French Orientalists who painted Maghrebi women for Western spectators to meet popular demand for exotic arts and erotic indulgence by offering satiating portrayals of the people of 'Le Sud', ornamented in paintings which 'enter [their] eye, like a glass of wine going down [their] throat and are immediately intoxicated' by it.[125]

Nasseri's male voice and representation embodies then, the masculine discourse and perspective that is addressed, critiqued, and rectified by the women's voices offered by Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar, and Rayhana Obermeyer in their own writings – which will be shown in the chapters following the discussion of *Chroniques* to demonstrate this contrast with Nasseri's perspective.

The following chapter on Nasseri's *Chroniques* provides an interesting addition to the selected women's writings as it represents an ambivalent perspective on the sacred women's hammam as experienced by a male insider to the same culture who gained

125 Petre, p. 41.

illegitimate access to the hammam through ruse. This masculine perspective is also important to highlight in this study because it pertains to a Maghrebi male familiar with the customs of the Muslim-Maghrebi people – where it is considered taboo to penetrate such sacred women's spaces illicitly or have sexual intent and fantasies about it, making this text all the more controversial and essential to explore.

Nasseri's representation will also serve to enlighten the essence of the hegemonic Maghrebi masculine discourse, infused with a misogynistic attitude towards the opposite sex of his patriarchal, disillusioned post-colonial society, and subjecting these same women to his sexualizing gaze and his displaced frustrations projected onto these female compatriots – all themes which will be expanded more on in the women's writings chosen for this study, as voices of the female subjects on the receiving end. Nasseri's interpretation will also serve as material for animating discussions within chapter five of this study, which focuses on the ambivalence of perspectives and multi-layered aspects relevant to the women's hammam offered in each selected writing.

Chapter Two: Maghrebi Male Perspective on the Women's Hammam – Kamel Nasseri *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam* (1998) :

As previously noted, the women's hammam has historically been described and portrayed by men, especially Orientalists, as a place where the bodies of women are exposed and sensuality reins. The portrayal of places like the hammam as exotic and sexually charged subjects has effectively been the signature of many artists such as Ingres, Delacroix, Giraud, and Gérôme. Their works often exotically depict odalisques, inviting a voyeuristic gaze, breaking then societal boundaries by revealing intimate spaces which are normally hidden from view. This fascination with intimate women's hammams reflects Westerners' persistent association of women with private enclosures and men's preoccupation with penetration, since again: entering a bathroom symbolizes gaining access to the innermost parts of private abodes.[126] The desire to possess and dominate colonized women is evident in these representations, as colonial Orientalists contributed to the colonization process by attempting to penetrate the perceived hidden world behind forbidden women's quarters. This intrusion into women's spaces signifies the completion of colonial control over these territories, disregarding cultural boundaries imposed by colonized people.

For instance, in *Le Bain Maure* (1870), or later *Femmes au Bain* (1898) by Jean-Léon Gérôme, the Orientalist artist portrays his odalisques' naked bodies with voluptuous figures, leisurely and nonchalant, seemingly unaware of the voyeur who is intruding on their privacy as they do not gaze back.[127] The depictions created by Orientalist artists

126 Bentahar, pp. 30–31.
127 Efterpi Mitsi, 'Private Rituals and Public Selves : The Turkish Bath in Women ' s Travel Writing : Women Negotiating , Subverting , Appropriating Public and Private Space Private Rituals and Public Selves : The Turkish Bath in Women ' s Travel Writing Efterpi Mitsi', September, 2019, p. 52.

such as Gérôme reflect a power dynamic that subjugates women while promoting a signature aesthetic of decadence, sensuality, neurosis, and depravity. These portrayals objectify the women within their surroundings, denying them agency and subjecting them to the Western male gaze, falling victim to the obsession for unveiling and taking control of the colonised woman offered to them.

However, one cannot help but wonder, what would a Maghrebi male, insider to the same culture, say about this intimate feminine space, and his female compatriots inside it, if exclusively granted actual access to it? This question is precisely what fuelled this chapter and the endeavour it seeks to accomplish.

To answer these questions, I have chosen Karim Nasseri's novel *Chroniques d'un enfant du hammam* (1998) as a necessary contribution and perspective to this study. The Maghrebi author selected offers an interesting approach to the women's hammam from a child-passing male adolescent's perspective, as the sole protagonist and narrator, still allowed access to this forbidden women's private quarters because he is believed too young to 'gaze' and perturb women's decency in this sanctuary due to his frail demeanour. Narrating his adventures through a stream of consciousness narrative mode, the young protagonist, Idriss, gives his own masculine representation of the sacred and intimate Maghrebi women's space, and the women who frequent it.

In *Chroniques d'un enfant du hammam* Karim Nasseri conveys female experiences inside the hammam from his own overtly distanced but intrigued masculine standpoint, coalesced with the author's palpable subjectivity in representing how a young man experiences this brief long-fantasized penetration of the forbidden women's hammam.

Through the stories of the main character, Idriss, the childish thirteen-year-old-boy, Nasseri paints the everyday struggles a young man goes through in a patriarchal Moroccan society plagued by corruption, poverty, and perversion during the 1990s, branded 'les

années de plomb'. This period extended from the 1970s until the end of the 1990s, encompassing Moroccan King Hassan II's reign. This period was known as the most violent, economically unstable, and oppressing period of contemporary Moroccan history post-independence (1956) because it was marked by unprecedented violence and repression towards anti-Hassan II politicians and democratic activists who dared to speak against the King, killing and torturing them.

Nasseri's narrative is set then during this period of unrest and is related in mosaic rather than linear style to highlights the childhood of the young Idriss from a small Moroccan village, a microcosm of Morocco under Hassan II and his oppressive regime. At the top of the village's hierarchy, just like the King in his royal palace, is 'l'homme fort', compared by the author to 'calife du temps des empires Ottomans' and 'Caligula' to finally give him a name: 'Isa le danger'.[128] This 'homme fort' is protected from the other inhabitants by one hundred and forty-seven bodyguards as he diverts the villagers' scant resources to maintain his collection of cars, swimming pool, and his large gardens, part of his main palace while possessing another 'petit palace à la sortie du village' where he would use his 'immense lit des milles plaisirs' 'où il étalait des femmes magnifiques et des hommes splendides'.[129] True dictator of the village despite his illiteracy, 'Isa le danger' is as rich as the villagers are poor; depending on the contraband market of the village, mendicancy, and prostitution to sustain themselves. The young narrator and protagonist would also '[s]'occuper et gagner de l'argent de poche' by trying every job at hand in this impoverished village: 'porteur, balayeur, voleur, gardien, *prostitué*, detective privé, […] conteur public'.[130] Still at a juvenile phase, the protagonist has personally experienced the overshadowing despair governing the villagers' prospects – which, paired with the

128 Karim Nasseri, *Chroniques d'un Enfant Du Hammam* (Paris: Denoël, 1998), pp. 34, 35.
129 Nasseri, p. 35.
130 Nasseri, p. 32. [My Italics, for emphasis].

detached description of the narrator, show the overfamiliarity and consequent disillusionment due to the perturbing conditions which have become a habitual – if not, binding – characteristic to surviving in Idriss's society and everyday life of Moroccans, 'résignés' during these 'années de plomb'.[131]

Born in 1968 in Morocco before emigrating to France in 1989, Karim Nasseri benefits from the experiences of his predecessors Mohamed Choukri, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Rachid Boudjedra, among others, by pursuing the questions that launched in the 1970s but remained complex to answer: the demand for identity, social criticism, the defence of the oppressed, the revolt against the social order, and de-colonialisation. Including in his narrative an undeniable appreciation for Western authors and poets such as Victor Hugo, Nasseri cannot help but refer to the agenda and consequences brought about by colonialism. Nasseri cites as an example the controversial xenophobic passages from "Victor Hugo's 'Actes et Paroles, Vol. 4 Depuis l'Exil: 1876-1885", which displayed the hegemonic colonial attitude towards 'Le Sud':

> Il était bien dommage que le grand poète (Victor Hugo) ait envisagé beaucoup de richesses pour les siens sans jamais penser – à moins qu'il n'eût oublié – au peuple de "ce Sud (Le Maghreb), de ce bloc de sable et de cendres", "qui fait obstacle à la marche universelle", […] ni aux guerres, aux famines et injustices qu'allait engendrer cette occupation forcenée'.[132]

On Nasseri's denunciations of his postcolonial dystopian society, he discusses the hypocritical nature of patriarchal societies such as the Maghreb which argue to be

131 Nasseri, p. 36.
132 Nasseri, p. 44.

honourably guided by Islamic law, while it is largely distorted and manipulated by men for their own self-serving purposes and perverted urges. Nasseri's writing condemns such agendas and denounces the perversions disguised in what ought to be the most sacred and respected institution after masjids, the Quranic school, where a *fquih,* teacher in the Quranic school, is disguised as a pious respected man:

> 'Il passé la plupart de son temps à fumer du *kif* [Cannabis] et à se masturber sous sa djellaba, tout en caressant, mine de rien, les petits écoliers innocents. Je haïssais ce salopard qui aurait dû naître porc, loin des pays arabes.

Victim himself of sexual assault during his first day at the Quranic school at three and a half years old, the protagonist of *Chroniques* describes in detail the horrific experience he endured:

> Dès le premier jour, j'eue ma dose, comme tous les élèves. Le *fquih* passa un quart d'heure à m'embrasser et à introduire sa grosse langue puant le kif dans ma petite bouche. Puis il me prit la main droite et la fit entrer par la poche de sa djellaba. Je fus écœuré quand ma petite main rencontra son salême dur et lisse.[133]

Idriss is exposed from an early age to sexual abuse and has frequently been confronted with what in psychoanalysis is called the primal scene, which is the direct observation or imaginary perception of sexual relations between the father and the mother. This primal scene is distinguished not by its tenderness but by its violence, that which the father exercises on the mother through sexuality:

133 Nasseri, p. 46.

> Mes parents, comme tous les villageois, ne faisaient pas l'amour. C'était le mâle qui montait la femelle. Comme des animaux. Ma mère, toujours silencieuse, résignée, écartait les jambes, fermait les yeux dans l'obscurité et se laissait envahir par le bélier de la troupe.[134]

This sexual violence is what forged the young protagonist's sexual identity, distanced from any form of decent and mutual love and sexual communication, Idriss himself gradually emulates and portrays the immature and distorted perspective on sex throughout his adventures, especially once inside the women's hammam. For the young Idriss, the primal scene is a scene of aggression, of subjection. It inscribes sexuality not in the reciprocity of pleasure, respect, and consent but in a balance of power where the father behaves as master and satisfies his pleasure at the expense of his reluctant wife, who is 'résignée'. Following the numerous depraved sexual encounters, described once again with the violence of words but with a detached stoical tone, Idriss explores a sexuality that is both juvenile and deviant, a distinction is made between the dominant feeling which drives, early on, the sexual awakening of Idriss: He keeps intact his hatred of his father, the Dictator, and the rage of wishing for his death and of not being able to kill him himself because too weak, while the progression of his sexuality will lead him to retroflex the footsteps of this 'Dictateur' from whom Idriss will seek to distance and exorcise himself throughout the narrative.

To distance himself from the revulsions committed by corrupt men, valuing the genuine philosophies of the Islamic scripture, Nasseri includes a section where Idriss reminisces on the time where his grandmother, Fatna, enquired whether 'les Blancs,

134 Nasseri, p. 56.

colonisateurs et oppresseurs' used to let Black people into their churches, which the cultivated, Mohamed Ier University graduate, Yahia, negated. Idriss contentedly continues that Yahia instead related that although slavery was only abolished in 1848 in France, the Muslim prophet (pbuh) and his companions had freed an Abyssinian/Ethiopian slave, Bilal Ibn Rabah, and gave him the honourable position of the first *mu'addin* (caller of prayers) in all the history of Islam, in as early as the 7th century AD. Along with these historical facts, Idriss also makes numerous references to pious respected men and women such as his mother, grandmother, and the 'vieux sage du village' who accomplish good deeds for the villagers on some occasions (such as offering generous donations to the mendicants after the Friday prayers, and teaching proper Islamic principles, among others).

Finding refuge in the Women's Hammam:

The young Idriss is subject to a violent and miserable childhood, implemented by the poor regime in place, but also by the tyranny of the two male figures at home, his father and uncle. In his preface to *Chroniques*, Nasseri references this to sets the scene from the onset, he straightforwardly announces in the first page: 'A ma mère, à mon père ce dictateur.' At Idriss's home, it is then the father – always referred to as 'Le Dictateur', or 'Mohamed Le Dictateur' throughout the narrative. Idriss's strict and violent father and uncle, Tahar, both treat him hostilely and oblige him to complete 'des travaux forcés' 'interdites à un mioche comme moi par l'ONU, l'UNICEF et Amnesty International réunis' to force forge his masculinity and manhood.[135] Idriss continues his emotional purge through stream of consciousness to expose his alienation, frustration, and *mal-être*:

135 Nasseri, pp. 13, 49.

> J'étais un enfant pas comme les autres. Un enfant maudit condamné depuis que je tenais debout. […] Je sentais mon petit âge, malmené, maltraité, massacré, amputé, piétiné, frustré. [Le Dictateur] allait disparaître avant de me donner ne serait-ce qu'un brin de cette merveilleuse insouciance sans laquelle il n'est point d'enfance. Grâce à Dieu, j'avais ma mère.[136]

Although Idriss found solace in his mother, she too was a victim of the dictator, and could not save herself or her children – this weakness participated in amplifying a conflicting love / hate relationship with his mother and the feminine. Indeed, the family's dictator, Mohamed, is oppressive towards all: his wife, but also his mother, sister, and children who are all subservient to him. In the lowest position in the chain of hierarchy is the youngest of them, Idriss.

The protagonist addresses his *mal-être* again and articulates in a physical way the desired unloading of the oppression and aching resulting from a prolonged exposure to a cluster of oppressions:

> J'avais envie de *vomir*. *Vomir* les trois femelles toujours soumises, *vomir* le Dictateur mon père et l'écraser comme j'écrasais les mouches autrefois. J'avais envie de *vomir* mes souvenirs malheureux et douloureux qui ne cessaient de me poursuivre partout. J'avais envie de rendre ma vie entière et de laisser la poussière la recouvrir. M'oublier.[137]

136 Nasseri, p. 35.
137 Nasseri, p. 103. [My italics, for emphasis].

Self-inflicting amnesia but expressing it as 'vomi[ssement]' (unloading), Nasseri expresses a simple desire to reject and ultimately eject the masculine universe that surrounds the boy and 'les femelles' but does not necessarily try to change the hegemonic masculine behaviour towards him or the women since he is weak himself. Idriss ultimately ventriloquises and mimics the misogynistic behaviour himself throughout the story for lack of better examples to try and fill the void created by his own experiences of oppression. Idriss's story is filled throughout the pages of the novel with a stream of unhappy memories but the readers who follow the story to its end will notice that the path of Idriss's narrative is non-linear: It wavers between a fluctuating emotional expression, between the drive towards violence, like his father, between the drive towards desire and sexual exploration to transmute the violence, the feminine, and between reassurance from violence through maternal / feminine sensibility.

From his earliest childhood, Idriss went to the hammam with his female family members because in Arab-Muslim countries, women bring their male children to the hammam until the pre-pubescent age, which usually does not surpass the ages of five or six years old, or unless advised otherwise by the hammam manager who would deem the male infant mature enough to have an illegitimate male gaze towards women inside the hammam.[138] The child therefore associates the intimate 'uterine' space of the hammam not only with the special bond he has with his mother, but also with the intriguing atmosphere of freedom women experience during their day out of the house – seen as a modern-day harem – and away from the dictators:

138 Ahmed Bouguarche, p. 225.

> Le hammam n'était pas seulement un endroit pour se laver, se raser ou encore s'exhiber. Il était un lieu de rencontre et d'évasion pour ces femmes obligées de rester cloîtrée à la maison.[139]

Although the young boy is foreign to the hammam experience from a female perspective, he does however acknowledge the necessity of this space for the women, in finding refuge themselves from the oppressive patriarchal society he is also victim to, confirming Djebar's own description of its liberating nature. Indeed, as one of the most prominent writers from the Maghreb, Djebar herself describes the hammam experience in *Ombre Sultane* as a 'refuge' which dissolves the idea of closed air, and of imprisonment, wrongly associated with the hammam, considered another constraining gendered space while she, and her sisters, consider the hammam as a 'substitut du cocon maternel' and unique homosocial respite from oppression.[140] Similarly, the only way for the young protagonist to unload himself from the constraints of the authoritarian masculine atmosphere, although momentarily, is to take respite in the women's hammam along with his mother and the other female family members: '[…] j'allais passer une journée entière à contempler des corps de femmes dénudées, bercé entre les vallés roses et des cieux brumeux'.[141]
For the narrator, the description of the hammam becomes a personal experience that translates into the exaltation of words, a series of glances and sometimes unnoticed persistent gazes, which end in a sexual initiation with the other sex (the young Zineb), which will be discussed further on.

In *Chroniques*, the afternoon in the women's hammam is presented as a ceremony prepared by Idriss's aunt and his female cousins. As they bustle about, excitedly filling

139 Nasseri, p. 73.
140 Djebar, *Ombre Sultane*, pp. 217–18.
141 Nasseri, p. 71.

baskets with food and applying henna to each other's hair, the protagonist can only resign himself to what he describes as an afternoon in a hubbub, where 'la revue de presse du village du pays et du monde entier était imprimée sur les langues de ces femmes ignorantes.'[142] Referring here to the feminine discourse, proper to intimate feminine spaces where they feel free to chat and gossip as has been construed by Jones, Irigaray, and Cixous as a form of exteriorising and expressing one's frustrations is perceived by the male protagonist and thus the male Maghrebi author as 'une revue de presse' expressed by women considered by him as 'ignorantes' ; directly echoing patriarchal male discourse which condemn it because 'frighten[ed]' by it.[143] Since the protagonist does not feel prisoner to domestic feminine spaces to which some are confined, Idriss readily recognizes that the hammam can become a space of freedom, an excuse to escape from the daily life of the house: 'Pour ces femmes. C'était une opportunité de sortir. Rencontrer d'autres femmes, tout en parlant et se lavant'.[144] An atmosphere of nurturing and protective exchanges that surround him but from which he nevertheless feels excluded. It is through his gaze and his words that Idriss becomes aware of the existence of these women as a community, a community in which he knows he doesn't belong to, but which he nevertheless appreciates and favours over outside male oppression: 'J'étais heureux de faire partie de cet univers limité'.[145] The hubbub of women thus becomes the canvas of the child, ready to let himself be transformed. Inside, the bodies are sensual and let themselves go with a gentle abandon contrasting with the physical restraint they must express outside the walls of the bath. Contrary to the women's narratives, for Nasseri, women in the hammam are denigrated, presented negatively, especially if these are not to

142 Nasseri, p. 73.
143 Spacks, p. 20.
144 Nasseri, p. 34.
145 Nasseri, p. 34.

the protagonist's taste. Idriss focuses his attention on the beautiful, younger, and more sensual bodies he secretly observes inside the hammam, bodies that he objectifies and describes as having 'des tétons comes des cerises', which erect in him,

> […] un besoin urgent de me le masser en fixant les seins, les fesses, et les pubis de ces bonnes femmes qui ne venait pas seulement pour se laver mais pour s'exhiber les unes aux autres, distiller des paroles au goût de sucre et s'échanger des remèdes.[146]

The bodies of women in the hammam are recognised by Idriss as something which is forbidden to him, and it is this limitation that exacerbates his desire of touching them, and being touched by them. When describing the women's bodies observed inside the hammam, if the latter doesn't fit into the exotic and erotic vision of the gazer, however, the protagonist is repulsed by them and simply dismisses them:

> […] une vision traumatisante : une femme qui n'avait qu'un seul sein. Je courus vers ma tante qui m'expliqua que la pauvre l'avait perdu des suites d'un cancer. Je ne savais pas ce qu'était un cancer. Vu le tableau, je n'eus pas envie d'en savoir plus.[147]

In another instance, the protagonist reinforces his disgust when describing the other sex's aged bodies, which do not fascinate his perverted vision or arouse his sexual appetite: 'Avec son gros sexe qui n'avait rien d'une vallée de roses, son pubis osseux […]. J'étais révulsé par ses seins flasques, pendants ici et là, qu'elle tentait de rejeter vers ses épaules.'[148]

146 Nasseri, p. 71.
147 Nasseri, p. 76.
148 Nasseri, pp. 79–80.

As previously established, the ritual of the women's hammam also involves the use of beautifying and hygienic rites, essential to the bathing experience for women. During Idriss's short stay inside the hammam, he meticulously describes how women whole-heartedly take part in these rituals, foreign to him: 'Elles se frottaient le corps […] se savonnaient […] et s'attarder sur leur bas-ventre pour frotter délicatement la bouche de loup.[149]

Little boys have the possibility to access the forbidden women's quarters before puberty and are therefore able to initiate exposure to the bodies it hosts, different from theirs, which can consequently induct their sexual identity and training.[150] The hammam becomes for gradually cognisant male children a moment of ecstasy during which they allow themselves to gaze on the bodies and movements of the other sex - while they are still perceived as harmless males, devoid of a sexualising male gaze which would disrupt the tranquillity and safety women come for and sacralise inside the hammam.

For Arab-Muslim Maghrebi men, the hammam represents a first glimpse of the anatomy of the other - that of the woman. The young narrator of *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam* sees very clearly the temptations to which he is subject within the women's hammam as he contemplates these women's bodies, 'cradled between pink valleys and misty skies', especially since he is clearly knowledgeable about his anatomy, sexual pleasure, and human reproduction:

> J'allais souvent, à l'abri des regards, arroser la ferme de notre regretté Juif de mon petit liquide blanchâtre. Je savais beaucoup de choses. Je savais qu'un enfant ne vient pas au monde d'un coup de

149 Nasseri, pp. 72–73.
150 Bouhdiba, XX, p. 174.

> baguette magique, mais à la suite d'une bonne séance de gymnastique ou d'ébats très chauds entre deux êtres humains de sexe diffèrent.'[151]

For Idriss, the hammam is precisely synonymous with sensory awakening in a space he finds both intriguing and enticing, which gradually stimulates all his senses: 'Il fallait que je consacre mon temps à écouter, à regarder, à observer et surtout à profiter de cette atmosphere *vulgaire*, *sale* et *moite* dont je ne pouvais plus me passer'. It is interesting to note here the specific adjectives used by the male author to describe the women's hammam from his own masculine viewpoint, a description which has both a prejudiced depreciatory connotation but to which the male narrator confesses his obsession for – a representation which echoes 'l'imaginaire répressif' which perceives women as impure due to their menstruations and 'l'obsession masculine du contrôle des femmes ou des rêveries exotiques et érotiques inspirant l'imaginaire Orientaliste des Occidentaux'.[152] Much like an Orientalist painting then, each body and each action are subject to an erotic or objectified representation by Nasseri, alienating the subject / object of the gaze from the gazer (and describer) of the first. The eroticism of the bath experience in the narrator's representation is also amplified by the fact that, much like Orientalist representations, these male gazes are illegitimate and voyeuristic, since not allowed in Nasseri's Arab-Muslim Maghrebi society where female intimacy is sacred and safeguarded by all members of the community. Based on Islamic principles prevailing in Arab societies such as the Maghreb, which sacralise and respect the intimacy and purity of women and their spaces, the Maghrebi protagonist willingly transgresses and defames these principles. As a Maghrebi writer, familiar with the customs of the Muslim-Maghrebi people, and it is then

151 Nasseri, p. 70.
152 Carlier, p. 1312.

a great taboo to illicitly penetrate such a sacred women's space, let alone have sexual intent and fantasies about it. Not to mention, Nasseri's writing is published in a French publishing company, Denoël, and thus his erotic adventures knowingly targets a mainly Western public to expose his own revisited Orientalist portrait, analogous to French Orientalists who painted Maghrebi women for Westerners' pleasure, exotically portrayed and silenced to claim control over their bodies.

Unbeknownst to the women's hammam manager who allowed Idriss entry, the protagonist uses ruse to penetrate the hammam as a sexually conscious and active male readily set to indulge his fantasies. Once inside the women's 'obscur' realm where naked bodies are a necessity, the protagonist and narrator experiences what Bouhdiba refers to as 'euphorie' at the sight of different female body parts which he scrutinises during his last stay at the hammam, a sight that provoked a 'véritable frénésie sexuelle, et cela pour la premiére fois de [sa] vie de treize ans'.[153] As Bouhdiba contends, the hammam is the place where a young man's sexuality awakens and develops, and the language used contains a strong sexual connotation. With the narrator's desire amplified by the vision of naked bodies - usually hidden in society by clothing - he feels the urge 'qu'on s'occupe de [lui], qu'on [l]'embrasse, qu'on [lui] touche le petit sexe'[154] - as would a misogynist man / Orientalist figure who has intruded into the hammam, who exoticized women and fantasised about being served and satisfied by them, through a sort of 'sexual promise' owed to men like him due to the 'unlimited desire', and 'deep generative energies' the women urge in them.[155] Certainly, much like Orientalist art and literature brings forth the fantasy of penetrating, observing, and finding favour within the women's quarters, the

153 Nasseri, p. 71.
154 Nasseri, p. 71.
155 Said, p. 188.

narrator even goes so far as explicitly desire (and succeeds at it) sexually touching one of the bodies of the younger girls present in the hammam, Zineb, whom he erotically and meticulously describes: 'J'avais une envie folle de toucher Zineb […] Elle était là avec ses petits seins encore montants et leurs tétons rouges comme des cerises, et sa petite ch*tte qui était à peine vétue d'un léger duvet blond.'[156] The young boy eventually satisfies his sexual urges with Zineb, while all the women were distracted by another little male child intruder who also wanted to access the hammam: 'Je tournais la tête vers Zineb et d'une main douce et légère je saisis ses petits seins', when Zineb did not protest and on the contrary 'jubila' from the boy's touches with 'des petits gémissements de plaisir', he proceeded to 'lui baisai les lèvres et laissai descendre [sa] main gauche sous son nombril' while he felt his 'petit sexe se dress[é]'.[157] The narrator was determined to go through with his compulsions but was abruptly interrupted once the women horrifyingly noticed his unacceptable behaviour with Zineb inside the women's hammam and 'tout le monde cria au scandale'; he had breached the conventional rules of the ancestral women's sacred space and depraved it with his sexual impulses.

Nasseri inscribes throughout the narrative a descriptive subversive discourse by staging carnal desire and sexual acts through his young narrator, which are deemed taboo in an Arab-Muslim cultural context. Such an exaggeratedly detailed description offered by *Chroniques* shares poignant similarities again with Orientalist representations of the women's intimate quarters and bodies, especially when considering the same lack of ambivalence and heterogeneity of representation, a result of pure disinterest in what the women have to say or what they are experiencing. The narrator's erotic description of female bodies and his sexual desire for them attest to his similarly voyeuristic gaze. The

156 Nasseri, p. 78.
157 Nasseri, pp. 78–79.

illegitimate access and exotic representation of the women's hammam and the women who frequent it displayed throughout the narrative further attests of the mimesis of Orientalist representations of Western male painters, because like them, he pervaded the female bath as an intruder who violated this sacred women's space and the women it shelters. Again, although the hammam is considered public since women and children (males who are still considered asexual) of different horizons can enter it, is at the same time an intimate safe place for them, with specific guidelines set up for centuries to ensure its inviolability and decorum.

Nasseri pushes boundaries and social norms by detailing sexual fantasies and fetishes around women's bodies, a purely carnal desire, but does not refrain from tackling immoral sexual drives and practices punished by state law and religious law, such as sexual assault and paedophilia (mentioned earlier in this chapter), but also, bestiality. What is problematic in Nasseri's narrative addressing such subjects is that the protagonist does simply not denounce such perverted practices, but he also personally performs them. Idriss recounts, on many occasions throughout the novel, the harmful sexual practices performed by the villagers, by his father, or himself, whether out of pure damaging sexual inclinations, out of despair for lack of willing sexual partners, of money to seek favours from other desperate and impoverished prostitutes (male or female), or simply out of boredom. Inside his father's stable – forced to do his forced chores – Idriss is witness to the distressing aftermath of his father's obsessional daily sessions inside the stable sheltering the dictator's most prized possession, and his darkest secret practices with his mounts:

> Un cheval expulsa une semence jaunâtre après avoir uriné [...] Un autre [cheval], [...] l'anus de l'animal se mit à clignoter, s'ouvrant et se fermant à une vitesse qui me donna le tournis.[158]

Idriss makes other swift, desensitized references to other zoophiles when promptly describing them and their perverse habitudes: 'ils baisaient des chèvres', 'baiseur d'ânesses', etc.[159] In another instance, he swiftly describes his own bestiality, without much contemplation and puzzlement, or moral dilemma although describing the animal as 'pauvre', which again shows a complete detachment with reality and basic concepts of morality:

> J'étais resté fidèle à mes habitudes. [...] Je continuais faire pipi au lit, à entretenir les chevaux, les mules, les ânes, les lapins et les serpents, à survoler le village de mes petites ailes bleues, à baiser la pauvre chèvre de la voisine. Apparemment, l'animal s'était habitué à mon sexe trois fois plus petit que celui de Kiloul, car elle se mettait à frétiller à chaque fois qu'elle entendait mes petits pas.[160]

Written during a period of complete disillusionment, Nasseri portrays and denounces in his *Chroniques* the prevailing atmosphere and setting of the 1990s. Nasseri is part of a younger controversial generation of writers tackling taboo themes revolving around pervasive repressed sexuality, accentuating the tropes linked with other controversial Maghrebi writers – predecessors and prospective inspirations – such as Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri and Algerian writer Rachid Boudjedra who are part of the 'Littérature

158 Nasseri, p. 16.
159 Nasseri, pp. 20, 50.
160 Nasseri, p. 95.

de la transgression' coined by Mohamed Ridha and Sabiha Bouguerra in *Histoire de la littérature du Maghreb* (2010). Like Boudjedra, or the Choukri, Nasseri had a difficult upbringing in the poor classes of his society. All three authors also experienced the patriarchal Maghreb family with numerous brothers and sisters, and all three became writers even though nothing predisposed them to this social ascension. Nasseri also shares with the author of *La Répudiation* (1969), Boudjedra, and the author of *Le Pain Nu* (1980), Choukri, a sexual awakening from childhood through self-exploration, compulsive sexual appetite for the other sex and bestiality to assuage it, and prostitution as a way to subsist financially.

This transgressive literature strives to grasp on the one hand the first practices of sexuality in narratives centred on childhood and adolescence, and on the other hand, to trace the impact of representations of juvenile and deviant sexuality in Morocco during its 'années de plomb' and Algeria during its Civil War, contemporary with the Arab Spring. Nasseri appeals then to an exacerbated sexuality in *Chronicles* by transgressing taboos and prohibitions, he deepens the problem addressed in particular by Boudjedra in *La Répudiation* and develops several scriptural strategies announced by his predecessors (formal innovation, taste for provocation, expression of 'the unspeakable', i.e., morally abject acts such as paedophilia and zoophilia / bestiality). These writings, like Nasseri's, mixes reality and fantasy, and challenges the norms of Arab-Muslim culture symbolised in this narrative by penetrating women's sacred place, denied to him, and unleashing his innermost fantasies inside it. In accordance with his writing, Nasseri conforms to the literature of transgression which can be considered as a direct influence of the collective aesthetic expression to the generation of "Souffles", the Francophone Maghrebi magazine founded in 1966 by Abdellatif Laâbi, which includes Choukri and Boudjedra and accentuates the characteristics of writing which combines the importance of the body,

and subversive taboo eroticism.[161]

Nasseri's text expresses the revolt chosen as a space of enunciation in the margins, where Idriss is relegated in his patriarchal and violent society. Arguably considered as a space in the margin, sometimes conflated with 'marginal space', the women's hammam is the chosen space of enunciation of Idriss's frustrations and desires. The protagonist chooses to penetrate the women's hammam, forbidden to him, to take refuge inside it. The contradictory character of Idriss who finds safety inside the hammam but also satisfaction in fulfilling his desires inside a women's hammam is touching due to the fact that he is equally lost and misunderstood in his patriarchal society. Reduced to being an object himself, lost and wandering, Idriss only finds his happiness in the expression of the often-repulsive sexualised voice and body, which appears to be the sole capacity to account for the situation of the individual condemned to exclusion and alienation: from the world of men, and that of women; even though Idriss was excluded from the safe women's hammam, he was unable to fully substitute it with the men's hammam, threatening inside. This narrative constitutes, in its diegetic dimension, the story of the protagonist's journey to the depths of his sexuality and serves, through this, to expose the problem of the individual who suffocates under the influence of the father (and of his substitute – the uncle) as well as the patriarchal order dominated by hypocrisy. By representing the body as an object of repression, oppression, exclusion coming from power, we can think of Foucault's History of Sexuality and postmodern reflection which perceives the body as a

161 For more exhaustive information on the generations of writers associated with « Souffles », read : Kenza Sefrioui, *La Revue Souffles : Espoirs de Révolution Culturelle Au Maroc (1966-1973)* (Editions du Sirocco, 2012); Christiane Ndiaye, *Introduction Aux Littératures Francophones Afrique · Caraïbe · Maghreb* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2004).

hybrid entity because it allows us to describe the power relations by reconfiguring them in the space of margins and transgression.

Drawing its expressive power from formally subverted transgression, Nasseri's work opposes the oppression that was the law in Morocco during les années de plomb involving dictatorship, censorship, reprisals: it deconstructs the discourse based on the authority of political and religious doxa. To oppose it and to get rid of it, Nasseri adopts a hybrid language that expresses itself in French, but makes a visceral, instinctive language vibrate within it — that of the body. Nasseri's work is thus inscribed in the body. This happens in a natural way, because the body constitutes a discursive modality in its own right, thus drawing its original influence, which is none other than *Les Mille et Une Nuits,* an Orientalist fantasy narrative par excellence.

Aspects of oriental tales are highlighted in *La féminisation du monde* (1996), where Malek Chebel proved that in narratives such as *Les Mille et Une Nuits* translated and reformulated the social questions and anxieties of their time by staging what he called '*psychopatia sexualis'*.[162] A place of disorder and violence par excellence. The folktale, like Nasseri's dreamlike chronicles inside the forbidden women's hammam, refers to the intrapsychic conflicts of its object through eroticism. In this sense, *Les Nuits* that speak of the specificity of the Arab universe with its tensions and contradictions help better understand the troubles of the contemporary Arab-Muslim world as experienced in Nasseri's narrative. According to the Algerian anthropologist, such texts as Nasseri's which is reminiscent of *Les Nuits* (which has long given rise to new rewritings and tales) can be considered as a radiography of Arab-Muslim Maghreb society, written through the prism of the fantasy tales of *Les Mille et Une Nuits,* which essentially constitute the 'anti-

162 Malek Chebel, *La Féminisation Du Monde. Essai Sur « Les Mille et Une Nuits* (PAYOT, 1996).

texte' *par excellence*: they both practice transgression, use gendered speech, and their narrative evocative of an orgy.[163] Indeed, '*Les Mille et Une Nuits* is le lieu textuel où se déroulent diversions, transgressions et blasphèmes au sein de la cour califale, symbole de l'Ordre de la ville arabe classique'.[164] Because of this transgressive and blasphematory dimension and because of its moving, dynamic form, open to incessant updating, the collection constitutes the opposite of the sacred text. For capable of incorporating everything into its structure, changing, open to infinite actualizations, it is opposed to the Qur'an, a text destined by its sacred vocation to remain complete and unchanged. Such a character of insatiability in places *Les Nuits* at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Qur'an: the Word par excellence, the doxa that has remained immutable and unchanged for fourteen centuries. Chebel reminds that:

> *Les Nuits* sont essentiellement du côté de la violence et du désordre alors que le Coran est, par définition, un Ordre à part entière, une Parole (kalam) qui est précisément intangible et qui porte en elle le destin et le salut de la planète entière. [...] Enfin, sur le plan sociolinguistique et politique, celui qui détient la Parole sacrée détient le pouvoir. [...].[165]

The profane, therefore, is opposed to the sacred; A word that has remained oral, even when it is fixed in writing, is opposed to the word par excellence, immutable, divine as much as deified, and which refuses any rewriting, any re-composition, sometimes even any translation. The insatiability *of Les Nuits* on the one hand, and the immutability of the Qur'an on the other, offer a double entry point for those who want to penetrate the Arab-

163 Chebel, p. 25.
164 Chebel, pp. 40–41.
165 Chebel, p. 40.

Muslim imagination. This opposition articulates and legitimizes an enlightening double discourse, even if the levels of apprehension are obviously different and the duality of the Arab-Islamic essence rich and contrasting.

Similartly, in *Chroniques d'un enfant du Hammam.* Nasseri exploits the model of the orientalised oriental tale, because it must be emphasized, in the same context, this kind of tale, like the text of Nasseri in question here, takes up the theme of the insatiable Orientalist fantasy:

> Quand je franchis la première salle [du hammam], je fus saisi d'une véritable frénésie sexuelle [...] Il fallait qu'on s'occupe de moi, qu'on m'embrasse, qu'on me touche le petit sexe. Je sentais un besoin urgent de me le masser en fixant les seins, les fesses, les pubis de ces bonnes femmes qui ne venaient pas seulement pour se laver mais pour s'exhiber les unes aux autres, distiller des paroles au bout de sucre.[166]

This description of transgression and sexual frensy is reminiscent of Delacroix's experience when permitted exceptional access to the women's harem in Algiers, where he was 'prey to an exaltation which translated itself into a fever which was hardly calmed by sorbets and fruits'.[167] This further attests of the fantasy these storytellers and artists have of being served and satisfied by women inside the caliphal court of the palace, the women's hammam, or their harem, through a sort of 'sexual promise' these first feel are

166 Nasseri, p. 71.
167 Grigsby, p. 9; Petre, p. 40.

owed to them because of the 'unlimited desire', and 'deep generative energies' such sceneries and ostensibly exoticized women urge in them.[168]

Outside of the women's hammam, Idriss also makes analogous references to the Orientalist fantasy which inspires *Les Milles et Une Nuit,* and have inspired Western Orientalist paintings: 'A calife' compared to 'Caligula' has 'un petit palace à la sortie du village', and 'un immense lit des *milles* plaisir' 'où il étalait des femmes magnifiques et des hommes splendides'.[169] It is all the more readable because, led by the subject itself to talk about the taboo, the protagonist of *Chroniques*, Idriss, and the other storytellers, let themselves be carried away by a delirious and sexually-deviant imagination.

As a result of transgressing the norm, they feel 'dévorés par leurs phrases', that is to say, overwhelmed by the tale, cursed, threatened with self-destruction.[170] The implicit reference to insatiable sexuality in an intimate, crowded place in general is made explicit in *Chroniques*, where the protagonist – just like the heroine of *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, Shahrazade, or the palpable impulse of the Orientalists through their brushes towards the 'offered' odalisques - is significant in this respect. Indeed, the motif realized by Idriss, the narrator and protagonist, illustrates oppressed masculinity's desire for revenge, i.e., masculinity that has been oppressed by the stronger man in power (government, rich men, paternalistic figures). Idriss, dominated by hatred, becomes the modern male incarnation of Scheherazade once he is admitted, also by cunning, into the intimate interior of the carefree women offered to him. Idriss takes his revenge on the male race which, unlike him, does not access it, but also his revenge on the female race which forbids impulses and fantasies in this place to be ruled, this time, by women. The behaviour of the

168 Said, p. 188.
169 Nasseri, p. 35.
170 Chebel, p. 43.

young protagonist is therefore as if it were the direct result of *Les Milles et une Nuits* and the stereotypes and fantasies that erects from them.

Nasseri's subversive narrative also makes use of the narrative tactics associated with the "Souffle" generation with authors associating a tendency to blur fantasy and fiction – fantasy being correlated to *Les Milles et une Nuits* – which is what makes it taboo and sexualized. In expressing his own revolt in the margins, it must be noted that such taboo-breaking subjects as tackled in Nasseri's, which involves in this case the over-sexualisation of the women's hammam and of women's bodies, comes at the expense of the unknowing Maghrebi women who are the subject / object of the resulting male neurosis.

The women's Hammam: First educator of the senses and place of encounter with female anatomy :

As retrogressive versions of adult males, young boys discover for the first-time feminine anatomy in the women's hammam. It is by experiencing the women's hammam in childhood that Arab-Muslim Maghrebi men preserve the repressed memory of having made in their discovery of nudity of women's bodies while still permitted access to their realm:

> The hammam is a place of infinite variety, a space haunted with so many memories, so many scenes, and so many mixed visions where the mother and sisters, charming cousins and enigmatic neighbours

> make up a dream world of femininity that every man carries inside him.[171]

It is then inevitable for the hammam visitors of both sexes (in some exceptions), coming from different walks of life are exposed to one another's physicality once inside it. This unique environment can serve as a setting where young boys can initiate their exploration and education about gender differences by observing women's bodies, curiously distinct from their own. The female hammam thus becomes for them a captivating moment filled with curiosity and fascination as they discreetly observe the intriguing forms and movements of the opposite sex as they experience the lived hammam.

In *La Sexualité en Islam,* Abdelwahab Bouhdiba debates on the hammam in relation to Islamic laws and interpretations of this space and what it represents in Arab-Muslim culture, especially for men. Bouhdiba asserts that the hammam has always been intimately linked to female anatomy because it carries an important erotic charge generated by the hammam goers' sexual fantasies – young male infants who are still allowed access in the women's hammam and females of all ages that is, which are nourished from early childhood, fantasies that even the bodily configurations of this spatiality of intimacy - hot room, cold room, and anteroom - strongly animate.

For Omar Carlier too, one of the most important aspects of the hammam resides in its sexual dimension and how the nude / naked body, which dwells inside it, echoes the sexual aspect of the hammam. For Carlier, the hammam is

> A sexual place, [it] is integrated as such into language and amorous transport. It educates the senses, awakens, and expresses desire, invites pleasure, prepares, and repairs the meeting of bodies.

171 Bouhdiba, xx, p. 170.

> Instance of seduction, it extends the game of the hidden and the unveiled, the art of showing and suggesting.[172]

Indeed, the hammam is an evocative space and immersive experience where self-exploration and self-indulgence of the lived bodies of the hammam visitors takes place through all the senses. A sacred ritualistic experience, it is so then as a preparation for physical gratification and sexuality, but also as a site where lived bodies regenerate.

Like Nasseri and Omar Carlier, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba also notes the analogy between the women's hammam and a welcoming maternal womb because of the similarities both share: closure / heat / humidity: 'cieux brumeux', 'atmosphère moite dont je ne pouvais me passer'.[173] For Bouhdiba, 'the hammam is a sexually underestimated place. It may be a uterine environment. It is so psychically and oneirically […] but it is so physically and topographically. Its labyrinthine form is highly significant.'[174]

Inside the women's hammam, visitors such as Idriss in *Chroniques* penetrate the hammam's intimate, labyrinth-like atmosphere and are enticed by it and are isolated inside the place's different chambers. The 'hot and cooling' stream of water inside the hammam used for purification is another evocative and mysterious aspect of the hammam experience as it 'sort d'un trou, traverse un trou et plonge dans un trou'.[175] Indeed, hot, and cold water, wetness and steam are all elements strongly suggesting the female anatomy and the arousal it provokes in Nasseri's protagonist's journey inside this forbidden space of pleasures to the senses:

172 Carlier, p. 1306.
173 Nasseri, p. 71.
174 Bouhdiba, xx, p. 171.
175 Bouhdiba, xx, p. 172.

> Ma frénésie était toujours présente. Il y avait un sacré désordre dans ma petite tête. Je ne savais plus où j'étais, ni ce que je voulais. Mes vertiges, persistaient. Mon désir et mes envies troubles aussi.[176]

More so, this comforting liquidity is associated with the protective uterine space where the social and cultural chains are broken during the young boy's sojourn inside the hammam. Aside from being a therapeutic and erogenous space, the hammam is a unique place of delights, pleasure, and enjoyment in patriarchal Maghrebi Arab-Muslim countries. For Bouhdiba, the 'euphorie' one feels inside it owes to the 'joie psychique illimité redécouverte dans un onirisme qui fleurit dans le hammam, un espace où tout peut être réconcilié'.[177] The hammam also represents an oneiric liminal space which nourishes the passage from the outside (male) world towards the erogenous liberating dream-like (feminine) world of delights where women, and Nasseri's young protagonist reconciles with the other gender, away from the toxicity of hyper-masculinity, which is forced upon males in patriarchal societies such as Morocco.

The topography of the hammam itself constitutes both a rite of passage and separation by the foreseeable change in status, from a young gaze-less boy still allowed inside the women's hammam, to a matured male whose place is now in the man's hammam / world:

> J'étais heureux parce que je venais de gagner une guerre contre une grosse matrone [who, at first, refused to grant him access to the hammam with his mother because she considered him too old] […]

176 Nasseri, p. 76.
177 Bouhdiba, xx, p. 174.

> Mais j'étais triste parce que c'était ma dernière visite dans ce lieu de discours sucrés et d'apprentissage de la vie intime de notre mère Ève [scriptural figure].

Such a frenetic obsession with the women's hammam, and the bodies of its visitors, prompts the following question: what happens when the young male figure is finally deemed sexually aware to be granted access and is then exiled from the women's realm he fanaticises about and longs for.

Rites of passage and separation:

Because of Idriss's disrespectful behaviour inside the women's sanctuary and the breach of guidelines set by women who had allowed access inside it, the young male, trickster and intruder displayed his complete sexual awareness and thus, he set in motion his own expulsion from the women's sphere because he could not control his urges. Idriss's undeniable lust for the other sex and hysterical pursuit of sexual pleasures with them inside their space, signifies that he is transitioning from boyhood to manhood, and thus, from the women's world to men's world.[178] Similar to bouhdiba's reflexions on the sexual nature of the hammam, Carlier also debates that for him, the hammam is 'soumis aux lois de la nature' just as it is 'aussi le lieu par excellence du corps social gouverné par la culture', which is consequently 'elle-même accordée aux lois de Dieu' ; This enables the hammam then to serve as a system to identify and signify emerging manhood, and therefore, to symbolise a place of transition, crystallising the passage from the maternal realm to that of manhood. For Carlier, the hammam

178 Nasseri, p. 79.

> Accompagne la sortie de l'enfance et normalise les rapports entre les sexes, le hammam discipline l'expression des affects, corrige ou compense les stigmates de la domination, canalise les marques de distinction et prévient le risque de désordre. Le bain de vapeur (hammam) contribue donc à renforcer le lien social.[179]

Carlier here highlights the importance the hammam holds in Arab-Muslim Maghrebi societies from which he is an insider, but also emphasises the necessity of respecting boundaries set by and for the sexes in order to reinforce sociability and respect, avoiding thus, unwelcome infringements to such gendered homosocial spaces.

The male protagonist as represented by Nasseri is subjected in this narrative to the feminine social power, in control in the women's hammam, through his expulsion from their space as soon as the women notice his prohibited behaviour inside it. Idriss is thus normed and socialized through rituals (the expulsion from the 'maternal womb'), which their application is not a choice as it escapes the subject who undergoes them. The protagonist is staged as a subject whose sexual gender is marked by masculinity, which is clearly distinguished from femininity, historically dominated by the laws of the phallocratic system. This gender marker tries to avoid any possible ambiguity because the boy is supposed to act socially according to his gender, respecting the other sex and the boundaries set between the two, especially since it is illegitimate, voyeuristic, and thus controversial in nature. The act of expulsion from the female uterine world plays the role of a performative act since it makes it possible to carry out the act of inscribing the boy in the world of men, where his masculinity is ritually fixed and promoted, as a clear opposition to the women's hammam as feminine space. The rite of the hammam also

179 Carlier, p. 1306.

allows the child to have a status which recognizes his sexual belonging to the male universe. The topic of the hammam thus constitutes both a rite of passage and of separation since the young narrator recounts the pain caused by this change in status, a pain which Ahmed Bouguarche goes as far as compare it to a 'cauchemar', due to its effect on the expulsed boys and their unwillingness to be separated from it.[180]

A passage or graduation to the hammam of men represents for Idriss the prohibition to return in the feminine space, a place of no return or regression. In getting expulsed from the women's hammam, the figurative umbilical cord that binds him to the maternal uterine women's world is cut, so he can erect into the outside masculine world where his matured sexual awareness and outlook are an undeniable trait but considered a profanity inside the sheltered and sanctified women's world in the Islamic Maghrebi hammam tradition. As it were, prohibiting the matured male child from seeing female nudity inside this intimate women's safe haven means keeping sheltered the female body from any type of voyeurism or depravity from male strangers. The women's hammam then, can be considered as a symbolic extension of the veil, a highly regarded symbol of modesty in Islam, this spatial substitute for the veil acts with its walls as the concealer of women's dignity against male gaze and lust.

For Nasseri's male protagonist, however, the inflicted mandatory transition from the women's hammam to that of the men after his sexual endeavours with the young Zineb causes a dejection in the young man, resulting in inhibition when becoming part of the adult male world:

> Expulsé du hammam des femmes, je ne me suis pas précipité vers le hammam des hommes. Dans chaque regard, je ne pouvais

180 Ahmed Bouguarche, p. 211.

> m'empêcher de déceler la menace d'une violence. De penser à mon père ou au *fquih.* Je ne voulais pas qu'ils anéantissent ce qui restait de mon enfance. […] je n'ai jamais retrouvé les sensations, les tourments, l'attirance et la répulsion qui m'avaient tant fasciné dans le royaume brumeux (des femmes) [...].[181]

Transitioning into manhood indicates embracing all the social and cultural connotations implied by this word: virility, sexual vigour, and in patriarchal contexts, masculine discourse. This in turn is supposed to strengthen his awareness of his gender, and consequently, his own position in the social stratification in what happens to be a patriarchal society. It is an obsession with hyper-masculinity in relation to men and the ensuing gender relations in patriarchal societies which in Nasseri's narrative is Morocco under the authoritarian rule of Hassan II in the 1990s.

This results in complex ramifications on genders and gender relations, which American sociologist Allan G. Johnson with expertise in gender studies, discusses in his renowned manuscript, *The Gender Knot*:

> What drives Patriarchy as a system - what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression - is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control; to fear other men's ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defence against loss and humiliation and the surest route

181 Nasseri, p. 81.

to what they need and desire.[182]

This obsession with control of and over what or who men need and desire is inevitably linked with the other sex, and how it is the other sex for men in patriarchal ideology that can provide them with what they need and lust for, whether it is their own bodies for their libidinal needs, or the men's instinctive needs for nurturing and indulgence that for them only women can satisfy due to their supposed innate maternal instincts.

Consequently, in his expulsion from the hammam, the young male protagonist feels isolated in what could be called an identity exile since he is cut off from the feminine and from the only maternal space in which he was admitted. It is this same idea of the exiled being as having been cut off from the maternal bond that Julia Kristeva develops in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991).[183] According to her, the stranger is a being whose maternal memories are in some way painful since he seems to have been 'misunderstood by a mother who was loved and yet distracted, discreet or preoccupied'.[184] If Kristeva concentrates on adult beings in geographical exile, we can however keep the symbolic dimension of her idea and apply it to the psychological experience of the male protagonist, exiled from his connection with the refuge of the maternal, feminine world he longs for. Indeed, if we want to see in the hammam the metaphorical representation for the young boy of the maternal earth (or uterine environment) of which Kristeva speaks, the separation with the mother in favour of her female friends with whom she continues to enjoy the hammam experience where she finds refuge and satisfies her longing for escape and socialisation. This separation announces, according to Kristeva, 'the beloved and yet distracted mother' that we lose with the departure into exile for the

182 Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot : Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Temple University Press, 2005), p. 26.
183 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press: Reissue edition (1994), 1991).
184 Julia Kristeva, p. 14.

male child, which would be illustrated by the expulsion from the women's hammam in Nasseri's *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam*. The metaphorical exile in this narrative, as it were, is associated with the discovery that the protagonist has of his own sexuality. The exile from the female hammam which comes from the loss of innocence is similar to an awareness of the female body as a sexual object and is followed by a drastic change removing the permeability between the male space and the female space to which Idriss was connected.

Expulsion, if it is traumatic since it symbolizes the breaking of the bond with the maternal and with the symbolic feminine realm as a whole, it therefore reinforces the delimitation of sexual spaces, although expected since the protagonist had prior knowledge and used ruse to keep this bond. In this sense, since the gender delimitation of roles and the gendering of spaces in Arab-Muslim society are rather well applied and generally well respected and practiced at an early age, this proves that certain transgressions exist in such societies, and this suggests then, the existence of a space of resistance in / to the binary system.

The world of women is forbidden to Idriss as the women thereby recognize in him a developed masculinity linked to the interest he begins to take (as an alleged juvenile) in the other gender's bodies and sexual attraction towards them. It is through the female management of the hammam that feminine power and control is exerted and the 'prohibition law' applied on sex.[185] The body of the young boy becomes subject to the law of gender distinction and is produced as a male subject. Idriss's sexuality remains marked, however, by this vaporous space because a whole section of sexual life is in fact organized 'around the hammam: the real and the refusal of the real, childhood and puberty,

185 Vern L. Bullough and Michel Foucault, *Histoire de La Sexualite*, *The American Historical Review* (Gallimard, 1985), p. 110.

transition and initiation' into manhood are all an assemblage of meanings, are constituents of becoming a man and all crystallised inside the women's hammam which has now ceased because denied to him.[186] The expulsion from the women's hammam and the expected passage to that of the men's hammam grants the male protagonist a definite sexual identity fixed by precise social codes and Islamic principles. All of this functions as a coercive norm carrying, as Michel Foucault suggests, a 'claim to power'. This power, which also holds within itself its principles of transformation and innovation, is based on mechanisms that fabricate and produce a heteronormative subject. The narrative subverts the rite of the hammam which reminds any male visitor of their heteronormativity.[187] The fact remains that the heteronormative male models around Idriss (who is the subject of the enunciation in Nasseri's narrative) exert a symbolic violence on him since his society assigns him, from a young age, a virile and masculine role pre-established by this community's consensus, such as the hard labour he is forced to do on his father's farm, instead of allowing him to get an education, or his forced transition from the feminine realm of the hammam to that of men. Secluded then from the women's sphere which he does not belong to, Idriss does not feel or want to be, at the same time, integrated to the 'violent' male sphere which social norms require him to automatically belong to.

However, we can notice the ensuing maturity and acceptance of the young protagonist, even after his separation from the women's space, when he can finally be at peace with himself, and with his 'trois femelles soumises', when 'Le Dictateur' goes to live in France by the end of the story. Years after this separation with the 'royaume brûmeux', Idriss whose frustrations with the outside violent male world have been channelled, continues

186 Bouhdiba, XX, p. 207.
187 Ahmed Bouguarche, pp. 223–24.

to be fascinated by the women's hammam and indirectly gets his dosage of it from his aunt when asking her about it:

> Des années plus tard, je demandais à ma tante Rachida, qui […] continuait d'aller au hammam deux à trois fois par semaine de me donner des nouvelles de cet endroit devenu pour moi mythique, et de ses visiteurs.

Coming a full circle, on the first page of *Chroniques*, the protagonist described the fun he had watching for flies to crush them with his sandal, a displacement activity to unload his frustration as a victim; while during his journey inside what he considers to be reminiscent of the maternal womb, the hammam, Idriss found the only comfort he could have to appease his needs and desires. However, on the last page, having become a young teenager who supports his mother, his grandmother, and his aunt after the departure of his father to France, Idriss imagines that he is himself: 'une petite mouche, fragile et si légere', where in the evening, exhausted by his work, he goes to snuggle up 'contre Aïcha [s]a mère' for comfort.[188] This is interpreted as an analogy of the transition the protagonist has gone through during the entire narrative, from the frustrated and misunderstood child victim of violence seeking refuge and revenge on the weaker than him, to a matured supportive young man in tune with his sensitivity (feminine side / the maternal) in absence of the dictator, perpetrator of the oppression and *mal-être* of Idriss and of his female family members:

> L'absence du dictateur fut un soulagement pour moi, je trouvais ma liberté et ma dignité. […] je ne fus plus battu, plus surveillé, plus torturé, plus maltraité. Mon cas ne relevait plus de l'UNICEF. Il fallait

188 Nasseri, p. 107.

> profiter de cette indépendance et de cette chance qui m'est tombé du ciel. […] Tous les jours et tous les nuits, je touchais à la liberté avec mes petites mains. De la serrer contre mon cœur et la sérré avec mes petites mains.[189]

A crucial need for feminine self-representation:

Static and unnuanced portrayals of the women's hammam and its visitors such as Nasseri's – as Orientalists before him have historically done – frustratingly objectify women within their surroundings with little care for an exchange or true understanding, incontestably denying them agency and over-sexualising them, a displacement of the protagonist's own oppression and alienation. That is why it is important then to note that the main characteristic of feminine artistic production, as it is composed in the Maghreb, is concerned with highlighting womanhood and women's experiences through their own representations, shedding light too on the implications that this endeavour implies. These representations indeed make it possible to stage the experience of the woman, her voice, and her body in relation to the patriarchal society. In this sense, who can write about womanhood and women's experiences inside a women's hammam in a patriarchal hegemony better than a woman herself, writing about her own selfhood and that of women she has known or inspired by them first-hand.

There is an undeniable intimate link between author / filmmaker and the object of the writing, which is decisive both in the enunciative characteristics and in the elaboration of the universe of narration. The consubstantiality between subject and object of the enunciation makes women's writings commentary spaces. The woman, by choosing

189 Nasseri, pp. 86–87.

herself as the object of narration – in a patriarchal society historically inundated with masculine discourse – cannot avoid comments on her relationship to the world. This is how an 'écriture féminine', as Hélène Cixous construes, erects as a feminine-proper appropriation and representation of reality.[190]

The female narrators in *Les femmes au bain, Femmes d'Alger,* and *A mon âge* orchestrate, as will be discussed in this study further on, the disclosure of heterogenous feminine voices and points of view through their female characters; these narratives are part of the memory of modern Arab female production since they display, starting by their titles, their affiliations with women. The authors and filmmaker explicitly extend this filiation in their stories by representing their female characters, voice, and body, in the women's hammam, a place of feminine disclosure par excellence. The world would thus escape the exclusivity of the male gaze to be read through the points of view and the sensitivity of women.

190 Cixous, p. 37.

Chapter Three: Assia Djebar *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement* (1980), Leïla Sebbar *Les Femmes au Bain* (2006)

> *"Here I am in this dark kingdom, with its waters dripping: a universe of shadows of which I would dream for a long time, the following night, with its swell of profuse, fluctuating sounds, the echoes of so many voices of strangers, often the body already nude…"*

Taken from Assia Djebar's novel *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007), the author posits here a poetic description of what the hammam, as a private women's space and cultural heritage, represents for Algerian women. Through the title itself, Djebar deliberately connotes a recurring subject in contemporary Maghrebi literature, a non-belongingness, a 'nowhere' the author has grown up in. In one of the chapters however, entitled 'Le Jour du Hammam' which contains the quotation, the young female narrator - which is assumed by many critics to be the author herself- is marked by her initiatory journey as a young girl inside the shadowy kingdom that is the hammam, obscure due to its dimly lit interior and narrow windows for complete intimacy and protection from the external public eye. She describes in a tone of intrigue and amazement the hammam which harbours women who are 'already bare' – literally and figuratively readily and delightedly nude, to bathe inside it but also to express their profuse voices by their 'égosillements' which fluctuate and echo inside the hammam. Djebar's chapter extract here illustrates a little girl's journey inside a hammam. Through this journey, the readers get a detailed and poetic description of what goes on inside the hammam in the Maghreb and what it represents for the women it welcomes.

It must be noted that Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar – of a younger generation – are two of the most prominent Francophone Algerian female writers.[191] Both authors' works continue, as such, to be considerably studied.[192] My aim in this chapter is to study Djebar and Sebbar's novels that put a special emphasis on the theme of the hammam, most notably: Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980)*, l'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), *Ombre Sultane* (1987); and Sebbar's *Les femmes au bain* (2009), and her *Shérazade* trilogy: *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982), *Les Carnets de Shérazade* (1985), *Le Fou de Shérazade* (1991); from a perspective that has been mostly overlooked or given less significance when considering the major themes the two female writers engage in throughout their authorhood. The theme of the women's hammam, as an all-female experience, and as a recurrent setting in writing as women about women is what has sparked my interest in both these authors and is specifically what I will investigate throughout this chapter.

This first section focuses on Assia Djebar's and Leïla Sebbar's reactions to colonial Orientalist male misconception and misrepresentation in their writings. Throughout their works, Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar project the homosocially experienced hammam as a felicitous and protective space, reminiscent of the home which resonates with Gaston Bachelard's lived space.[193] Both authors instrumentalise this unique feminine locus where their female characters find respite: to foster a feminine discourse – liberating thus their speech and opinions –, but also indulge their oppressed bodies to nurture balanced lived

191 Mildred Mortimer, 'Reappropriating the Gaze in Assia Djebar's Fiction and Film', *World Literature Today*, 70.4 (1996), 859.
192 Jonathan Lewis, *The Algerian War in French/Algerian Writing : Literary Sites of Memory* (2019); Edward John Still, *Representing Algerian Women*, (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019); Meredeth Turshen, 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?', *Social Research*, 69.03 (2002), 889–911.
193 Bachelard, p. xxxvi.

bodies at the end of each long-awaited hammam session. Such literary representations and filmic ones (such as Rayhana Obermeyer's which I will consider in the subsequent chapter) which focus on Maghrebi women, what they have to say, and what they experience - through the locus of the women's hammam - are essential in order to reflect, react, and amend silencing and essentialist Orientalist stereotypes bestowed on Maghrebi women, more so inside the forbidden space of the hammam; especially since Orientalist interpretations and representations have often been associated with imprisoning women in silence, exoticism, and in a hopeless eroticized femininity – as we have posited early on in this study.[194] Along with the hammam, a second orientalised feminine space is also frequently and simultaneously mentioned in the two works selected for this chapter which is the *harem* (women private quarters), where the colonial gaze has yet again subjected Maghrebi women to exoticism, nonchalance, and luxurious mutism.[195] It is important to clarify that the hammam was actually one of the main components of a *harem,* but has since been built as an independent edifice for public use.

The hammams considered throughout this thesis are the modern public Maghrebi bathhouses open to all women, regardless of their age, status, and race, thus it is only the geographical and cultural component that is the main focus of this selection. I read the hammam throughout this study with the concepts of private and intimate because of its gendered nature, forbidden to men, and because of the atmosphere it fosters due to its architecture.

In reinscribing the hammam or harem and giving one's own representation of what these forbidden private female spaces mean to the people who identify with the same culture, and gender, and have had actual access and experience with this ancestral space, Djebar

194 Hiddleston, p.78; Janice Mills, 'Orientalism and the Culture of "Other"', p.90.
195 Assia Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), p. 243.

and Sebbar both engage in challenging the Orientalist discourse, by reacting to the colonial power's stereotyping and essentialist representations of the Orient. Indeed, the Orientalist discourse and representations, where 'woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies', are the core reason why such reactions and rectifications as Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar's are needed to rewrite history and write back to take control of, and to express, Algerian womanhood and culture in their own terms, as Algerian women. [196] So, how do Djebar and Sebbar react to Orientalist representations of Algerian women in their forbidden private quarters, and what do they write back to these Orientalists through their writings?

Anti-Exotic Criticism: Reacting to Orientalist representations:

In *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and *Les femmes au bain,* both Djebar and Sebbar make several references and reflect on Orientalism, especially male Orientalists' perspectives and renditions of Algerian women. In this section of the chapter, I will be focusing in more detail on the instances where Sebbar and Djebar make such mentions or use intertextuality when referring to specific Orientalist works and historical writings.
I argue that Djebar and Sebbar aim to deconstruct the eroticized image of femininity and the distorted view of Western men on Arab women to subsequently give these same Maghrebi / Algerian women their voice and body back.

In her collection of short stories published in 1980 and reissued in 2001, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement,* Assia Djebar purposefully chose an eponymic title as a direct reference to the established French romantic painter Eugene Delacroix's painting.

196 Irigaray, V, p. 25.

As one of the great Orientalists of the 19th century, Delacroix is chosen by Djebar as a recognised example to enter in dialogue with Orientalist representations of the kind, to reflect on and denounce their 'exaggerated' representation and the prejudices / misconceptions they communicate.

Throughout *Femmes d'Alger,*[197] Djebar expresses her desire to rewrite both Algeria and Algerian women as they are portrayed by Orientalists such as Delacroix, seeing that the atrocities suffered by Algerian women have been amplified because they have been historically silenced and marginalized by colonization, but also tradition and patriarchy after Algerian independence. Djebar, however, does not pretend to speak on behalf of Algerian women but rather with them, as she transcribes from her own memory and that of her compatriots, polyphonically, what has for a long time been omitted: 'première des solidarités à assumer pour les quelques femmes arabes qui obtiennent ou acquièrent la liberté de movement, du corps et de l'esprit'.[198]

Later on in her narrative, Djebar delves into her critique of the historical misrepresentation of Algerian women spread through orientalist artists' representations. She devotes an entire segment to the brief visit in 1832 of the French painter Eugene Delacroix of Algiers, a momentary first-time experience which inspired him to paint an Algerian harem, which he illustrated with a signature Orientalist stroke: which Djebar describes as a painting depicting an exoticized obscure place, exaggerated with luxurious golden elements and women sensually lying in the middle of a pile of silk.[199] Delacroix's brief sojourn in Algeria and his experience of the Orient had a profound impact on him.

197 From here on, I will abbreviate the title of Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* to *Femmes d'Alger.*
198 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 15.
199 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 241.

Once back to the French mainland, the renowned Orientalist artist dedicated several years to immersing himself and refreshing 'l'image de sa mémoire'.[200] This involved delving into the notes he meticulously took during his transformative visit to the harem, using them as a source of inspiration and reflection for his work.[201] The artist finished his painting "Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement" in 1834 and painted another version of it in 1849. In his second attempt, he made alterations to render his painting more inviting to the viewers by altering the subjects of his painting to include a more revealing bust, a warmer, more enticing gaze, and a wider panoramic view by reducing the size of 'ses' women of Algiers.[202]

In his paintings, Delacroix portrays three odalisques in a moment of contemplation, absentminded, their expressions half-concealed and mysterious, but nonetheless exuding sensual and exotic tones with their porcelain skin and ornaments surrounding them. They seem to exist in an enigmatic world of their own, detached from the observer's gaze but simultaneously drawing it in with a sense of voyeuristic allure. Djebar condemns Delacroix for portraying women 'figées' in a strange silence and absent to themselves, 'elles cachent dans leurs yeux un secret douloureux', in what she translates as as luxuriously painted prison where these women are entrapped without much contemplation.[203] The limitations of Orientalist painters' rendition of Algerian women highlighted by Djebar reveals how the dual patriarchal control over the female body has continued over the centuries: First, a control accentuated during colonial domination by their imperialist agenda who also painted them as exotic 'prisonnières résignées d'un lieu clos qui s'éclaire d'une sorte de lumière rêve venue de nulle part'; second, by

200 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 245.
201 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 245.
202 Djebar, Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement, p. 241.
203 Djebar, Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement, p. 241.

fundamentalist Maghrebi men who forced some women to conceal these same bodies non-consensually.[204] Djebar details the extent to which Delacroix exhibited above all in his painting a minute detailing of the female bodies and the private apartments they occupy: Delacroix's odalisques are depicted with unnatural warmth, with rich and luminous colours, as they are disguised with sumptuous fabrics and surrounded by sublime objects – to the extent where the odalisques he seeks to portray remain barely noticeable over the oneiric ornamentation.

The Orient thus represented by Delacroix is what Djebar describes as 'un Orient superficiel, dans une pénombre de luxe et de silence', which cannot be any more distanced from reality.[205] Certainly, for the Maghrebi female author, Delacroix was one of many Orientalist painters, 'artistes étrangers, nouvellement arrivés à Alger [...], qui étaient tous seulement préoccués de noter les couleurs, les costumes, les postures de la femme algérienne'.[206] Contemplating the artist's painting, Djebar continues to condemn how Delacroix was able to render and describe the physical appearance of the women, 'ses' women, which barely testifies to his female subjects' actual subjectivity and his legitimacy:

> Ce cœur du harem à moitié ouvert, est-ce vraiment la façon dont il le voit? [...] De retour à Paris, le peintre travaillera pendant deux ans sur l'image d'une mémoire qui vacille d'une *incertitude* sourde et non formulée [...] Ce qu'il en ressort est un chef-d'œuvre qui suscite encore des questions au plus profond de nous. [...] La vision, complètement nouvelle, était perçue comme une image pure. Cette vision trop brillante devrait *brouiller la réalité*.[207]

204 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 241.
205 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 243.
206 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 245.
207 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 246. [My italics, for emphasis].

Indeed, Djebar questions Delacroix's blurred reality as she reacts and retorts to the obstinacy of the artist's colonial gaze to bestow Algerian women in a muted and suspended presence, which is all but present. Djebar criticises such uncomplimentary Orientalist illustrations as they essentially communicate to the beholders of such paintings prejudiced tendencies of making the colonised peoples' subculture mirror a stagnant and unchanging status and (in)significance in the world.[208]

A striking reminder that ought to be mentioned, is the fact that in the construction of colonial history, colonised / ex-colonised women have been relegated to a greater silence and invisibility then colonised men; likewise, at the heart of postcolonial Algerian thought, silence is coerced by Algerian men, and male strangers respectively. [209]

The importance of Delacroix's painting for Djebar derives from the fact that by looking at it: 'Cela nous rappelle que d'ordinaire, nous n'avons pas le droit de le faire. Ce tableau lui-même est un regard volé'.[210] By penetrating for the first time into the secret space of a harem, Delacroix violates the sanctity of the women's quarters, but also restricts Algerian women in his painting in an image of oriental odalisques. The illegitimate access auto-granted with Orientalists such as Delacroix strip Maghrebi women of the traditional veil (actual and figurative) associated with their otherness, their Arab-Muslim heritage, only to portray them as exotic and sensual objects; the Western artist forced his vision onto these female bodies and took control of it.[211] For Djebar, these Orientalists' women are projected as 'absentes à elles-mêmes, à leur corps, à leur sensualité, à leur bonheur'.[212] As such, therefore, such blurred depictions fix a patriarchal discourse and image of Maghrebi

208 Bhabha, Barker, p. 9.
209 Franz Fanon, 'Sociologie d'une Révolution', in *L'An V de La Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1959), p. 175 (p. 135); Stora, p. 78.
210 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 149.
211 Marnia Lazreg, 'Féminisme et Différence : Les Dangers d'écrire en tant que femme sur les femmes en Algérie', *Les Cahiers Du CEDREF*, 2010, pp. 73–105 (p. 93).
212 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 150.

women as the male coloniser wishes to see, define, and have them, by entirely stripping these women of the possibility of seeing themselves as subjects instead of objects, unable in the process to regard themselves beyond objects of desire for male colonisers and their integral colonial masculine discourse – inextricable from Orientalist pictorial exoticism.

In *Les Femmes au Bain*, Leïla Sebbar touches upon the situation of women in Algeria post-War of Independence (1954-1962) and post-Civil War (1992-2002), which tore the country apart during the 20th century, as she brings attention to the historical violence and misogyny towards women. Sebbar's main protagonist and narrator in this narrative is 'La Bien-Aimée', a young woman who offers her point of view and reasoning through a stream of consciousness from inside the women's hammam. Much like Assia Djebar in *Femmes d'Alger*, Sebbar's young female protagonist shares her views on historical representations of her ancestors and herself – as an Oriental woman herself in Orientalist lexis – to denounce how Orientalists who came 'du Nord froid à la lumière et le soleil' have set out to superficially paint women like herself in their works, only to have them remain 'gelées dans les musées et les ateliers d'art'.[213] La Bien-Aimée condemns the lack of interest or engagement with the very subjects / objects of the Orientalists' fantasies:

> Les artistes qui ont aimé l'Orient et ses femmes les ont dessinées pour ceux qui ne les verraient jamais. Seulement l'image, les corps alanguis, les couleurs et le chatoiement tels qu'ils l'imaginaient pour leur jouissance.[214]

The odalisque, the main theme of Orientalist paintings, reoccurs frequently in Leïla Sebbar's narratives. In *Les femmes au bain,* Sebbar tackles in several instances how odalisques, as historical female servants and slaves, were regarded as trading currencies,

213 Sebbar, p. 31.
214 Sebbar, p. 50.

as sex objects, and 'butins de guerre' whose existence is decided upon by a man.[215] Sebbar uses the historical example of the odalisques and their representations in the arts to convey how women have had, for the longest time, their destiny and life decided upon and controlled by male figures: father, brother, or husband; and historically, the male coloniser. Sebbar notes how in the arts too, men have sought to maintain control over women, their image, and voices by painting them through Orientalist or neo-Orientalist lenses, a masculine discourse undertaken in light of motives which stray away from verisimilitude, to favour dominance over leisurely, exposed, and defenceless women who are pictorially represented as 'rêves de volupté, with 'couleurs et paresse fataliste.'[216]

In highlighting and criticising Orientalism and exoticized Orientalist representations, Sebbar denounces how such colonial masculine discourse has confined women to silence in an exotic and unrealistic realm, thus leading the life of an exotic prisoner in the arts, without much contemplation. These male representations, where forbidden female private places are illegitimately offered to the gaze of the public, are made from a perception and representation where fantasies take over memory, as Djebar also affirmed in *Femmes d'Alger*.[217]

As a pictorial genre trend, representations of Oriental women among Orientalist painters was, as discussed earlier in this study, born out of a specific socio-political and cultural context where the discovery of the East ignited Western imaginations, one which was clouded by the prohibitions of religion (Islam) and the modesty of Muslim women. In *Les Femmes au bain,* Leïla Sebbar condemns Western obsession with the Orient which led to prejudiced and superficial depictions that satisfied this fascination:

215 Sebbar, pp. 23, 19.
216 Sebbar, p. 31.
217 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 246.

> Les artistes, les écrivains de la rive occidentale aimaient l'Orient jusqu'à la folie, ils pensaient qu'ils les possédaient, mais ils ne voulaient rien savoir de ces femmes de chair pure.[218]

In fact, Sebbar goes on to wonder – again much like Djebar - whether it is even possible for a man, all the more a man from a foreign culture, to have the ability to transmit the sensitive and profound nature of Arab-Muslim Maghrebi women and 'la profonde mélancolie de ces yeux là' in their paintings.[219] For apart from the minute brush strokes of the women's idealised bodies and their over-sensuality, the artists did not give much attention to the women's individuality or spirit, observing and portraying them instead as 'femmes de chair pure', soulless and voiceless sensual bodies offered to the gazers, veiled in exoticism and idealistic beauty traits, as Delacroix himself confesses:

> I did not begin to do anything passable from my North African journey until I had so far forgotten the small details as to recall only the striking and poetic aspects in my paintings.[220]

Delacroix confesses here his disassociation with exactitude and faithfulness to what he momentarily witnessed in Algiers to project his own 'exalted' interpretation of it, adorned with poetic enhancements. On this point, La Bien-Aimée exclaims: 'Le corps oui, l'âme, pour quoi faire?'.[221] Indeed, 'what for?' Sebbar asks in her narrative, asking through her protagonist her readers, as these artists did not give much thought to these women, what

218 Sebbar, pp. 31–32.
219 Sebbar, p. 32.
220 Delacroix in Correspondance, October 17, 1853, II, p.92, as quoted in Petre, p. 40 [My italics, for emphasis].
221 Sebbar, p. 32.

they might feel or might have to say, because, as she continues 'Ils n'ont saisi que le geste et la couleur, un regard a suffi, pourquoi s'attarder?'[222]

Through *Les femmes au bain*, Sebbar first deconstructs the masterpieces of the past and proceeds to give voice to the orientalised odalisques and oppressed Algerian women in post-Independence. La Bien-Aimée even deplores through her narration the historical misogyny women have faced, dating back to when women were traded as war trophies for the winning male adversary.[223] Sebbar's young protagonist alienates Orientalist illustrations which perpetuated misogyny but also mutism, at the hands of 'the colonial man'. During her journey at the hammam, La Bien-Aimée reflects on, and takes the paintings and their illegitimate representational control back – as she talks back to its creators and their female captives – to awaken the odalisques from their torpor and sleep, and finally bring them back to life. The main female character herself finds peace and harbours her feminine discourse only inside the women's hammam, she explains that 'le jour du bain, le plus long de la semaine, is 'le jour le meilleur', because 'bavard et gourmand', for 'aujourd'hui elle parle [...] elle vient au hammam [...]', the protagonist and her fellow women who come visit the hammam for the same reason.[224]

Sebbar exposes then, misogyny as long-established and still propagated, from the time of these women's ancestors but also criticises how it still persists in present times, regardless of modernity or the women's equal role in the country's independence from the colonialisers. In an interview about *Les femmes au bain*, Sebbar professes:

> Je veux faire entendre une voix, une voix qui marche du côté du désir, du plaisir et de l'amour. Une voix de liberté sans contrôle tribal, communautaire, patriarcal, c'est cela qui m'intéresse dans ce

222 Sebbar, p. 32.
223 Sebbar, p. 19.
224 Sebbar, pp. 13, 36.

> texte-là. Cela me faisait plaisir à travers ces voix, car il y a des voix différentes, de femmes, d'hommes aussi, de m'amuser avec les références littéraires d'un monde de l'Orient musulman en opposition parfois avec la représentation du corps des femmes dans la peinture occidentale.[225]

Further on the motive behind writing *Les femmes au bain,* Sebbar also discusses how this text, and the critiques it holds, intimately link to her trilogy on Shérazade: *Les carnets de Shérazade* (1985); *Le Fou de Shérazade* (1991) and *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (2010) – especially her main female protagonists' feelings on Orientalism and Orientalist art's illustrations more particularly, and the writer's desire to write back to it :

> C'est un peu un jeu avec Shéhérazade, d'une part la sultane et d'autre part la jeune Shérazade de ma trilogie romanesque, sa relation particulière avec la peinture Orientaliste et ce qu'elle cherche à représenter. Il y a dans ce texte aussi un certain nombre de clins d'œil à mes autres textes.[226]

As it were, Leïla Sebbar uses the two female protagonists, Sherazade and La Bien-Aimée, to reject the prism through which the West saw Eastern Muslim women. Indeed, Orientalist painting tradition is one of the main elements challenged in Sebbar's writings on women by re-writing the historically muted odalisques. As a pictorial genre, highly popular at the height of French imperialism and hegemony, it also served as a symbol

225 Circé Krouch-Guilhem, 'Leïla Sebbar: interview on women in the bath', *La Plume francophone: Les Litteratures du monde francophone*.
226 Krouch-Guilhem.

expressing a photographic moment of the colonial period, a pejorative colonial propaganda to which Djebar and Sebbar's women writings respond. Sebbar declares:

> Ces esclaves du harem seraient morts dans la mémoire de l'Occident comme de l'Orient si les hommes occidentaux ne les avaient pas déguisés par leurs désirs de les exposer au regard et au désir de l'Autre, femmes, hommes, pour l'éternité [...] une monnaie d'échange [...]. Ils croyaient pouvoir la posséder [...].[227]

The clear lack of interest for the colonised women's voices in favour of a mirage image of their exoticized flesh and demeanour, as well as the tendency to overlook the complexity of different subjectivities and identities that a colonial discourse promotes, is at the heart of the problem authors such as Leïla Sebbar and Assia Djebar try to write back to and amend, to give these disregarded voices and identities a long overdue exposure. However, how precisely do these authors write back and amend the lack of exposure and heterogeneity of Algerian women in their works?

From muted odalisques to muted *combattantes*: Outcasts in one's own society?

Adding to the previous section on anti-colonial discourse in Djebar and Sebbar's texts, I will now reflect on the authors' essential exploration of the patriarchal gaze and control exerted on Algerian women in a postcolonial context, in a post War-of-Independence, and post-Civil War Algeria. This section of the chapter is essential to the study because it explores how the authors reflect on Algerian women's contribution to the independence

227 Sebbar, p. 31.

from the colonial power, Algerian women's glorious past as war heroines, and how these same 'militantes' have been abandoned, marginalised, and stripped of their right to, and promise of, an equal role in modern post-colonial Algerian society.[228]

Each author writes from their place in the historical-social world, a place that refers not only to the origin and situation of the writer, but also to the concrete conditions of the writer's scriptural practice and topics debated. Undeniably, the marked absence of representations of women and their historical roles in modern Algerian society has given a motive to female authors and filmmakers such as Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer to produce writings and films on Algerian women, seeking in the process to capture these lost female voices and the feminine discourse expressed. The authors express their voices first, but also voices unable to speak aloud or write themselves, fearing reprisal.[229]

The collective national movement, of a united nation seeking its independence, has always been associated with men in the Maghreb, although Algerian women were equal to men when it came to fighting against the French colonist.[230] The situation of Algerian women has since then regressed and women took on the status of 'colonisés des colonisés',[231] as the latter remained cloistered in a past war-heroine memory, in a renewed silence and in a patriarchal misogynistic control which reduces them – all again and post-

228 Anetha Sivananthan, 'Harems, Neo-Colonial Patriarchies and Understanding Modernity for Postcolonial Maghrebian Women in Morocco and Algeria, with Reference to the Works of Assia Djebar, Fatima Mernissi and Leïla Abouzeid.', p. 04.
229 For more on this, refer to: Marnia Lazreg, 'Féminisme et Différence : Les Dangers d'écrire En Tant Que Femme Sur Les Femmes En Algérie', *Les Cahiers Du CEDREF*, 2010, pp. 73–105; Brinda J. Mehta, 'Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices against Violence', *Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices Against Violence*, 2014, 1–282; Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (Guilford Press, 1994).
230 Brinda Mehta, p. 4,5,6; Zohra Drif, 'La Mort de Mes Frères', ed. by F. Maspero, *Libertés*, 1960; Claire Mauss-Copeaux, '"Deux Femmes Parmi d'autres Dans Un Monde Dominé Par Les Hommes", Algérie 1954-1962, Hadjira et Doukha', *Histoire Coloniale et Postcoloniale*, 2020.
231 Smail-Salhi, 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar', p. 83.

independence – to a body-object forcefully covered, this time and vengefully perhaps, from the gaze of the other sex. It is then, as Mehta explains,

> L'écriture [qui] fournit le vecteur qui permet de lever les nombreux voiles de silence et de violence qui recouvrent les vies de femmes, en particulier par l'usage de leur 'sang-voix' dénonçant l'injustice, l'inhumanité et la triple culpabilité colonialiste, nationaliste et intégriste.[232]

Indeed, on Algerian women's glorious past in *Femmes d'Alger,* Djebar shed light to, and expose:

> Les traumatismes psychologiques subis par les combattantes pour la liberté post-révolutionnaire, reléguées dans l'obscurité au statut de parias dans le nouvel État, malgré leur service national actif pendant la guerre.[233]

Djebar uses the water carrier in the hammam of *Femmes d'Alger*, Fatma, to do so. Fatma condemns her present torment and recollects nostalgically a lost past, following her falling accident inside the women's hammam, which 'déclenche' her traumatic memories.[234] Fatma reminisces her past role as a woman and heroine who contributed to the collective joy of the independence of a country torn apart by war.

Fatma sets out to lift the veil on a past encrusted in her flesh and memory and to release all the fragmented shadow voices of her fellow women which still haunt her: 'Moi, la

232 Brinda Mehta, p. 4.
233 Brinda Mehta, p. 5.
234 Janov; El Korso and Malika, 'La Mémoire Des Militantes de La Guerre de Libération Nationale', 3, 1997, 25–51 (p. 38).

femme, toutes les voix du passé me suivent [...] voix multiples [...] '.[235] By subversively voicing her own torments, Fatma sees herself disclosing the torments of all her fellow *militantes* through feminine discourse:

> Je ne vois pas pour nous aucune autre issue que par cette rencontre: Une femme qui parle devant une autre qui regarde, fait que celle qui parle raconte-t-elle l'autre avec des yeux dévorants, d'un sombre souvenir [...] Celle qui regarde, est-ce à force d'écouter, d'écouter et de se rappeler qu'elle finit par se voir, avec son propre regard, sans voile enfin...[236]

As former female soldiers, bomb carriers, nurses, and secret army weapons carriers and coordinators, their society had opened all doors to a space outside the women's quarters and offered a collective identity in the name of the nationalist cause: the *Moujahidettes*.[237] In her present day, however, Fatma and these women are isolated from the outside world and given a subordinate role. Fatma's character serves as a spokesperson for all Algerian women and for the writer herself to criticise a disillusioned post-Independence Algerian society by voicing her story and of the other women who sacrificed themselves for their country's independence and prosperity but have not had lasting recognition or due respect for it. Certainly, masculine hegemony in the patriarchal Algerian society readily ousted their female compatriots after the colonised Algerian man recovered his long-lost land and regained full control. As a direct result of this, women saw their position regress, from that of an equal war heroine committed to the independence movement to that of a

235 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 47.
236 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 57.
237 *Moudjahidattes*, militantes, combattantes, are all synonyms for war heroines, however, the term moujahidettes has a stronger connotation in the Arabic language: It is associated with the Arabic term Jihad, which means fighting enemies in war in the name of God in Arab-Muslim culture.

subordinate individual whose efforts and important role got stripped from her and remained a distant memory.

Consequently, Algerian women have sought other ways to inscribe themselves in this masculinized space and a way to fight for their freedom: Speaking out, writing, and filming Algerian women out of their periphery and confinement. Djebar felt necessary to use one of her female characters to utter a necessary, cathartic cry: 'Je suis tout le ventre stérile de toutes les femmes',[238] an analogy used here to refer to the sterility of the efforts accomplished by Algerian women in their crucial role in the War of Independence hand-in-hand with Algerian men, unable to yield their own independence as women in their society due to the deceit of the patriarchal Algerian regime instituted post-independence.

A clear disenchantment is therefore associated between the Algerian independence and Algerian women because women's fate remained suspended despite being the *moujahidettes* who helped free their mother land. The subsequent section delves into how Djebar and Sebbar criticise and condemn continuous historical misogyny towards Algerian women, even after colonial occupancy.

Anti-Exotic Active portraits: Reclaiming Algerian women's representations:

After independence from colonial rule, Algeria entered a complex phase where women gradually lost their status as equals where they could mix and engage with the other sex without stigma when they actively fought alongside men. The positive momentum drastically shifted during the Civil War as Algerian men adopted similar controlling tactics used by the colonisers to dominate and regulate women's bodies. Women were coerced into covering themselves, and according to Djebar, unveiling in Algerian society during

238 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 119.

the Civil War was synonym of 'être nu'. Those who defied these extremist societal norms by attempting to participate in public spheres unregulated faced severe social stigma for refusing to conform. This period of rising Islamist extremism reduced communal heterosocial life and exchange to an almost exclusively male-dominated environment that could be likened to entering hostile territory for women.[239] Patriarchal societies have historically been dominated by a masculine discourse that seeks to implement self-justified male power and control which resulted in the suppression of women's voices, preventing them from fully expressing their femininity and self-awareness. This pervasive atmosphere prevented Algerian from being fully self-aware for fear of facing dismissal, reductionism, or hostility.[240] As it were, the main motivation of the man in the patriarchal society which increasingly restricts the space and the freedom of its women, 'his authority', as mentioned in chapter one of this study, finds its source in the man's fear of being dishonoured (through gaze or acts), which Djebar also confirms in the first section of the afterword in *Femmes d'Alger*.

Gender relations terms (authority, master, lawful gaze, female body, possession of the body, dishonour) are interconnected and collectively contribute to understanding the complex female condition: 'Hier, le maître a fait sentir son autorité sur les espaces féminins clos par la solitude de son propre regard, annihilant ceux des autres[...]'.[241] Djebar illustrates how motives justifying male hegemony persist over time – encompassing past and present in her chapters titled 'yesterday' and 'today' – shedding light on these enduring gender dynamics and giving historical insights to highlight continuity of patriarchal oppression. The legitimised gazes and control of the counter-gaze on the feminine by the 'maître' are exerted on the female eye and body – for the eye

239 Teets, p. 39.
240 Stora, p. 113.
241 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 123.

of the one who dominates seeks the other eye first, that of the dominated, before taking possession of the body. Djebar denounces this obsession with control over female bodies, and its implications:

> Il suffit d'un rien – d'un épanchement brusque, d'un mouvement inconsidéré, inhabituel, d'un espace déchiré par un rideau qui se soulève sur un coin secret – pour que les autres yeux du corps (seins, sexe et nombril), risquent à leur tour d'être exposés, dévisagés. C'en est fini pour les hommes, gardiens vulnérables : c'est leur nuit, leur malheur, leur déshonneur.[242]

It is through the author's sense of duty to preserve memories and show solidarity among women that she breaches the silence surrounding taboo topics related to her female identity as shaped by her childhood experiences and acquaintances. Djebar writes:

> La première rencontre des sexes [n'est] possible qu'à travers le rite du mariage et de ses cérémonies éclaire sur la nature d'une obsession qui marque profondément notre être social et culturel. Une plaie vive s'inscrit sur le corps de la femme par le biais de l'assomption d'une virginité qu'on déflore rageusement et dont le mariage consacre trivialement le martyre, la nuit de noces devient essentiellement la nuit de sang.[243]

It is through the regular use of the possessive adjective 'notre' that Djebar voluntarily includes herself, and highlights – despite being presented from an objective

242 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 151.
243 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 154.

viewpoint – the condemnation of archaic traditions and their impact on gender relations which evolved into a subject of literary exploration. The vivid lexical field used in the narrative to convey young women's initiation to sexuality in this patriarchal society pertains to a wounded female body, encompassing words such as 'plaie,' 'martyre,' and 'sang'. Djebar paints here a powerful image to capture the explicit and graphic nature of such a 'deflowering' ritual – socially inflicted on the bodies of women alone. Djebar overtly and evocatively denounces the obsession with female virginity – as a symbol of men's honour – is sustained through a violent 'blood ceremony' to ensure a non-transgression and safety of virtue of the young woman, and thus, of the honour of the family, at women's expense. This blood ceremony is referred to in the Maghreb as the *qmedja* ritual and traces back to the Western culture of the Middle Ages, and later, in other cultures in India, Armenia, or Georgia, as well as the Middle East, and North Africa. The tradition consists of using a white bedsheet or cloth, used during the newlyweds' first intercourse as a married couple, generally on their wedding night, to prove the 'purity' of the bride as she loses her virginity by leaving traces of bloodstains on the white textile, initiating then 'la première rencontre des sexes' through 'une plaie' and women's blood-shedding.[244] In some instances, especially in more remote and traditional parts of the Maghreb, the family of the newlyweds would wait outside the couple's room to confirm whether the bride is indeed 'pure' or not, in case of the latter instance, the bride can be humiliated, considered 'sullied', and is immediately repudiated.[245]

In order to challenge the misogyny persisting after independence and alienating Orientalist, neo-Orientalist male representations, the once lascivious, recumbent, and

244 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 154.
245 Nicola Heath, 'The Historic Tradition of Wedding Night-Virginity Testing', 2018.

indolent odalisques, now ex war-heroines, are gradually reinvested in a dynamic literature of defiance in Djebar and Sebbar's texts. This subsequently leads to liberating the female characters from their collective isolation and mutism as they express themselves, voice and body, against the dual patriarchal hegemony and oppression. Freed from paintings, they come back to life, and now work to redefine themselves, far from the Orientalist tradition, as active portraits. Leïla Sebbar's female protagonist, La Bien-Aimée, is one such active portrait who participates in this initiative.

Modern and unconventional, Sebbar's protagonist embodies through her perpetual disposition and transgression, the aspirations of a new generation, eager to go beyond the limits normally allowed in her society. Strong in a thirst for freedom of expression, movement, and thought; carefree, rebellious, and detached from everything,

La Bien-Aimée is the antithesis of the orientalised portrait shaped by the Western gaze, and later, by the weight of patriarchal norms because she resists any attempt at appropriation or moulding. Through her female narrator, Sebbar combats the myths and fantasies that make women a submissive sexual symbol in masculine depictions, Western or otherwise, as Sebbar says herself in an interview: 'ce sont des "Shéherazades" d'une certaine manière, modernes'.[246]

Characterised as a witty and rebellious young teenager, aware of the danger of the enslaving power of the gaze and aware of her duty and her responsibility as a modern young Algerian woman, La Bien-Aimée does not refrain from voicing her opinions on the prevailing masculine discourse, archaic social conventions, and obscurantism:

246 Krouch-Guilhem.

> Je voudrais la lumière, l'impertinence, non pas cette violence qui nous détruit, et nos vies se passent dans l'ennui, la résignation, sans amour. Je ne suis pas de la tribu des femmes qui obéissent.[247]

Because the patriarchal social norms which bid women to remain in the private sphere, and establishes the latter as guardians of the home, Djebar and Sebbar strive to restore the reality of this confinement, and the micro-resistances that allow them to circumvent it or to take ownership of it. The private, the family, the intimate are thus culturally and socially feminine themes - certainly not 'naturally' - and exposing these in their writings and productions constitutes a political position in the Maghreb.[248]

The lived women's hammam, considered as a feminine private space, in contrast to the outer space associated with the masculine, acquires a social sense by being symbolically distributed between masculine and feminine. The privatisation of the hammam is linked to 'accessibility' and inclusiveness as much as it is to resistance, this according to an ambivalence intrinsic to Algerian society, and which fiction is responsible – consciously, or not – of highlighting.

The women's hammam, as a historically coveted Orientalist *gynaecium* (women's quarters in Antiquity) in masculine discourse, is the place of a fantasized female omnisexuality. Djebar and Sebbar make possible, through their representations of the hammam experience and female characters, a rediscovery of a performativity that is otherwise adverse when the authors denounce the susceptibility of female kinship to a reactionary re-writing of Orientalist and neo-Orientalist fantasies. A socio-political re-writing which involves disrupting overarching patriarchal social norms intrinsic to masculine discourse on womanhood and everything feminine, including private feminine

247 Sebbar, p. 17.
248 Stora, p. 87 ; Edward Still, p. 111.

spaces. Against this adequacy of place and tradition in its essentialist patriarchal interpretation, is opposed the transformation of the usual women's gathering into a secret political gathering. The 'sorority' and regrouping of forces which take place inside the women's hammam, in an adverse patriarchal society, can take forms that are less deliberately political, but which are no less important for feminine resistance and subversiveness.

With time, this intimate feminine place par excellence, forbidden to men, has been subverted to gain new, adaptive purposes which serve women and their needs. Women can perform the traditional and religious rituals at the hammam, as they have for centuries, but have also used this experienced place to meet other women, socialise and spontaneously and freely express themselves and their bodies without the constant oppressive and controlling presence of their male 'guardian'.[249]

The manifestation and unravelling of the main theme of the hammam and its meaning in the selected works of Djebar and Sebbar is manifested through an exploration of femininity as experienced by their female characters set in Algeria. This is accomplished by revealing the historical representation of the purely feminine space of the hammam forbidden to men and their gaze, thus giving sense of its purpose and significance in the contemporary representation of Maghrebi women, by female authors of Maghrebi descent. The next section will thus tackle the different discursive methods of feminine expression, as well as denunciation and criticism of the patriarchal power in place, used by the female characters in Djebar and Sebbar's texts.

249 I use here the term 'guardian' in reference to the Algerian Family Code which deems women as 'mineures a vie' legally [lifelong minors,] because under a male relative's guardianship. [For more on the Family Code and women rights please refer to Mounira Charrad's manuscript *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.*]

Giving voices and visibility to the odalisques and censored female compatriots:

Faced with the social frustration and after a long period of muteness – both as colonised women and after the Independence - Algerian women found themselves in the dire need of breaking this imposed silence and inequality in order to tell their stories. They must speak 'a speech by women' to replace 'the speech on women' that has monopolised the discourse for far too long.

Deborah Jones and Luce Irigaray's feminine discourse, 'gossip', 'parler-femme' are harboured inside Djebar and Sebbar's textual hammams to reinscribe women and their transgressive discourse. In both *Femmes d'Alger* and *Femmes au bain*, the female characters' act of reminiscing on the past and the unspeakable is a speaking out, an act overlooked by male authority, because committed writing which denounces social inequalities historically fell under masculine hegemony. Women have always had this desire for an autonomous expression that allows them to challenge male discrimination and erasure.[250] Such feminine discourse, thus, acts as a discursive practice inside female-exclusive spaces such as Djebar and Sebbar's hammams, used by and for the historically muted and marginalized voices of women.[251] The voices expressed in both Djebar and Sebbar's novels are a written demonstration of Algerian women's stories and their rejection of the unfair and archaic patriarchal society that governed their society after its independence. Indeed, women writers such as Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar, denounce the oppression women have gone through in its different forms and used writing as one of the best ways to make women's voices heard, as Djebar discloses in *Ces voix qui*

250 Rita A. Faulkner, 'Vaste Est La Prison: Assia Djebar Tracing a New Path - Writing the Algerian Woman out of Her Confinement', *Journal of North African Studies*, 13.1 (2008), 75–89.
251 Jones; Irigaray, v.

m'assiègent… en marge de ma francophonie: 'écrire ce feu, nous qui serons femmes ou à jamais fillettes-femmes [...] écrire est une ouïe de minuit'.[252] Similarly, Sebbar evokes what her entry into writing implies, namely the act of speaking out and defending Arab women's causes. For her, writing is necessary to break the silence but also to disclose deep and latent memories, which would otherwise be 'forgotten forever'; a statement that is further confirmed by Anne Donadey: 'Sebbar is in constant dialogue with the past [...] [she] is part of [the] dialectic of history and memory'.[253]

The women not only tell their life stories, but what they experience is a source of self-reflections and interrogations as social criticism. Djebar's female characters' testimony communicates their discomfort and shows the importance of transmitting their voices and memory so as not to fall into oblivion. In *Femmes d'Alger*, the character of Sarah, an activist and ex-*militante* who suffered torture while in prison during the war against the coloniser had indelible scars on her flesh, as a constant reminder of her suffering and her past as a female combatant. Referred to in the novel as 'the muted prisoner', Sarah finally breaks out of her traumatic mutism as pain grips her in her scars while prompted by her friend Anne to liberate herself by talking. As if subject to neurosis, and while nervously smoking, Sarah compulsively and intimately "chats" with her friend Anne after a prolonged silence:

> Je ne vois qu'une seule façon pour les femmes de tout débloquer. Parler, parler constamment d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, parler entre nous dans tous les gynécèces [...] Parlez l'une à l'autre et regarder.

252 The expression 'fillettes-femmes' here refers to the status of Algerian women as life-long minors due to the Family Code instituted by the patriarchal government in place; Assia Djebar, *Ces Voix Qui m'assiègent …En Marge de Ma Francophonie*, PUM (Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2018), p. 17.
253 As cited in Michel Laronde, *Leïla Sebbar* (Harmattan, 2003), p. 187.

> Regarder dehors, regarder à l'extérieur des murs et des prisons! [...]
>
> Le regard-femme et la femme-voix.[254]

Through the characters of Sarah, Djebar releases the voices, for her and her fellow combattantes, putting an end to mutism, as Sarah, analogy of all Algerian heroines, finally communicates the sufferings hidden in the depths of her flesh, her conscience, and the collective conscience of her female compatriots.

Suspending the Double Male Gaze to See Oneself:

The temporary suspension of male presence in the feminine spaces of the selected women's works, and what this absence entails (i.e., suspension of the male gaze, patriarchal control, and masculine discourse), represents a necessary step in fostering a purely feminine culture, women's agency, and subjectivity without male intrusion. In *Femmes d'Alger,* Djebar addresses Algerian women's bodies, their subjectivity and agency to pose the problem of masculine discourse and the forbidden voyeur's gaze in representing these women. She emphasizes the urgency for women to see themselves and see for themselves, listen to their bodies, and talk without the instinctive need to 'whisper', far from the panoptic male gaze, in the following:

> Femmes d'Alger nouvelles, qui depuis quelques années, circulent, qui pour franchir le seuil s'aveuglent une seconde de soleil, se délivrent-elles – nous délivrons-nous – tout à fait du rapport d'ombre entretenu des siècles durant avec leur propre corps ? Parlent-elles vraiment, en dansant et sans s'imaginer devoir toujours chuchoter, à cause de l'œil-espion?[255]

254 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 122.
255 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, pp. 9–10.

The Algerian regime and the Islamist agenda established after the War of Independence gave rise to a repressive system that is now, however, directed essentially towards women. Djebar bitterly polemics against the patriarchy of her home country and amalgamates the two forms of voyeurism: that of the colonialist French man and that of the Algerian man. Indeed, as concords Zahia Smail-Salhi agrees with this point:

> This dual otherness, positions these women in a state of double subjugation both under the colonizer and the colonized, thus giving them the status of the colonised of the colonised.[256]

Djebar compares the act of remembering the Algerian female historicity attached to a 'spéléologie très particulière', as a way of removing the veil of forgetfulness and absence of feminine voice, present and past, to 'inscrire à [son] tour la passion calcinée des ancêtres' but also an act of writing a de-colonial palimpsest, bridging then the multilayered tensions of colonial legacy, post-colonial national gender anxieties and oppression weighing on women's everyday life and the preponderance of their voices.[257] These texts, written to fill a void, are charged with the tensions between coloniality and the intersection of gender, nationalism, and decolonization.

Djebar, but also Sebbar, present the psychological traumas suffered by post-revolutionary Algerian war heroines, relegated in obscurity to the status of pariahs in the new state, despite their active national service during the war. Here we subvert the male and adult domination of chronicles and history, so often presented from an elitist, one-dimensional, written point of view, thereby excluding other voices, especially those of the

256 Smail-Salhi, 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar', p. 83.
257 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, pp. 95; 97.

victims. In choosing their witnesses from among women and children, writers such as Djebar and Sebbar prefer a polyphonic positioning of history, including distortions and opposing partialities. Writing provides the vehicle to lift the many veils of silence and violence that cover women's lives, in particular through the use of their 'voix-sang' denouncing injustice, inhumanity and the triple guilt of colonialist, nationalist and fundamentalist. The gaze of the other is always perceived as a danger to be avoided. It is precisely the right to see oneself away from intrusive, voyeurist and controlling eyes that can help women see themselves. The oppression born of the gaze of the man on the woman, his voyeurism, prevents her from seeing herself for what she is and distorts the perception that she has of her body and her being as a whole. The voyeur is the one who spies, from the outside, on the body and the intimacy of the female characters. It is the symbol of the invasion of feminine space. In other words, it represents the internalization in the female characters of the prohibition of the public space. Moreover, 'the right to see' implies that it is forbidden for the Arab woman to look at the other.

In *Les femmes au bain,* Sebbar's main character La Bien-Aimée denounces the oppressive traditionalism and fundamentalism although her entourage condemns her because she is a woman who asserts herself against social and religious norms. The Algerian society in *Les femmes au bain* also judges the protagonist for her passionate relationship with 'Le Bien-Aimé' as a profane act and imprison the latter on false charges of sexual assault to save the family's 'honour' which is dependent on their women's virtue:

> Le seul malheur pour ce père-là dressé par sa mère, sa femme, la communauté toute entire : Que sa fille, ses filles, perdent leur

honneur, en même temps l'honneur de la grande et noble famille,

sa virginité, capitale du clan.[258]

The oppression and pressure socially put on women alone, which reduces them to subservient shadow figures who need to conform to the norms and who are punished if they rebel, is a major factor or catalyst in their battle to voice their struggles, seeking change, equality, and eventually, emancipation. As demonstrated in *Femmes d'Alger* and *Les femmes au bain,* the female characters first experience a trigger event (a hard fall, and the unjust imprisonment of the lover, respectively) that in a way act as a catalyst for denouncing the injustices, voicing their uproar, and speaking up for themselves and other women. It is this repression that allows these women to utter their rants and cry of discontentment which stems from their suffering - physical, emotional, or both.

The authors chose fictitious female characters, sometimes inspired by reality, to audaciously criticize a patriarchal society imprinted by extremist religion and archaic tradition, by breaking down the taboos thus, opening a new agenda of expression for themselves.

Liberating Screams:

Djebar's water carrier, Fatma, in *Femmes d'Alger* experiences inside the hammam what Arthur Janov defines as the 'liberating' and cathartic 'primal scream', advanced in his *The New Primal Scream*. [259] The American psychologist confirms that the primal scream 'marks the end of the struggle' for the women who express it; the scream itself is an act that requires a preliminary primal scream period that can be linked to the period of silence and repression of one's voice. Fatma's primal scream, or rant, represents her

258 Sebbar, p. 63.
259 Janov, p. 159.

combattante's body's ability to communicate which has been destroyed and which seeks to bare its suffering. It is a pain that can never be uttered, and its release remains a fight, a struggle that the body experiences. The actual scream, again, is closely related to the indescribable, the repressed struggle, and is a scream that is expressed at a mature stage (after the primal scream) so that it can be a liberating, or otherwise be condemned to total silence.[260] However, it is through this process that the pain is transmitted to the consciousness to be able to communicate and say it. Therefore, this cry which breaks the silence is a cry which transgresses language by the realization and the installation of the muted word and consequently it is the world which it subsequently transgresses.

Orality, as a type of liberating cry, is restored in Sebbar and Djebar's texts through the storytellers and chanters, represented by the elders of the female characters inside the hammam, who play a mediating role between a past time and the present by reconciling the present with the past. The elder generation (Fatima the water carrier for Djebar, and La n*gresse Noire for Sebbar), who are surrounded by the young generation eager to learn stories from the past, are the storytellers and folklore spreaders and safekeepers:

> La vieille femme, la plus âgée dans le bain, poursuit ses contes [...]
> Les autres femmes ne l'interrompent pas. Les mères écoutent attentivement, les jeunes filles aussi. Des mots et des mots. D'une voix monocorde, elle parle [...].[261]

The voice of Algerian women and their repressed feelings and unspoken word are uttered amongst women, away from men, to allow them to evacuate the pressures accumulated

260 Janov, p. 159.
261 Sebbar, p. 79.

in daily life. The act of singing combined with the feminine discourse and orality taking place amongst Djebar and Sebbar's female characters allow them to challenge the established order, to transgress taboos and to defy masculine norms. In Maghrebi culture, women sing to evoke the past, describe the present and imagine a future. They sing above all to finally exteriorize all that is hidden within them under the weight of extremist religious prohibitions and those dictated by tradition. This orality which is described as 'lyrical female speech' by Djebar, is also seen as hyperbolic to mask another type of expulsion of women, it is 'the expulsion of speech' as offered by Djebar.[262]

As noted, orality is performed in the hammam, as a feminine territory and space of feminine discourse par excellence, in *Femmes d'Alger* and *Les femmes au bain* among several other of their texts, where women meet to share their story and their concerns, where the neighbourhood women meet to tell each other the latest news and disclose their opinions and secrets to one another. The women's hammam represents a place of exchange that allows women to reconnect with the severed link with external reality and to escape from the daily burden through sisterly conversations and activities.

Critics such as Christine Détrez claim, however, that the voices of Algerian women have remained locked in closed spaces or away from others – especially male presence, and much like many others also considers modesty in clothing such as *hijabs* substitute of imprisoning – which we consider as Muslims a protection and an Islamic statement.
In a direct response and reproach for future claims such as Détrez, Mernissi stands out in *Sexe, Idéologie, Islam* (1983), and initiates in this monograph a counter-debate directed towards the Western stigmatisation of Islamic values by criticising and relativizing their reading of Islam and veiling, which for them is synonymous with the 'ségrégation des

262 Djebar, *Ces Voix Qui m'assiègent …En Marge de Ma Francophonie*, p. 75.

femmes, […] les Occidentaux ont tendance à [le] considérer comme une source d'oppression, est ressentie par de nombreuses femmes comme un objet de fierté', mentionning in the process the same observation made by Germaine Tillion in *Le harem et les cousins*.[263]

As many stereotypes befall Muslim-Arab women, Christine Détrez extends her views and argues that which such gendered spaces as the homosocial hammam, which its very gendered nature is what constitutes its sacred and welcoming nature, remains for Détrez an ill-advised and oppressive division on both genders:

> Certes, la sororité récupérée dans les romans contemporains est volontaire et non imposée. Mais cela conduit toujours à la même division entre les sexes, entre les hommes et les femmes. [...] Les femmes restent entre elles, et les hommes sont exclus de leur monde.[264]

However, what Western critics such as Détrez overlook is that such women's writings and films in the Maghreb configure a retrieval of their lost word because, just like in Sebbar's *Les femmes au bain* and Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger,* these authors revive Algerian women's voices which were essentially left 'non écrit, non enregistré, [et] transmis uniquement par des chaînes d'échos et de soupirs'.[265] The two authors capture the essence of oral and feminine communication in their writing, reviving long-forgotten female voices to ensure the preservation and passing on of this oral tradition through generations: 'l'écriture ne tue pas la voix, mais l'éveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de sœurs disparues.[266] It is in

263 Fatima Mernissi, 'Sexe, Idéologie, Islam', Deux Temps Tierce, 1983, 198 (p. 27); Germaine Tillion, Le Harem et Les Cousins (Seuil, 1982).
264Christine Détrez, 'Orientalismes', *Colonialismes*, 25 (2008), p. 113.
265 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 7.
266 Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (Albin Michel, S.A, 1993), p. 285.

fact in the exclusivity of the women's hammam, as a 'lieu de femmes entre-elles' proper, that an essential characteristic to this unique space, a 'non-integration', is finally met, in order to produce and transmit amongst women an equally unique feminine discourse.

Fostering Feminine Body Discourse:

It is essential in this study to note that the feminine discourse attached to the hammam in Djebar and Sebbar's texts - which constitutes a refuge for female speech - is however, always intrinsically linked to 'feminine body discourse'. Female gatherings, such as in the women's hammam, are also a space where chanting and dancing, among other activities and physical expression, take place to allow the reconciliation of speech with body language for the female characters. It is the feminine essence that joins orality in order to alleviate the female characters from their frustrations and daily sufferings, to then allow their bodies to express themselves in the safety of the sororal and homosocial feminine space of the lived hammam. It is only then that the female bodies are thus able to reveal themselves and free themselves, just like their voices, from social constraints and taboos, because they are sheltered from male gaze and patriarchal (and / or Islamist) oppression.[267]

The female characters inside the hammam all seek 'La liberté qui sort de la salle chaude! [...] qui libère'.[268] The need to free oneself from inner pain is here reflected by Djebar in the metaphor of water. To speak of oneself to others, to speak of the suffering, of imprisonment and silence, means for the woman to strip herself and wash herself of all the filth that has defiled her life. It is in the context of the public bath which gathers Algerian women to offer them bare, both physically and spiritually. In the bath, the women

267 Irigaray, v.
268 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 95.

speak of themselves and of their tragic past, they liberate themselves from their secret sufferings which have been too long repressed.

Indeed, the hammam atmosphere and experience with one's body and the bodies of others creates a favourable agenda to liberate one's voice and confide in women whom the hammam experience is shared with:

> Les femmes s'apprêtent à se soulager: conversations ou monologues se déroulent en mots doux, délicats, usés, elles glissent avec l'eau, tandis que les femmes lâchent leurs lourdes charges des jours, leur lassitude.[269]

The act of chatting and pouring one's voice is associated here figuratively with the act of washing and is similarly discharged with the water women pour on themselves to purify their bodies and restore it, all stimulated inside the safe space of the women's hammam.

Fatma, the masseuse and water carrier massages all the women of Algiers, washes them and hears their conversations. The day she breaks her arm sliding on a slab, she faints, and an ambulance comes and grabs her bare body to be transported to the hospital, a body that concealed words heard and gathered in the bath - but which is itself now unrestrained. When Fatma fainted, her unconscious voice was also freed to tell her own past in fragments. As Fatma is being taken to the hospital, circulating in Algiers, her pores open and her primal scream ready to be finally expressed, she liberates her voice and all the voices that have followed her, all the women's words she has collected in the hammam, which she lets pour out of her:

269 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 100.

> Des mots libérés à cause de mon vieux corps [...]. Des paroles du harem transparentes de vapeurs, des échos [...], je circule, moi la femme, toutes les voix du passé me suivent en musique, des chants bavardés, des cris brisés, des mots de part et d'autre étrangers, des voix multiples.[270]

Through this one character, Fatma and her voice, Djebar has condensed several other women, the women of Algiers and their tormented voices.

In *Femmes d'Alger*, an entire segment is devoted to the hammam, to the experiences of women with their own bodies and with that of others, and to the multiple discussions approached without constraint inside the hammam's walls. The female characters discover their bodies and explore them through the sensual massages of Fatima. With each rubbing movement, associated with hot water as an 'aphrodisiac',[271] the masseuse performs a sensual, relaxing, and physically liberating ritual which intensifies and stimulates the female bodies' pleasure inside the hammam:

> Noirâtre, paisible, travaillant rythmiquement, la masseuse semblait elle-même détendue. S'arrêtant pour reprendre son souffle, puis versant lentement une tasse d'eau chaude sur un dos nu bronzé, tandis qu'en dessous d'elle, des soupirs rauques étaient expirés [...] Le couple de deux femmes installées sur la dalle, dominant les autres baigneuses, renouvelées au rythme obsédant, prit une forme étrange, un arbre lent et oscillant dont les racines plongeraient dans le ruissellement persistant de l'eau sur les dalles grises.[272]

270 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, p. 177.
271 Brinda J. Mehta, 'The Rituals of the Female Body', p. 131.
272 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, pp. 98–99.

Massage is described by Djebar as a peaceful moment, relaxing both for the bather and for the masseuse. Present in the hammam to help bathers relax, the masseuse offers women the opportunity to reconnect with their bodies, which are often hidden in public and forgotten in the house. Carlier discusses of the key role the masseur holds in the hammam:

> Si le responsable du hammam est le maître du bain, le masseur est le maître du corps. Ce dernier est un véritable spécialiste, qui tire son savoir-faire d'un aîné qui à son tour l'a reçu d'un homme de l'art qui a pratiqué avant lui, mais aussi de son propre tour, acquis par des années de pratique et renforcé par le don.[273]

Carlier describes the importance and the professionalism of the masseur, related solely however, to the actual practice of massages and rubbing on male bodies, while the function of the masseuse in the women's hammam is manifold since in addition to treating female bodies, she heals and relaxes bodies and minds through her stories: 'Je connais si bien les mains de mes corps favorite, doux et bons à endoloris, les coups de l'âme, les coups de la vie'.[274] The masseuse therefore uses her hands to loosen bodies, and her words to free the soul:

> Elles se font masser par 'la vielle négresse' et 'ses doigts de fée', elles viennent tout comme 'la bien-aimée' pour les mains de la masseuse mais aussi pour ses mots qui bercent ces femmes venues s'évader dans ses 'contes'.[275]

273 Carlier, p. 1316.
274 Sebbar, p. 30.
275 Sebbar, p. 13.

Women's physical liberation is therefore inextricably linked with their spiritual and oral emancipation. The physical gratification practiced in the hammam, through water, purification rites, and massages enable women to retrieve their bodies and pleasurability and reclaim their subjectivity. The hammam session is the occasion for women to cathartically relax minds through sororal exchanges, and to relax the body with care and meticulous gestures, but it is also the place where the body is disclosed and nurtured:

> Les femmes s'y prélassent et se consacre à leur bien-etre physique et psychique, elles se lavent et préparent leurs corps et s'attalent à bavarder avec les femmes qui co-existent dans cette éspace de détente et d'évasion.[276]

It is in this space reserved for women that the traditional female bath is where the body gets rid of some of its restrictions, particularly related to modesty and the concealment of the body in a controlling patriarchal society. It is only through a complete and intimate physical and psychological bareness that these can be meet the essence of their personhood and true identity, one that hides under layers of patriarchal social effects and masculine discourse.

In *Les Femmes au Bain* as in *Femmes d'Alger*, each woman present in the hammam reveals herself and her voice and at the same time exposes her body, her life, her experiences, her pains or even her desires 'without surveillance', imbued with the stories and words of the bathers who surround her. The liberation of the feminine voice in the hammam is manifested by the exchange of dialogues and oral tradition in all its forms. Kwasi Wiredu defines oral tradition as a 'transmission of thought over generations by the

276 Sebbar, p. 13.

spoken word and techniques of communication other than writing', and as it were, literature and as a whole, 'languages, do have embedded in their syntax and semantics various notions about reality and human experience.[277] Through these, our habits of speech influence our habits of writing. And so, we cannot regard written traditions as altogether independent of orality'.[278] As is manifest in these Djebarian and Sebbarian writings, orality is indeed entrenched in their written texts and is inextricable from it. Rightfully so, orality has undeniably characterised feminine expression since ancestral times: through it, the woman does not only posit her existence but presents herself as part of a community, that of women. Expressing oneself then becomes the desire to pass from one epoch to another, from one woman to another, a word that links the community, that of women but also that of men, to a history, that of humanity inherited from the ancestors.

Oral expression in Sebbar and Djebar's texts becomes a personal statement of relief and celebration, but also of rebellion for women, a critical statement which questions the path of an identity while posing the question of the meaning of being a woman in a society that has historically oppressed – and continues – to oppress them. It is, as it were, the entire feminine essence that now rebells in the face of an increase in violence, imposed on the female body as a whole – actual and symbolic – but also on female bodies in all the uniqueness of their individuality who suffered under colonisation and now under Islamist extremism after independence. The feminine discourse which is exhaled in these texts thus bring about a decolonization and demystification of the female subject through the attempt, for these women, to monopolise the discourse and thereby reclaim their voice. By creating a link to orality in their texts, a new relationship between

277 Kwasi Wiredu, 'An Oral Philosophy of Personhood: Comments on Philosophy and Orality', *Research in African Literatures*, 40.1 (2009), 8–18.
278 Wiredu.

the reader and the text is created, by amplifying the latter's capacities to evoke reality since they draw on the ancestral tradition which places the text at the source of all expression. One can see it as an act of decontamination of the written word, which is no longer rooted solely in an ever-reimagined fiction.

Moreover, this decontaminating act is nothing other than a liberation from the patriarchal gaze 'spy-eye' to untie the oppressed female body and its mute voice: under the example of Algerian women, it is indeed the whole universal community of women that the authors attempt to deliver; Djebar writes:

> J'aurais pu écouter ces voix dans n'importe quelle langue non écrite, non enregistrée, transmises seulement par des chaînes d'échos et de soupirs. Son arabe, iranien, afghan, berbère ou bengali, pourquoi pas, mais toujours avec un ton féminin et des lèvres prononcées sous le masque.[279]

The authors want to translate, transmit the language of the body, of the fatigue of the eternal feminine heritage, in Algeria but also universally, which alone represents all origins but therefore has no anchored existence. Also, faced with such an evocation, feminine discourse must reveal how the experience of being a woman is constructed. The reason why Djebar and Sebbar prefer dialogues or direct speech for their characters, is because they want, through the exchange with others or the self-reflection and the maieutic work that it generates, to report of the awakening of the character to herself at the same time as she awakens to others, and to the readers.

Unlike the restrictive Orientalist depictions they condemn, Djebar and Sebbar in turn offer the captivating agencivity of female figures who seem to flow in verbal fluidity,

279 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 8.

as these 'retrouv[ent] les autres! Retrouv[ent] l'eau qui coule, qui chante, qui se perd, celle qui libère peu à peu, en chacune de nous.' [280] the premises of a real dynamic of repositioning of subjectivities. La Bien-Aimée declares: 'Les femmes au bain chantent', and as an oral tradition of relief and celebration, chanting unites women as they 'chantent lentement, elles écrivent des vers qu'elles se lisent les unes aux autres, si elles ne les écrivent pas, elles les disent, les inventent au cours du discours. A sense of community is felt through the act of singing as it is not a single woman who sings, nor a specific group of women, but 'les femmes' as a whole. Unity presents itself to the readers through the definite article 'les'.

Similarly, women unite in the hammam to collectively enjoy the 'tales, the least popular among Arabic tales' of 'La Vieille N*gresse', which 'les fera crier et rire' in unisson, in its turn nourishing a sense of complicity through shared emotions. On this sense of sorority and communal disclosure and enjoyment, Sebbar explains that it is a conscious, unifying choice, to omit and thus transcend the temporal and geographical setting of the text for her worldwide readers:

> Je n'avais pas besoin de localiser et de donner des noms géographiques en particulier […] il me plaisait que ce soit dans la brume du bain et que quiconque puisse s'identifier à ce paysage-là, à ces paysages, à ces femmes, à leurs rêveries, à leurs colères. […] ce sont les femmes entre elles, ensemble, qu'elles soient en Orient ou en Occident, elles parlent des mêmes choses…[281]

280 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, p. 102.
281 Krouch-Guilhem.

Being present in a purely feminine space, away from masculine discourse, the hammam is therefore a favourable place for experimentation and revelation of feelings or repressed desires for women. The female bodies in the hammam are sensual and unrestricted, a freedom contrasting with the physical restraint they must communicate outside the walls of the bathhouse. The woman's body is no longer a burden and the woman herself no longer rendered a dangerous being for men (supposedly considered impure due to her menses, and a source of temptation) since she is in a feminine space denied to men and their discourse or misogyny.

Chapter Four: Rayhana Obermeyer *À mon âge je me cache encore pour fumer* (2016)

> *"The hammam has established itself from the philosophical and ancestral point of view as a cathartic place of disclosure. [...] the hammam is one of the few places where a woman can go without reprimand."* [282]

The French-Algerian film director Rayhana Obermeyer reflects through this statement on the importance of the hammam in the Maghreb and its long-lasting role and importance in Algerian women's everyday life. It is in an interview on her film *À mon âge je me cache encore pour fumer* (2016) that the French-Algerian filmmaker explains her choice of setting for the film and the reason behind choosing the hammam. Obermeyer stresses the fact that the hammam has had a long standing, ancestral importance in the Arab-Muslim society from which she is originated. The hammam procures a safe place of 'mise à nue', away from the restraints or reprimands of the patriarchal society in most Arab-Muslim societies, such as Algeria. Unlike any other place, women feel safe enough inside the hammam to externalise their uncertainties and hardships encountered every day in a therapeutic 'cathartic' manner.

In this chapter, I argue that in *À mon âge je me cache encore pour fumer,* Rayhana Obermeyer expresses female voices and lived bodies by portraying Arab actresses using

[282] Rayhana Obermeyer in 'Anecdotes Du Film À Mon Âge Je Me cache Encore Pour Fumer - AlloCiné'. [My translation].

the Algerian Arabic language 'for authenticity', to represent women in search of emancipation from Islamist oppression and patriarchal misogyny during the decade of the Civil War in Algeria (1992-2002) and on violence and discrimination against women.[283] The choice of this film stems not only from the desire to highlight the filmography of Algerian women - which so far is very rare - but also to investigate an intimist filmic representation of the women's hammam and the women who gather inside it and experience it. Indeed, Obermeyer's *A mon âge* can be associated with what Malika Laïchour Romane designates as a 'cinéma de l'intime', as the film touches upon its main components, mainly the 'private, […] lived experience' and the 'links between one individual to another, to others', filmed inside what I interpret as an experienced / lived hammam.[284]

In *À mon âge,* Obermeyer polyphonically paints portraits of Algerian women during the Algerian Civil war, who intermingle and gather inside the hammam to temporarily escape from their everyday life and from the war atrocities they witness outside the hammam walls. Filmed in 2016, *À mon âge* tells the story of nine female protagonists in a hammam in Algiers in 1995 during the Algerian Civil War.

It is important to highlight again here the prevailing attitude during this war and what has resulted in it happening in order to make sense of the context and message of Obermeyer's film. The Civil War lasted from 1992 until 2002 and was referred to as 'the Black Decade'; it opposed the Algerian state in place and Islamist parties who participated in political elections to implement a religion-based state. After winning the first round of elections, the Islamist political party was refused further participation in elections and the party was dismantled to keep the existing regime. This resulted in more than a

283 'Avant-Première Au Capitole: "A mon âge je me cache encore pour fumer" de Rayhana' (Suisse: Cinémathèque Suisse, 2017).
284 Romane.

hundred thousand civilian deaths as casualty by the end of the war.[285] Islamists instituted fear by random mass murders and attacks on the army and civilians, including journalists and reporters, teachers, writers, and artists, but also targeted assassinations of women who refused to follow their extremist religious commandments.

While the noise of an attack resounds in the streets of Algiers, Fatima the hammam manager and masseuse in the film witnesses the incident from afar, becomes frightened and rushes to the hammam for protection. Once safely inside she cleans the hammam together with Samia, the second masseuse, to prepare for opening before customers start to arrive. Meriem, pregnant out of wedlock, has been beaten and threatened by her brother who has returned from France, to avenge his honour. Meriem comes to Fatima for help, and the latter decides to hide her in the hammam.

Throughout the film Fatima and Samia tend to the hammam and to its visitors while the intimacy of this isolated space from the outside world, by its architecture and its exclusivity to women, gradually exposes women's bodies, and their voices through bathing rituals and emotional dialogues. Each character has a pain to share, a trauma to reveal, or a joyous moment to share collectively, inside the hammam's quarters. Kelthoum shares her excitement for her husband's return after being deployed for three months as well as the excitement one feels during sexual intercourse. Samia continuously shares with the other women her hopes of marrying soon, all the while Fatima and the other women try to find Samia a mother-in-law inside the hammam. Nadia, on the other hand, expresses her happiness once she received her official divorce papers. During the film, Aicha, Nadia's ex-mother-in-law, confronts her son's now ex-wife and shames her for

285 The armed conflict opposed the Algerian government, aided by the National People's Army (ANP), and Islamist groups (GIA: Islamist Armed Group, MIA: Islamist Armed Movement) who wanted to establish an Islamist state, initially caused by the cancellation of a close election of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

wanting to divorce, and for not giving her grandchildren. Louisa, in her sixties, shares with the other women her own story of being trapped into marrying a much older man at eleven years old, but later confesses she has found sexual gratification with her brother-in-law. Zahia, an Islamist's widow, has a poignant confrontation with Nadia later in the story on Islamist diktat, one defending their cause while the latter denounces their cruelty.

The film's denouement ensues when Mohamed, Meriem's Islamist brother, comes to the hammam to avenge his 'honour', which has been 'tarnished' by Meriem's pregnancy, with the help of other Islamists.[286] Through the multiple characters used by Obermeyer, one can witness a new approach to the agency of Maghrebi women, characterizing the symbolism of rejection: of control over their bodies, of being silent, of society and of religion. Obermeyer explains herself in an interview:

> I didn't make this film to get awards or honours. I wanted to help change the mentality of many people out there who still think women are inferior and must be suppressed. The film is for all those women who were always muffled for what they believe in and to remind them that they are independent human being, just like men. They too have desires, politics, and could not be concealed within four walls.[287]

286 Rayhana Obermeyer, *À Mon Âge Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer* (Algeria - France - Greece: Les Films du Losange, 2016). [I have translated all citations from this source from French or Arabic (Algerian dialect uses both languages interchangeably)]
287 Gopika K. P., 'Interview: Challenging Fanatics Is Passport to Death: Rayhana Obermeyer.', *Onmanorama*, 2017.

During the context of religious repression in Algeria in the 1990s, Islamists attempted to install a more conservative lifestyle after the modernisation and secularisation which emerged during French rule. Extremists forced women to veil and cover themselves but also forbade them from their sacred hammam visits.[288] However,

> It was to forget the resistance of women [...] to the expropriation of a space won by them since the beginning, and the prosaic — but vital — character of body care in a city hit like so many others by water cuts... [The Islamists] have won the battle of the veil, essential in performing the symbol, but lost that of the hammam, decisive in that of the body, by its ability to join the intimate and the social, and the awareness of self.[289]

Religious and patriarchal repression in Algeria also gave rise to the practice of severe gender segregation. In this fundamentalist ideology, male is synonymous with the outside sphere while the female, on the other hand, is automatically attributed with the private sphere. In considering the women's hammam (gendered by nature and sacred due of its intimacy) as a Bachelardian private space, Bollnow similarly contrasts Bachelard's private space to the outside space of the town: the former is the private space of females, experienced as peaceful and intimate, the latter is the public space of men, experienced as dangerous and threatening.[290] How then does *À mon âge* depict the experience of female characters *inside* the private space of the hammam, and *outside* it?

288 'À Alger, en 1994-1995, le GIA a décrété l'interdiction du hammam et aurait même mitraillé l'un de ces établissements'.
289 Carlier, p. 1328.
290 Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Christine Shuttleworth, and Joseph Kohlmaier, *Human Space*, 2020, p. 78.

The 'Inside' / 'Outside' notions in relation to the 'experienced' women's hammam:

Reminiscent of Bachelard's lived space as 'being within limits that protect', Muslim societies like Algeria show a strong parallel between the 'protective' structure and architecture of the traditional hammam and the outside domain. [291] Descriptions and interpretations of the traditional hammam are thus often adorned with a set of opposing homologies when compared to the public sphere, moderated by men: 'feminine / masculine'; 'obscurity / light'; 'inside / outside'; 'nude / veiled'; 'sheltering / oppressive'.[292]

In the film's context of the Civil War in Algeria, the public spaces were moderated following misogynistic Islamist commandments which led the public sphere to be 'rendered a dangerous place for over a decade'.[293] In other words, the public sphere belonged to men who were in control of Algerian society, the same men who veiled most women against their will and forbade them from equally occupying the outside public sphere as freely as one should. We can thus say in the context of this film that the 'public' sphere and the outside world, as opposed to the hammam, can be associated with 'men' and their misogynist control over it which has segregated women to the private and domestic spheres. On the other hand, since the women's hammam is monitored and managed by women only as it is forbidden to men, this 'private' intimate sphere can be associated with 'female' presence and control. This distinction between the interior of the hammam, and the exterior world is further attested by the filmmaker who explains: 'Le

291 Gaston Bachelard as cited by Xiaoshan Yang, *The Poetics of Space:*, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere* (Orion Press, 2017), p. xxxii.
292 Carlier, p. 1310.
293 Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre Invisible: Algérie, Années 90*, Volume 90 (Presses de Sciences Politiques, 2001), p. 94.

hammam c'est le lieu des confidences partagées. On y parle et personne n'en saura rien à l'extérieur', this exterior which is associated with men does not include women's intimate confidences.

As a transitional space due to its architecture and the way it is set up, especially its threshold, the hammam, as it were, permits the body to pass from the outside world to that of the 'royaume obscur' of the hammam, from daylight to dim lighting, and transfers its female visitors from the 'dangerous' public male world to that of the 'protective' women's hammam.[294] In most cases, once the hammam threshold is crossed, there is typically a small corridor which is a space of transition between the outdoor environment, and the interior of the hammam, as a way of keeping a clear separation, and for the warm ambiance inside to always stay welcoming for its visitors. Interestingly, in the film *A mon âge* the actual separation between the hammam's main entrance is displayed as an iron door while it is generally a wooden arched portal. The iron door of *A mon âge* is also seconded by a curtain, hung from the inside, for extra shielding against unwanted gazes, and to signify to male visitors that it is the women's session. Moreover, the actual corridor we typically see in hammams after entering from the exterior door is in the film separated by a small court, with steps going down from the main entrance to another smaller entrance which finally gives way to a corridor leading to the hammam's main chamber.

In some scenes, the exterior door's bull's eye window is also given special attention, like a window to the outside (men's) world from the women's hammam, and vice versa. The bull's eye also provides further protection for women inside the hammam by enabling them to safely know who is trying to enter the hammam, and thus, to chase away any male trespassers.

294 Assia Djebar, p. 75; Bachelard, xxxii; Stora, p. 57.

When Obermeyer portrays the outside atmosphere of the women's hammam, the filmmaker highlights the heavy contrast of the 'fearsome', 'nightmarish' outside in comparison with the 'limits' of the hammam 'that protect'.[295]

After the opening scene of the film which displays a long shot of the rooftops of Algiers, the camera gradually ascends to frame Fatima's appartement balcony, as Fatima is seen solicited by her husband once inside the appartement for sexual gratification, which she refuses by pushing him away. The husband then violently forces Fatima into non-consensual intercourse while she remains stoic. The entire scene unfolds in total silence – aggravating even more the sense of fatalist powerlessness of Fatima and other women like her – who suffer while total impunity and silence are sustained. This particular scene is reminiscent of Gillo Pontecorvo's *La bataille d'Alger* (1965), where the same technique is used to film a scene in which an Algerian combatant is tortured by the colonial police, captured from afar and in complete silence. One can argue here that Obermeyer used this scene as a reference to Pontecorvo's famous scene in his film, an allusion to the fact that violence was / is perpetuated and silence around what happened maintained, but instead of the coloniser perpetuating it, it is now at the colonised man who re-enacts it with his female compatriot, who is victim of both types of patriarchal oppression.

In another outdoor shot which frames the streets of Algiers, Fatima is seen wearing a veil and a djellaba - a long ample tunic which hides the entire body, as she leaves her apartment building. She is portrayed distressed and fearful as she then stops at a cigarette-selling kiosk held by a young man, who appears to know Fatima as he instantly stands up and gives Fatima a pack of cigarettes, while both avoid looking at each other to not bring attention to them. The scene here displays the apparent fear of reprimand in

295 Bachelard cited by Yang, p. xxxii.

women such as Fatima to do something as simple as buying cigarettes without risking being chastised by misogynistic men who deem smoking a 'sin'.[296]

Later, Fatima is seen hastily running other errands before opening the women's hammam, such as purchasing oranges for the hammam visitors to enjoy after their bathing session. At that same time, Meriem is seen frantically running on the streets, wearing a djellaba and a thrown-over veil with a face covered in bruises from the violent assaults at the hands of her brother before she escaped to go the women's hammam for safety. Fatima notices Meriem, already knowing about Meriem's pregnancy out of wedlock, as the rumours had spread across the city and calls after her to try and help her. But Meriem does not stop running, knowing she is not safe to stand outside and keeps running until she gets to a safe place, the women's hammam. On her way to the hammam, Fatima is filmed walking in the street until she hears a loud explosion and sees an exploded car at a small distance from her, followed by cries of fright, then people running towards Fatima. In these outdoor scenes, Fatima is portrayed as a frightened female witness to what a normal day during the Civil War in Algeria looked like, with exploding

296 Gopika K. P., 'Interview: Challenging Fanatics Is Passport to Death: Rayhana Obermeyer.', *Onmanorama*, 2017.

car bombs, people screaming and running everywhere, and staring bearded men who intimidate women, even if veiled, who wander outside.

All the other female characters filmed throughout the outdoor scenes are portrayed wearing veils and djellabas to hide their bodies while hastily running errands in the market alongside Fatima, to make their 'dangerous' trip on the streets as short as possible. Throughout the outside scenes, frowning, bearded men wearing traditional Islamic abayas (long tunic for men) are portrayed staring to intimidate passers-by and Fatima, who is seen rushing to the safety of the hammam.

Bearded men are particularly feared because they are commonly associated with the terrorising Islamist group, who at any moment might cause a car-bombing, kidnap a woman, or assassinate someone.[297] Other scenes that Obermeyer uses to paint the outside heavy atmosphere is when Fatima is about to get to the hammam, and men - some bearded - are seen leaving the hammam with their sons, all wearing long abayas and all

297 Meredeth Turshen, 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?', *Social Research*, 69.3 (2002), 889–911; Stora.

uncomfortably staring at Fatima, although she is wearing a veil and a djellaba. One of the little boys is portrayed holding a toy sword, which he points towards Fatima, the only woman around, in a manner where he is mimicking an assassination, while he utters the words that are stereotypically associated with terrorist attacks: 'Allahou akbar… Allahou akbar'.

The few scenes used to film the outside atmosphere mirror the horrors of what a day was like in Algeria during the Civil War. The film here displays the period which was particularly known to be a year when the Civil War was at its peak and Islamist diktat, oppression, and terrorism was prevailing among men, who also projected this mindset and propaganda into the younger generation of men. Forcefully veiling women during the Civil War in Algeria was perceived as a means of control in a society where the question of family honour is central, as previously discussed.

While the earliest Muslim societies protected women from invaders, from slavery, to preserve them, fundamentalist doctrine uses the veil for the purpose of supposedly protecting men from temptation, thus discriminating against women, as temptresses. This shift in perspective highlights a patriarchal system, accusing women of the fall of mankind and treating them as guilty of original sin. The shift in meaning that has taken place in the history of this veiling tradition - from the protection of women to the protection of male honor - attests to the marginalization of women in society and more particularly within the public and political sphere: women have lost their freedom in space, movement and speech. The veil, throughout history, then denounces the political system that excludes them. Lifting the veil on women and portraying them bare, in every sense, becomes a revolutionary act.

Un-veiling women's bodies inside the hammam:

In wrongfully instrumentalizing the *shari'a* (religious law, Islam), the new Islamist censors perversely won the battle of the veil, as an essential signifier of power over women's bodies, they nevertheless lost that of the hammam, by its ability to combine the intimate and the social, self-control and control of public space.[298] The hammam is therefore part of a subverted world order. The use of the bath is transformed into a social issue, both practical and symbolic, and ceases to be reduced to an ordinary subject of domestic conflict, because before that the woman only asks her husband for permission. It refers, for women, to the redefinition of their roles and status, starting with the social control of their body, in its signage and its movement, its kinesis and its kinesthesia. Standardized for centuries, the very power of integrating the hammam into the *hexis* (way of being) and *ethos* (moral character) of visitors to the hammam points it to criticism in times of crisis. Long invisible within the irreversible interplay of social changes, it suddenly poses a problem, because it is at the heart of the normative representation of the classification between the sexes; it becomes disturbing, if not enigmatic, by its capacity to rebuild a world of women, more autonomous and freer.

The image of the hammam and the behaviour in the bath mainly concerned the idea management men have of women, the idea that the latter is the one holding the 'masculine' gaze inside it, and an increasingly strong sense of self. The practice and the representation of the body, like those of the place, affect their condition as much as their desire; they primarily concern their individual and collective identity. Women inside the hammam for instance are liberated from the male gaze but they also reverse the control

298 Carlier, p. 1313.

of who holds the gaze. In one scene inside the hammam, a plumber is exceptionally allowed to enter the women's sanctuary to fix the drainage system. As he stands at the threshold of the hammam, Fatima covers his entire head and grabs his arm to walk him through. Along the way, the women gather inside the hot room to peek through the door frame and gaze upon this stranger, whose presence is unusual, forbidden, but lustful for the female characters who, ironically, are now the ones objectifying the other sex, without his knowledge or ability to gaze back at them:

> 'My God, a man at the door! - Not any man, it's the plumber. - Check out his butt. […] - Nice equipment up front! Saucy!'[299]

The transgressive performance of the female characters inside the hammam lies in the way the characters' bodies get rid of, and challenge, some of the restrictions particularly related to modesty and the concealment of the body in a controlling patriarchal society. The stories women's bodies articulate are as crucial as the voices that emanate from them.

299 Obermeyer.

Representing in a purely feminine space, outside the usual domestic sphere, the hammam is therefore a favourable place for experimentation and revelation of feelings or repressed desires in a Muslim society. The female bodies in the hammam are sensual and unrestricted, a freedom contrasting with the physical restraint they must communicate outside the walls of the bath. The woman's body is no longer a burden and she herself is no longer a dangerous being for men (because considered impure by due to her menses, and a source of temptation) since she is in an enclosed space to which men do not have access.

Self-exploration through cultural and sexual affirmation is undoubtedly an important experience linked to the hammam ritual. Indeed, by regaining control over their own bodies, sexuality and eroticism, women in Obermeyer's hammam experience physical emancipation.[300] In her manuscript *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writings*, Brinda J. Mehta confirms that inside the hammam:

> The exploration of the body augments its desirability whereby slow, rhythmic, and circular movements, together with lubrification by water, become a highly sensual act. in other words, massages heighten the body's perception of itself as a source of pleasure.[301]

The female characters are repeatedly portrayed joyously nude, dancing, smoking, and gossiping inside the

300 Brinda J. Mehta, 'The Rituals of the Female Body', in *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (Sycaruse University Press, 2007), p. 318 (p. 131).
301 Mehta, p. 131.

hammam, whereas outside the hammam they are portrayed completely covered with veils and *djellabas*, silent, distressed, and resigned. The bodies of the women find themselves caught in the fabric of space they embody and form one.

The characters' relationship to their bodies is transformed inside the hammam, which appears as an extension of their bodily space. The hammam, I argue, is an extension of the veils and *djellabas* of the women who remove them inside. The 'safety' procured by the hammam's walls protects, as the veil is said to, from men and the dangerous outside which men control. The hammam is the women's extra-bodily layer of protection from the outside world and male gazes. Also, if in the external environment of the hammam, governed by men, the Algerian woman had to cover her body, in the hammam on the contrary, her nudity is a prerequisite.

The body condition of women dressed in several layers of clothing forced on them in the 'outside' was reversed in the 'inside' of the hammam where taking them off is a must for the bathing experience. The more the female characters venture into the hammam and its different chambers (gradually heated), the more they are gradually uncovered as they discover and expose their bodies and selves (warm / fully clothed -> hot / partially clothed with a *fouta* -> hottest / fully nude to perform cleaning, beautifying, and kinesis rituals) through the poetic deployment of transitional metamorphic images.

The visual sense takes over as a mix of bare women, sitting and chatting, hunching while washing their hair or their children, or lying on the floor tiles while Fatima or Samia rub them. Women are either sitting in groups, a mother with her children, or alone as they simultaneously rub, clean, and back rub each other, in the steamy hot chamber of the hammam that harbours their nude, or semi-nude bodies.

Throughout the film, Obermeyer avoided erotic close ups of the women's bodies and intimate parts when her female characters are filmed casually bathing inside the hot chamber of the hammam, or the changing room where they are seen changing or taking their clothes off to enter the hot room. Obermeyer displays the hammam atmosphere and focuses on the different exchanges and rituals the hammam harbours, avoiding unnecessary objectifications – especially those unbeknownst to the subjects themselves - which male representations have historically ever more performed in representing women's bodies.[302] In some exceptions, the filmmaker chose to get closer to the skins of women who, on the contrary, consensually display eroticism and sensuality inside the hammam of women who chose to explore their bodies and sexuality. One of such scenes takes place inside the hammam and sensually reunites Samia, the young unmarried masseuse, and Nadia, the recently divorced university graduate.

The scene is set on a massage slab, in a dimly lit hot room, while the echo of the running water accentuates the vibrations of the environment where the bodies of our two characters are portrayed relaxed, wearing a sultrily wet cloth that only partially covers their breasts and private parts, all the while embracing each other and Nadia proceeds to

302 Sheila Petty, *Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film, by Kaya Davies Hayon*, *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 2021; Ali Behdad, 'The Orientalist Photograph: An Object of Comparison', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 43.2 (2016), 265–81; Efterpi Mitsi, 'Private Rituals and Public Selves : The Turkish Bath in Women ' s Travel Writing : Women Negotiating , Subverting , Appropriating Public and Private Space Private Rituals and Public Selves : The Turkish Bath in Women ' s Travel Writing Efterpi Mitsi', September, 2019.

caress Samia's body, while Samia is seen holding her own cloth and pressing her legs together as if shying to express her sexual desires when talking about self-pleasuring with Nadia:

'- Did you already feel those things?

- What things?

- When you make love.

- That's called '*un orgasme*'[303]

- And in Arabic?

- I don't know. I don't think we have a word for it.

- I already felt it.

- Who was the lucky guy?

- Are you crazy?

- A lucky girl?

- What?! - Alone, I do it often, especially before sleep.

- So, you're normal.'[304]

Throughout the scene, the camera fluctuates and focuses more and more on the bodies and the sweaty skins of the two characters, urging the viewers to immerse themselves in this scene and embrace the sensuality of these two

303 The word orgasm is pronounced in French in the film, while most of the dialogues are in Algerian Arabic, to highlight the non-existence of the word in the Arabic language, and by extension, a lack of sexual awareness in the Arab-Muslim culture, as it is a taboo subject.
304 Obermeyer.

women in need of self-love, and love in a time of terror and 'shortages' in essential human needs, especially 'love'.[305]

In displaying heart-felt discussions and rants about their own individual experiences and situation as silenced women in a world of men, Obermeyer's camera changes the atmosphere of the room, the environment gets silent and focuses on the words coming out of these women. The camera is still and does not focus in a sensual manner on the body shapes. The women's barely covered bodies are portrayed realistically and are not embellished to the gaze of the viewers and fantasy, on the contrary, pendulous breasts, bigger and smaller figures, wrinkles and above all scars to give voice to their bodies and their individual stories are offered. Accordingly, what do the female characters talk about inside the hammam?

Un-veiling 'feminine discourse' inside the hammam:

The hammam's atmosphere and experience with one's body and that of other women creates a favourable agenda to liberate Obermeyer's female characters' voices, to confide and bond with each other, as women who share the same oppressive social, cultural, and political situation. Obermeyer creates thus a dialogical space, in other words, a space which refutes the dominant male discourse, reacts to this discourse and opposing it to another, that of women, and of freedom of expression.

In *À mon âge*, the dialogues inside the hammam are interested in the questions, debates and anxieties in the direct environment and present reality of Maghrebi women, entertaining and cultivating thus a feminine discourse in all intimacy. Rayhana Obermeyer explains in an interview how her choice of the women's hammam as setting helps to

305 Obermeyer.

'retrouver au cinéma l'authenticité du mot si fort', of inscribing one's voice against the oppressive one, to 'restituer cette oralité de l'Arabe dialectal populaire [des femmes Algériennes]'.[306] Indeed, Obermeyer, just as Djebar and Sebbar, give resonance and impact to feminine discourse; voices of women who are intimidated to speak outside of an all-female space where masculine discourse and oppression reins 'à l'extérieur':

> [Le hammam] est le lieu en Algérie, et dans le monde arabe, le plus populaire où se retrouvent les femmes. Elles y vont entre amies et, même si les visages sont inconnus, très vite les *bavardages (chatting)* sont pour toutes. Le hammam est un véritable lieu de liberté. Elles y parlent d'amour, des violences qu'elles subissent, de l'espoir d'une vie meilleure... Au hammam, dans cette brume, les larmes ne se voient pas, mais on entend parfois des éclats de rire. Le hammam est le lieu des confidences partagées. On y parle *et personne n'en saura rien à l'extérieur*.[307]

In Obermeyer's film, the female characters create, in several manners, a refuge away from the male world, where they can express themselves without restraint to harbour their feminine discourse. In *À mon âge*, Obermeyer utilises the hammam, as a locus, to satisfy the female characters' 'need' for non-mixing to express their voices. This need is only met in the hammam as the female characters depicted yearn for the hammam session and the comfort it brings them. Even before the hammam opens, while the characters Fatima and Samia are still cleaning the hammam, women start impatiently knocking at the external hammam door, eager to be let inside and away from the outside world. This apparent

306 Samia Messaoudi, 'Rayhana: "À Mon Âge Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer" - Clara Magazine', *161*, May 2017.
307 Messaoudi, 'Rayhana: "À Mon Âge Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer" - Clara Magazine'.

eagerness, and the different commentaries the characters make throughout the narrative about their hammam experience indicate the female characters' essential need to unwind, relax and exchange: 'finally!' one of the visitors exclaims as Fatima opens the hammam external door to let them in while explaining it is not yet the time for the opening to the visitors as they pour inside the hammam, undisturbed, disregarding Fatima's remarks.

The female characters' chatter is displayed throughout the film as a source of pleasure, exchange and solidarity, the act of speaking of the female characters emphasises the freedom of women who discover their differences, and their individual histories and experiences in the women's hammam. The atmosphere of excitement inside Obermeyer's hammam is also accentuated by the acoustics reverberating from the sound of voices and laughter that fill the different chambers where her female characters gather.

Harbouring performativity, the mingling and socialisation of the public hammam becomes a place conducive to shapeless, liquid, blurring women's free speech among themselves. In certain scenes, it is obvious that the overlapping exchanges seek less to clearly report all the words uttered by the multiple voices than to transmit the effect of solidarity and exaltation produced by the chatter that is grafted to the bodies and decorum of the hammam. Such a simulacrum of women's chatter and feminine discourse affirms the confidence felt when one is at home between equals, while the exchanges create an impression of deliverance after a period of imposed silence, and capture the sensation of intense noise, of *égosillements* and indistinct words coming from crowded places.[308] The sound effects of water, profuse words, as well as the murmurs, the excitement and the laughter of adults and children and vitality come to dress the hammam. The effect of community is reflected in the presence of interchangeable voices;

308 Jones, p. 197.

to say is to be happy to be there: 'Ah, you girls don't know how much I needed this (hammam session)'[309]

The women's hammam atmosphere harbours exchange and bonding on the characters' sexual life without restraint or taboo, which otherwise would not be possible outside the hammam. One such instance is found in a scene reuniting Kelthoum, the happily married woman of the group, Fatima the masseuse, and Louisa, the openminded sexagenarian, as they chat over their sex life. Kelthoum's husband is dispatched away every three months due to his job as a military man, Kelthoum is left yearning for her husband's touch. She shares with the other women her excitement over her husband's return:

> - I dream of it. I'm burning. Once every 3 months, I have spiderwebs down there! […] My honey's only staying one night. They're on strike. Poor thing…Poor me! God heard me; my period ended this morning. I'll have fun tonight![310]

In another scene, Samia, the young and celibate character, and Nadia, the happily divorced, university-educated, and nonconformist character, confide in each other inside the hammam's hot room where Samia shares her fantasies with her future husband:

> [I would] take off his jacket, shower him, give him his pyjamas. […] I slip into the bedroom, put on my transparent nightgown, loosen my hair, get into bed. So, he comes! He lies down next to me […] my

309 Obermeyer.
310 Obermeyer.

> body touches his, he smells my perfume, I close my eyes, he gets on me and… And they had many children![311]

Although men are absent physically inside the hammam, due to its gendered nature, they are however present inside the women's hammam through the female characters' feminine discourse as they voice their frustrations with, and sometimes hatred of the other sex in all intimacy. All throughout the film, several explicit references to men are confided to denounce male perversion and the traumatic experiences with the other sex in their everyday life. Obermeyer here, gives her characters voices to denounce misogyny.

Obermeyer's female characters also rant to engage in what Deborah Jones calls the act of 'bitching',[312] to denounce and voice the atrocities committed by men and families in general who have been silent and accepted to marry their young daughters to older men. The older generation, illiterate due to colonial presence and lack of funds, represented here with the character of Louisa, exclaims in a heartfelt testimony:

> I was scared of men. Not scared, I don't like them. The idea of someone touching my private parts scared me. Until my wedding night. I thought it was just for peeing. - How old were you? – Eleven years old. […] A friend of my father. […] This time, instead of sweets he dropped his pants […] I felt his damp hands on my thighs. He was standing there, naked. He looked at me, moist eyes, saliva beading on his lips. I was so afraid I peed myself.[313]

311 Obermeyer.
312 Jones.
313 Obermeyer.

In the first scenes of the film, while the characters of Samia and Fatima are cleaning the hammam after the men's morning hammam session, Fatima tackles and denounces in a sarcastic tone her disgust of men's perverse practices inside the hammam, which is to perform onanism in the hammam's hot room after the women's session:

> Scrub, it stinks. - Why not in the toilets? - Here it smells of women, they orgasm in a second. - I wouldn't like a guy to masturbate thinking of me. No risk there, they don't like me. - They'd masturbate to a fly. - I'm not a fly. - Skinny enough.[314]

In another instance in the film, the women horrifyingly notice that the children are playing with a used prophylactic. The filmmaker intentionally used this scene to infer how men, who oppress women in a patriarchal society, are on the other hand, going against its principles by performing sexual activities that they condemn, with one another.

Obermeyer further highlights men's hypocrisy, when she reunites Kelthoum, Louisa, and Fatima as they confide with each other on their sex life. Fatima confesses that her husband proceeds to perform alternative sexual acts by 'taking' her even when she has her menses: 'Mine thinks it's dirty and impure, so he takes me from…' embarrassed, Fatima refuses to be explicit and stays silent, expressing herself through her eyes.[315] Louisa, on the other hand, shares that her husband does not simply care whether his wife has her menses or not, if it's 'impure' as dictated by religion, or not, as he stops at nothing to satisfy his libidinal needs: 'My old man, period or not…'.[316] Since performing intercourse during a woman's menstruation cycle and sodomy are both forbidden in

314 Obermeyer.
315 Obermeyer
316 Obermeyer.

Islam,[317] Obermeyer highlights men's perversity in only following religious practices when the latter favours men's desires and agendas.

The female characters' dialogues follow one another and sometimes overlap once inside the private women's world of the hammam in which friendships – but also sometimes disputes - between women are formed and unravelled in all intimacy. The hammam's sheltered atmosphere gives women a safe space to also voice their diverging political and religious opinions, leading sometimes to heated arguments. One such instance is portrayed by Obermeyer in a scene which opposes Zahia, wife of a late Islamist Emir who shares her husband's beliefs and defends his horrific crimes, and Nadia who represents the modern educated Algerian woman, victim of Islamists' persecutions.

The filmmaker also makes sure to highlight the diverse ideologies and political views, here including how some women also implicitly or explicitly transmitted the oppressive Islamist ideology prevailing during the 1990s in Algeria while others wanted to liberate themselves from extremists' intimidations and bring sympathisers' attention to the hypocrisy of their cause:

- We only fear God.

- You don't fear God, you want to be God! Behind your veils and beards, all murderers!

- The veil protects us from temptation. And the 'bearded ones' protect us from despots.

- Murdered children, despots?

317 Omar M. Khasawneh and Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh, *Teacher Education from an Islamic Perspective*, *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), x; Abdelwahab Bouhdiba and Alan Sheridan, *Sexuality in Islam*, ed. by Trans by Alan Sheridan, *Sexuality in Islam*, Saqi Books (London: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), xx, p. 156.

- All wars are dirty.

- I'll fight against your extremist republic if I must ally with the devil![318]

Throughout *À mon âge*, as in the scene above, Obermeyer caricaturises some female characters to warn how women too, can verbally oppress other women by ventriloquising masculine discourse, conditioned to it from early childhood.[319] The character of Zahia emulates and retroflexes masculine discourse and mimics corresponding masculinist attitudes, extremist and / or misogynistic.

As a matchmaking place for matrimony, it is traditionally in the hammam that marriage is prepared and is thus accomplished as a rite of passage.[320] The mothers - as 'guardians' of traditions and moral standards of the masculinist society and of their sons' ideal woman - seek inside the hammam an eligible party for their male relatives. It is at this same time, that the ambivalence of the hammam takes shape. Indeed, the feminine gaze and the hierarchy during matchmaking is witnessed between women because the young girls are observed in their bodies and tested in their behaviours. Young women's mothers or the hammam manager, who are generally informed on all the hammam visitors, are questioned about young women's competences in order to be assessed for marriage by prospective mothers-in-laws. In *À mon âge*, Obermeyer chose to display this tradition, which Jones and Irigaray would refer to as an embodiment of the masculine discourse and behaviour, with sarcasm and exaggeration. Obermeyer criticises in this manner this tradition to highlight how women are also objectified by other women who assess them for their male relatives by mirroring and projecting the latter's gaze for what

318 Carbin.
319 Irigaray, V; Jones.
320 Carlier, p. 1313.

qualifies a good match. Obermeyer filmed the scene of matchmaking by exaggerating the process of selecting a bride for one's son and implementing humour by comparing the bride to an object that is evaluated by the 'buyer' (prospective mother-in-law) and advertised by the 'seller(s)' (the mother or matchmaker). As an advertised 'object', Samia is described by her 'sellers' as 'a good investment' - in a 'transaction' between Fatima, Kelthoum, and Nadia, and the expat Madame Mouni who is looking to marry her son:

> - Here (pointing to Samia), For your son […] You take her or not? What do you do for a living (speaking to Samia)? - Nothing. – Good. How old are you?
> - Twenty-nine (Fatima). - And a half (Samia).
> - That's a little old.
> - Her parents don't want to lose her. She's a washing machine. See these hands? They do your laundry whiter than white. And embroidery, knitting, crochet...
> - And her cooking?
> - People dream of her cooking. Tajines! Her tajines! Chorba, finger-lickin' good. Her cakes? The best *makroud* in the district, *gazelle horns* (traditional Algerian biscuits) [...].
> - My son loves food.
> - Men, you've got to satisfy their stomachs and below. What is a man? A stomach and a penis.

Obermeyer stresses how men, and some women, obsess over virginity, as a crucial requirement for young women who desire to marry, but also as a certificate of virtue in such Muslim societies. If a woman loses her virginity, she is shamed, threatened but also

labelled as 'broken', as opposed to 'intact', basically reducing women to genitalia, and evaluating their worth by the state of the latter. Words such as 'broken' and 'intact' are the product of the prevailing misogynistic masculine discourse, used to oppress women. Obermeyer makes use of this language in *À mon âge* to show how women themselves perpetuate this archaic and misogynistic masculine discourse by mimicking it to talk about other women, amongst women. The use of such a language of oppression by women is labelled by for Deborah Jones as 'scandal'. Jones defines this type of oral culture as 'a considered judging of the behaviour of others, and women in particular. It is usually made in terms of the domestic morality, of which women have been appointed guardians'.[321] One such instance where scandal discourse is displayed in the film is when the women are gathered inside the hot chamber of the hammam while Kelthoum expresses her worry about Meriem who is threatened by her brother for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Since getting pregnant presupposes that a woman has to have sexual intercourse and thus lose her virginity in the process, Louisa shares with Kelthoum and Fatima that 'the poor girl only got pregnant by her presence inside the hammam' after the men's session and the seminal fluid left as a result of the men's perverse practices. One of the other female visitors of the hammam reacts to Louisa's comment with disdain, as she mockingly laughs and replies: 'Bullsh*t! She is 'broken'.[322] The woman's judgemental comment does not however lead to more 'scandal' discourse as the other women either huff at her comment or disregard it by clicking their tongues in disapproval of such a misogynist comment. Fatima also directly reacts to the woman's 'slut-shaming' and bluntly reprimands and silences her, ending thus the scandal discourse.

321 Jones.
322 Obermeyer.

Other female characters do however bring back Meriem's story, as it is 'the talk of the city',[323] but each time this happens, Fatima yet again angrily steps in and terminates the scandal discourse. In one such scene, Madame Mouni bluntly asks Fatima if Samia is a virgin, because she wants to marry her to her son. Madame Mouni's question infuriates Fatima who replies: 'Are you insulting me?', because she is the one matching the pair, and then proceeds to leave, asking Samia to leave with her. Madame Mouni then apologises and explains that she only asked this because she 'heard 'talk' of this pregnant girl. Meriem, I believe'. Fatima, who is very protective of Meriem and the other women, is revolted by such an unacceptable statement and confronts Madame Mouni by shouting at her to 'watch what [she is] saying!', not tolerating anymore of such an oppressive and unfair women-shaming dialogue amongst women, on other women.[324]

Following this, Nadia then partakes in the conversation to appease tensions and proceeds to help finalise Samia's desperate resolutions to get married, under any circumstance, so the latter can flee her parents' house and their constant berating about Samia's 'marriage prospects'.[325] In such a desperate situation, the freethinking and educated Nadia sarcastically mimics Madame Mouni's ventriloquial masculine discourse in order to convince the latter to take Samia as a future wife for her son. She intervenes: 'Samia is 'intact'. Certificate of virginity on delivery'. Madame Mouni, who is only then reassured, replies naively using the same marketing terminology as Nadia had sarcastically used: 'Good deal. I'll take her'.

Another scene is used by Obermeyer in the film where the character of Kalthoum tells the story of her wedding night and how she and her husband were pressured by their

323 Obermeyer.
324 Obermeyer.
325 Obermeyer.

families to prove Kelthoum's virginity through the archaic tradition of the 'blood ceremony', as recounted too by Djebar in *Femmes d'Alger.*

Kelthoum recounts the traumatic experience of her wedding night in a scene filmed inside the hot room of the hammam, Fatima is seen rubbing the back of one of the women who's laying on the hammam floor, while the other women bathe. Louisa is sitting next to Kelthoum, the first is waiting for the henna on her hair to dry up, and the latter for her shaving cream to work, while Samia brushes Kelthoum's hair after asking her about her wedding night. Kelthoum proceeds to confess, with a sad tone, the fear she felt during that night and the reprimands she and her husband received from their families for failing to provide them with the *qmedja*, proof of the bride's virginity, but also of the man's virility. Kelthoum admits she could not let her husband touch her until months later: 'I was scared. He touched me, I cried for months despite our families demanding the *qmedja*. As a consequence, Kelthoum 'was deemed a whore, and he (her husband), impotent' by their families for failing to give them proof of the former's 'purity' and the latter's unquestionable masculinity.

Throughout the film, discussions about archaic traditions and culturally taboo subjects (virginity, sexuality, adultery, onanism) are repeatedly tackled. Such intimate topics and criticism of some oppressive mores are only discussed by the female characters inside the women's hammam, as the ideal intimate locus of feminine discourse 'lieu-de-femmes-entre-elles'. Through these hammam scenes, Obermeyer's oppressed female characters denounce, criticise, or condemn their deeply patriarchal society, the prevailing misogynistic masculine discourse transmitted by men and ventriloquised by women amongst women, and the perpetuation of equally oppressive archaic traditions that have been established by men to ensure control over women. The female characters engage with each other throughout the film and voice their feminine discourse, chatting, bitching

or scandal-ing - all types of dialogues that are only harboured inside the safe atmosphere of the women's hammam.

Although the concepts advanced by Deborah Jones and Luce Irigaray, as second wave feminists, were a result of their experiences and perceptions inside their own Western society during the nineteen eighties and seventies, the various similarities with our own Muslim-Maghrebi society when it comes to Western women's realities during that period of deeply patriarchal oppressive and misogynistic social constraints and hegemony are too substantial and reciprocal to be disengaged from one another. The use of this feminist approach and the feminine discourse categories present, recurrent, and observed in the lieu de femmes entre-elles that is the hammam in an Arab-Muslim context only helps extend the discussions launched by Jones and Irigaray to a transnational, contextually-germane perspective.

Jones's and Irigaray's feminist concepts have been aligned with the experiences of Algerian women within this specific cultural and ideological framework through a contextual social anthropology lens that considers women's experiences in the Maghreb and the historical and religious backgrounds influencing the selected women's writings and the female characters they represent. This has facilitated a contextualization from an insider's emic perspective focusing on the inherent cultural peculiarities that are crucial to our Arab-Muslim Maghrebi society to further assist in comprehending the internal rationale behind the behaviours of the female and male characters, why these behaviours hold significance for them, and why the feminine discourse discloses these.

Along with the specificities proper to our corpus's cultural, social, and religious situations, our discussion here brings together Western and Maghrebi feminine causes in a curated, interrelated and reciprocal manner that ultimately helps enlighten – through a unique

space and discourse – the disclosed, unfiltered voices of Algerian women after the War of Independence and during the Civil War contexts of our feminine corpus.

The next section of this study will engage with the hammam experience itself, and reveal what a centuries-long cultural heritage entails for the women who occupy and experience it, to answer the question: what do women do inside the women's hammam?

Perpetuating rituals pertaining to the 'lived experience' of the women's hammam:

The hammam session, as a lived experience, entails cultural codes and rituals. Similarly, the hammam strengthens the transmission of the cultural knowledge of the community, becoming a decisive factor in its very identity.[326] Ritual is generally defined as referring to rite, which is in itself related to the hammam's architectural structure and the atmosphere it sets as a 'royaume sombre' where women unite and perform different activities and rituals while socializing. As it were, the rites can be defined as being behaviors codified and imposed by the social group, repeating themselves according to a fixed pattern, each time the circumstances to which they are attached occur. The gestures, words, postures, and objects which do not have a utilitarian justification, but a symbolic scope oriented towards communication with supernatural powers.[327]

The notion of rite obeys a code dictated by religious or superstitious beliefs which allow the individual to keep a link with his religion, his customs or traditions, to better understand the things that surround him and specially to organize his life, both social and spiritual. The rite therefore has a meaning, a function very often dictated by a religious

326 Carlier, p. 1319.
327 Tony Lawson and Joan Garrod, *Dictionary of Sociology*, *Dictionary of Sociology* (Armand Colin, 2012).

authority. Ritual activity thus combines two essential notions in anthropology: otherness and identity. The hammam is, for example also the place where the bride bathes before and after the wedding; a ritual depicted in the film. Visiting the hammam certainly allows you to wash yourself, to purify yourself (purifying ablutions for prayer), but also to assert yourself and to register fully in your social group because it allows you to meet people, it is a leisure activity for women who do not go out, it allows them to relax due to the atmosphere and to share practices.

The hammam can therefore be considered as a rite made up of a set of rituals. The question of the rite thus makes it possible to stage the general properties of the social by placing at the heart of the reflection the relations which preside to the production of meaning: the relation of oneself and sense of self, and the relation to others. The hammam in Algeria is a place of exchange and social affirmation. It is a place that makes it possible to mark changes in social status (the rites practiced for young brides and thanks to which, among other things, we see the evolution of the young woman morph from the status of single to that of newly wedded). It is also a place in which the individual fits, poor or rich, young mother or bride, baby, within one's social environment.

Similarly, the hammam can also be considered as a beauty parlour owing to the different beauty rituals performed inside it. Women dye their hair with henna, their bodies are massaged with oils, their skin rubbed, and pubic area shaved in pure self-care and for personal enjoyment. The care given to the body is manifold and carried out with precision and application. The spa-like ritual of the hammam involves, for instance, the use of different beauty products essential to the bathing experience. In *À mon âge*, in one such instance Kelthoum asks Fatima for a shaving cream to prepare for her husband's return from deployment. She is seen applying the cream to her legs, then discreetly to her intimate part while chatting with Louisa and Fatima in a large framed sequence: 'It's a

forest down there. Not one hair will escape […] I'm burning! Quick! Water! Burning or not, tonight I'm f*cking'. At the same time, Fatima is applying henna to Louisa's hair, while other women wash their hair and bodies, and their children's. In several instances women are seen wearing shower caps to keep the henna on their hair, while others are applying different products such (as essential oils, or natural soap) during their hammam ritual.

The hammam is additionally a ceremonial and festive place where marriage is fully socialised and celebration rituals performed. The bridal shower is practiced by brides and the women of her family and future in-laws to celebrate the evolution of the young woman from the status of celibate to that of married life. Rayhana Obermeyer captures this intimacy in *À mon âge* in a particular scene inside the warm room, while a new bride is surrounded by her mother, relatives, and the women inside the room. The bride is covered with the traditional bridal embroidered hammam apparel, *fouta*, styled by jewellery and embellished slippers with high heels. The bride and two other women in each of her sides are portrayed holding candles, *ululating* in celebration as they march towards the hot room to perform the bridal shower,[328] all the while chanting a traditional wedding chant:

Women, open the harem, the beloved is here.

The party is joy to the rhythm of the darbouka. [329]

I'm not worried, the bride's beauty will protect her.

Once the bride completed her bath, women are portrayed gathered in the hammam's main chamber while chanting more traditional Algerian wedding melodies, cheerfully dancing,

328 Ululating is the act of singing youyous, which are long, high-pitched, modulated, and rhythmic cries of joy uttered by women in North Africa to manifest a jovial collective emotion during gatherings and celebrations.

329 A *darbouka* is an Arab musical instrument, a tambourine, or drum, made with leather skin which is stretched over the flared end of a cylindrical body made traditionally of terracotta, and in some instances, of wood or metal.

clapping, and ululating. The bride later on gives Samia her embroidered bridal *fouta,* which is a rite of passage from brides to brides-to-be, because Samia had informed the bride, when the latter entered the hot room, that she was about to get married, because Fatima had just arranged a prospective marriage matchmaking with Madame Mouni for her son.

Although the women's hammam, as we have established, is associated with safety, intimacy, and felicity, it is much like any lived space subject to change and is thus experienced differently at some point or another by the same character(s). The following section considers the 'ambivalence' of the experienced gendered lived space of the women's hammam portrayed in *À mon âge*, and which factors alter its 'liveability'.

Ambivalence of the Hammam: When the Other invades the lived space:

As discussed before in this study, German scholar Gerhard Hoffmann applied the phenomenological notion of lived space to literary approach to explore the way spaces in literary texts are experienced by the narrator or characters. For Hoffmann, lived spaces found in fictional writing, whether literary or cinematic, are 'ambivalent' in the sense that they are not experienced in a fixed manner by the character(s) but are subject to change during a narrative: one space can be experienced as intimate and comforting by a character, but the same space can later on be experienced as ominous by the same character(s) in the same narrative.[330] The women's hammam in *À mon âge* is characterised by this ambivalence.

As a lived space, the same space of the women's hammam is ostensibly subject to change in the film when Islamist men threaten to invade the hammam to murder Meriem who got pregnant out of marriage, causing thus an uproar and disturbing the intimacy and comfort of women inside the hammam. On this ambivalence of the lived space, Bachelard argues that 'the opposition of *outside* and *inside* ceases to have as coefficient its geometrical evidence',[331] and thus, the inside space of the hammam is altered, not by its topography, but by the disturbance caused by Islamist men. These same men further alter the hammam's atmosphere as they break inside the women's hammam court to act on their threats and invade this female-exclusive space.

The character of Mohamed, Meriem's brother, adopted Islamism while sojourning in France for his studies but came back to Algeria once he discovered that his unmarried

330 Gerhard Hoffmann, *Raum, Situation, erzählte Wirklichkeit. Poetologische und historische Studien zum englischen und amerikanischen Roman* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1978).
331 Bachelard as cited by Yang, p. xxxii. (my emphasis)

sister got pregnant. It is during the film's denouement that tensions escalate inside the hammam's previously calm and safe environment when Mohamed - who wants to murder Meriem for causing a scandal and 'dishonour' by her pregnancy - causes a scene outside the hammam once he is notified of his sister's presence inside the hammam. Mohamed is portrayed furious, as he shouts and publicly insults Meriem outside the hammam, ordering her to exit the hammam by threatening to wash his 'honour' with her blood. The entire distressing scene is shot in three separate frames, the first one displays Mohamed violently knocking on the hammam's door from behind the curtain that is hiding the interior of the women's hammam, Samia comes out and is faced by Mohamed's menacing demeanour as he angrily shouts by calling her a 'whore' and demands she calls on Meriem to get out of the hammam. The second camera shot zooms in on Samia's mortified face as she realises that she unknowingly notified Meriem's own brother of the latter's presence inside the hammam. Samia is portrayed horrified and slowly losing her composure as she loses grip and gradually leans on the wall of the hammam's court until she drops on the floor while Mohamed proceeds to shout:

- Meriem! You and your bast*rd will die! No man at home, and she thinks she's free. From your mother's belly. I'll pull you out and kill you! I know you hear me, wh*re!

The third scene simultaneously shows Fatima when she hears the outside uproar from inside the hammam's main chamber, which is the nearest chamber to the hammam's court after the inside door and threshold, disturbing the women's hammam calm atmosphere inside. As soon as Fatima realises it's Meriem's brother, she bravely goes to the exterior hammam door while holding a broom for protection. Fatima displays a composed demeanour while blocking Mohamed off from the hammam door and leaving the door

ajar as she pretends to naively ask him about the reason for his presence there, to calm him down and to not alarm him about her knowledge of Meriem's whereabouts. As Fatima enquires about his presence there, Mohamed introduces himself as Meriem's brother, however, instead of using Meriem's name to refer to her, he uses the word 'Zenia (fornicatress)'. Mohamed's use of this specific term, taken from the Quran, showcases how Mohamed, an Islamist, uses religion and the Islamic religious scripture, which describes a *zenia* as a sinner, to his advantage to justify his personal vendetta, which is the death punishment of his own 'fornicatress' sister for committing a 'sin' and tarnishing his *honour*. As soon as Fatima understands his gruesome intents, she rapidly closes the hammam door shut and tells him to 'leave, it is the women's time'. However, when Mohamed insists to see Meriem and gets violent by forcing open the bull's eye window of the hammam's door after Fatima rushes to close it and stands her ground by angrily shouting at him again to 'get lost! The hammam is the women's *horma*' and that he should abide by his religious principles by respecting the women's *horma* and leave'.[332]

Mohamed aggressively insists on seeing Meriem and proceeds to insult all the women inside for hiding Meriem and rips the curtain, which covers the hammam door from the inside, through the bull's eye window, disrupting thus the women's 'sacred' private space and the protection it provides to Muslim women. Fatima goes inside the hammam and instructs that 'no woman shall leave' although the hammam was about to close and most

332 In Arab-Muslim culture, *horma* is the 'sacred' which shall not be violated, whose etymological origin is 'haram' (taboo, inviolable) and is omnipresent in social life, manifesting itself in a concrete or symbolic way (it can be a place associated to women, or female relatives). Horma also establishes the relationship between the feminine world and the masculine world and revolves around the concealment or protection of women against male strangers (from their gaze and touch). Inviolability of the horma and its privacy is identical to the inviolability of women, because there is homology between the private (concealed) and the woman. What is 'harim', that is to say sacred, venerated, must be respected, defended, and is forbidden to gaze on or to touch by male strangers, to do so would be declared 'haram' (sinful). The concept of *horma* is also found in the word 'harem', which is also used to refer to the women's private quarters, but also to refer to the women or concubines of 'the man of the house'; the harem is a place, or the women, forbidden to male strangers.

women were already wearing their veils, *haïks*, or djellabas to exit the hammam. At the same moment, Mohamed can be heard from inside the hammam, from where the women and Fatima are standing, next to the hammam's threshold, as Mohamed continues to shout, threaten and insult, but this time including all the women inside the hammam by generalising: 'Give me Meriem or I'll slit your throats! All b*tches! Daughters of wh*res!'.

This scene is particularly important in Obermeyer's film, as it displays the hypocrisy of Islamists when it comes to applying the Islamic doctrine, as well as Islamists' resentment and animosity towards women in two ways: Firstly by refusing to respect, and by breaking, the women's *horma* - which is a sin in itself because *horma* in Islam is sacred, as it safeguards women from male strangers – through the act of ripping the curtain which represents the *horma* of the women's hammam as it is an additional protection against male gazers and accidental trespassing, by men. Secondly, by the act of insulting 'all' the women inside the hammam of 'whores', without exception and including their genitors, simply because they are women, whether they are involved in concealing 'the sinner', or not. The latter further exemplify how Islamists, through their acts and prevailing extremist masculine discourse, oppress and alienate women, by perversely associating them with 'filth' and 'lust' which drives men away from their religious duties. This attitude goes against Islamic values which glorify women and their unique feature as genitors:

> In Islam, the position of a mother is more glorified, even before that of a father. This is testified in one of the Prophet's recorded sayings that goes as follows: 'O Messenger of God, among all mankind who is that I am much obliged to glorify?' The Prophet (slaws) answered, 'Your mother.' 'And then who else?' again the man asks. 'Your

> mother', again the Prophet answered. 'And then who else?' the man asks for a third time. 'Your mother', still answered the Prophet. 'And then who else? Asked the man for the fourth time. 'Your father,' at last the Prophet said. *Subhanallah* (Glory be to God). In Islam, women are positioned on such high and noble place, until they were mentioned three times in a row by the Prophet Mohammed himself.[333]

All the female characters who are witness to Mohamed's prospective personal vendetta do not tolerate his behaviour and stand fearless by retorting and insulting Mohamed from the hammam's court to make him leave and restore the calm atmosphere back:

> - Not scared of three beard hairs!
> - Listen brat, on the head of my dead father Ben Ali, if I even sniff your scent here, you enter a man, and you'll exit a eunuch.
> - Shave your testicles!'

After this confrontation behind the hammam's door, Mohamed does not reply to the women and proceeds to leave, while the women celebrate their victory by dancing and chanting, each woman according to her personality, in French or in Arabic: '*The final struggle… Day of glory…*.'

Due to the anxiety caused by Mohamed's disturbance of the women's hammam, and the fear he instigated by his threats, Meriem experiences early labour, and Fatima and Aicha help deliver her baby. In the meantime, Samia thinks of a plan to leave the hammam and protect Meriem by advising all the women to disguise themselves as pregnant women

333 El-Malibary Moeslich, 'The Honor of Women in Islam', 2016.

wearing *haïk*s to conceal and protect Meriem, which they all do after delivering Meriem's baby. The *haïk* is a traditional Algerian long white cloth women wear outdoors to cover the entire body and face, while only one eye is peeking through for visibility. Covering their bodies using the *haïk* in this manner, veiled and usually unveiled women (such as Zahia), the women use this traditional covering as a tool to trick the same men who forced women to conceal themselves.

During the final scenes of *À mon âge*, Mohamed comes back to the hammam accompanied this time by other Islamists as they cause yet another upheaval and manage to break into the hammam's court, and thus the women's horma. As the men trespass into the hammam's court, they are faced by all the women who are wearing the *haïk* to protect Meriem, who is still hiding with her new-born son upstairs. Samia, who was unknowingly wearing Meriem's distinctive shoes is then attacked with a knife by Mohamed, succumbing to her wound. In complete shock, all the women step back while Fatima instantly picks up the same knife used to slay Samia and avenges Samia and protects the other women by attacking Mohamed back, leaving him lying lifeless next to Samia. Once the men realise Mohamed has wrongfully murdered an innocent woman, they are shown as seemingly petrified with shock then quietly vacating the women's hammam, with their heads down remorsefully, leaving the women alone amongst themselves.

The scenes featuring the character of Mohamed and his Islamist group's crude dialogues and behaviours with the female characters inside the hammam serve as a representation of the oppression and violence women incur if they dare to go against patriarchal and Islamist commandments such as chastity, covering female bodies, and/or staying in the domestic sphere. Obermeyer's representation of the Islamist men mirrors the horrors witnessed and reported by the likes of the Algerian journalist and author

Nacera Belloula that have accounted on the culture of 'rape', 'assassinations' and 'pure misogyny' which women experienced and feared to fully expose to the public - unless these women came forward anonymously to protect themselves.[334]

While the hammam, with its gender exclusivity to women, provided a safe, comforting and intimate atmosphere from the outside environment during Islamist and continuous long-standing patriarchy and is experienced as a homosocial, intimate place par excellence by the female characters who occupy the hammam; these same female characters experience feelings of fear and unrest because the threats of the outside 'masculine' and oppressive atmosphere penetrate the hammam, as men invade it to accomplish their vindictive agenda.

Rayhana Obermeyer specifically chose the women's hammam to represent her female characters and their free expression from the comforting, safe space of the experienced hammam. The female characters are represented with their ways of being, of expressing their concerns, their struggles, and dreams, as well as of behaving inside and outside the hammam. By gathering women in the hammam space, away from men and reprisals, it is only there that they can finally let their voices echo and their bare bodies express themselves.

As a first-hand witness to the conditions of being a woman in Algeria during the Civil war, Obermeyer's narrative has also been inspired by her female acquaintances, who have experienced the same oppressing living conditions as herself. To reflect the different stories that inspired her, Obermeyer used a variation of female characters of all ages and

334 Martina Sabra, 'Literature and Collective Trauma in Algeria: Moving beyond the Examination of History', *Qantara*, 2012; Turshen; Lemonde, 'Algérie, Le Lynchage Des Femmes de Hassi Messaoud Se Poursuit, Par Nadia Kaci', *Lemonde Magazine*, 2010.

from different social, educational, and religious backgrounds to expose the experience of woman in an Algerian society still anchored in traditions which are not in line with modernity and the desire for emancipation of the Algerian woman.

À mon âge constitutes a representation of Algerian women from the intimacy of the women's hammam, which allows for a richer understanding of the complexities involved in representing the Algerian woman, and how these representations shape her identity and subjectivity. This in turn, helps to lessen the 'masculine domination of public fields of representation [which] contributed to, if not ensured, a post-colonial marginalization of women and a reduction of their public role'.[335] By 'subjectivation', I mean the process used in the film by Obermeyer to highlight the forms of subjectivity and struggles of each individual character when referred to other women, and to men - weaving itself into social relations which intervenes in this film inside the hammam through speech on sexuality, struggles, fantasy, social criticism and oppression. Sensory interaction is however performed through rituals of beautification, massaging, rubbing, washing, and caressing; And action is performed by divorcing, dancing, smoking, masturbating, and defending other women. In other words, female subjectivities are played out in the film between forms of determination, through speech and embodiments of struggle and physical self-affirmation, and the unprecedented intimate exposure of these women's life stories in an Arab-Muslim country such as Algeria.

Rayhana Obermeyer's *À mon âge je me cache encore pour fumer* is, thus, a necessary contribution to Contemporary Algerian Cinema which has known a clear 'lack of representation and intimacy, due to an 'absence: that of the woman' in Algerian cinema, by representing Algerian women, body and voice, in a time when women were the most

335 Malika Laïchour Romane, 'Le Cinéma Algérien: En Quête de l'intime', *Pensee*, 384 (2015), 67–78.

oppressed in modern Algerian history.[336] Islamist diktat which sprung during the Civil War resented women and proceeded to unjustly silence their voices and control their bodies. Indeed, women have constituted for the longest time the first line of controlling a people's mind and spirits to exact one's perverted agenda and desires by claiming their identity – resonant with Western colonialism which upheld that:

> Indigenous women needed to be dehumanized and removed from their important roles for the colonizers to secure land and resources for the settler colonial state. The overall goal of colonization was "to make Indigenous cultures disappear" (Episkenew, 2009, as cited in Hargreaves, 2017, p. 9), which inevitably meant the disappearing of Indigenous women. […] As Indigenous women needed to be dehumanized in order for colonization to work, stereotypes were also created and used to justify it.[337]

Frenetically aiming at revoking Western influences of modernity and women's sexual liberation, extremist attempted to maintain Algerian women's traditional identity by controlling women's bodies, as the first symbol of identity, to exact their anti-Western extremist ideologies – channelling the same colonial identity war: 'a woman was a symbol and the last line of defence against the loss of national identity.'[338]

In order to exact this reshaping of Algerian women's traditional values to adhere to extremist ideology, and as was portrayed in Obermeyer's *À mon age,* anti-regime

336 Romane.
337 Cyndy Baskin, 'Contemporary Indigenous Women's Roles: Traditional Teachings or Internalized Colonialism?', *SAGE Journals*, 26.15–16 (2019), 2083–2101 (p. 2088).
338 Turshen, p. 902.

extremists went as far as creating their own perverted commandments which included, among many other principles: '[legitimised] killings of girls and women not wearing the hijab (which in Algeria consists of a scarf that hides the hair and neck and a full-length robe)', and 'forced temporary marriages' – void in the eyes of the state and of true Islamic principles – for supposed legitimate sexual gratification, reproduction, and ultimate widespread of Islamist radicalism.[339] Turshen collected in her essay "Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle" (2002) testimonies from Algerian war heroines, the *Mudjahidettes*, to attest first-hand of the important role and equally important status of Algerian women during the War Independence. However, this situation harrowingly regressed to the worst during the Civil War – a reversed treatment exposed by Obermeyer in *À mon âge.* One anonymous *mudjahida* attests in Turshin's study: 'we were all equal in the war – it was afterward that our citizenship was taken from us', to be given the status of oppressed and marginalised 'abject' objects by radicals.[340]

The resonance and screenings of Obermeyer's film in international festivals in Greece, France, Egypt, or Tunisia has given worldwide exposure to Algerian women by 'lifting the veil' of extremism on their forcefully concealed voices and bodies. *À mon âge* has been described by many critics, such as Jordan Mintzer or Colette Z. Dergham as a 'militant' work which shines light on the condition of Algerian women.[341] The critic Colette Dergham, writing in Arabic on Obermeyer's film, in '*When Nudity Becomes a Means to Breaking Taboos in Algerian Society*' celebrates the activism behind Obermeyer's work which, for her, daringly portrays bare women to break taboos in Algerian society and bring light to the women's stories, and their oppression, in all feminine intimacy inside

339 Turshen, pp. 897–98; Rohloff, p. 21.
340 Turshen, p. 893.
341 Jordan Mintzer, ''I Still Hide to Smoke': Film Review', 2017; كوليت زينة ضرغام, 'عندما يصبحُ العريُ مبررا لكسر التابوهات في المجتمع الجزائري – العربية | RCI', *International, Radio Canada*, 2018.

the hammam.[342] Through *À mon âge,* Obermeyer represents the women's hammam from the inside and through the perspective of her female characters, inviting thus her audiences to witness these women's voices, joys, struggles, and celebrations; to witness the embodiment of these life events and stories through the women's bare bodies and what these latter say about the women - either long 'ignored' or 'eroticised'.[343]

342 كوليت زينة ضرغام.
343 Romane; Behdad; Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, *The Colonial Harem*, NED-New (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Chapter Five: Comparing Perspectives :

From one stereotype to another, Maghrebi women have always been the subject of fascination in contemporary Orientalist or neo-colonialist imagination where they are reduced to exotic stereotypes, despite ethnic, religious, geographical, and cultural diversity associated with the Maghreb, and Orient as a whole. Fedwa Malti-Douglas confirms:

> The Arab woman is a most fascinating creature. Is she veiled? Is she not veiled? Is she oppressed? Is she not oppressed? Were her rights greater before Islam? Are her rights greater after Islam? [...] Book titles and book covers in the West tell part of the tale: behind the veil, beyond the veil, veiled women, partially veiled women [...] and on and on.[344]

This fascination for the Arab woman has been the object of all fantasies in the male imagination. As discussed earlier in this study, Orientalism has been historically linked to imperialism as an attempt to define and control the Other, colonised oriental people. When it came to colonised women, Orientalists sought to take control of these latter's bodies, defining them as characterless exotic women, simple objects of desire – forbidden to them, yet portrayed as lascivious and offered to the male coloniser.

The reference to masculine Orientalism and prevalent stereotypes is necessary in the ideological program of our female authors to accomplish a reappropriation or feminization of the perspective and therefore the overthrow of the hegemonic masculine order. First satirizing this Orientalism for Djebar and Sebbar, the authors but also the

344 Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word : Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*, 2019 (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 3.

filmmaker project the hybridity and alterity of their female characters, a key aspect of postcolonial Maghreb cultural production. This favours a repositioning of the postcolonial identity discourse from a recycling of anthological stereotypes falsely static, homogenic, and essentialist to be able to compensate for it with a homosocial encounter of characters from all horizons, ideologies, and shapes, united by the same cause, the condition of women in postcolonial Algerian society. The fantasies and empty erotic reductionism of certain representations of the hammam and its women are placed in the interval of a pastiche vision, where everything intertangles and interchanges, with varying crepuscular visions.

With introspection and reflection on modernity in its relationship to the horrors of Algerian history, of the deep-rooted violence and mutism inflicted on women, Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer paint a picture of a socio-political critique that bring attention to the disarray since the post-Independence War period and aggravated since the rise of extremist Islamism in the nineties. These writings also show the remarkable polyphonic complexity linked to writings on such critical periods, including their indelible after-effects. And although 'the drift of the system leaves less and less room for illusions', 'the aggravation, the generalized loss of meaning of horror in Algeria since the early nineties, will not, however, extinguish literary production', nor the cinematic one.[345]

Djebar, Sebbar, and more recently Obermeyer's voices are a claim to the rights of Maghreb women to freedom and equality in social systems marked, in one way or another, by the prevalence of often misogynistic patriarchal values , which these women writers and filmmakers are in clear opposition to, including extremist fundamentalism – result of a perversion of Islamic values – which although more recent, aggravates the already deep-

345 Charles Bonn, Xavier Garnier, and Jacques Lecarme, *Litterature Francophone: Le Roman* (Michigan: Hatier, 1997), pp. 208–9. [My Translation].

rooted patriarchal institutional authoritarianism in the Maghreb. The topicality of such writings brings 'awareness [to] femininity as a repressed or attacked identity', thus defying the masculinist hegemonic discourse.[346]

Undeniably, the topicality and polyphonic complexity of the contemporary women's writings of this study includes interculturality as an important aspect of the deployment of dialogism in Francophone Maghrebi writing. After the colonization of the Maghreb, it is possible to note that forms of endogenous interculturality prevailed there, which consists of contacts between the languages and cultures that dominated the territories of the Maghreb, namely the Arab, Spanish, Turkish, Berber, and French languages and cultures: 'The cultural syncretism at the base of the same social imaginary faithfully reflects community and ethnic encounters, their clashes and contradictions, but also their symbioses and harmonisations'.[347] The interculturality we are talking about here is rather exogenous, resulting from the encounter between languages and cultures that characterizes decolonization. The notion of interculturality crosses two notional fields: linguistic and identity. Delila Moursly points this out:

> The productivity of "inter" is undoubtedly to be understood in relation to that of "bi-", another prefix currently reactivated (next to the classic bilingualism, there is bi-lingualism, bi-culturalism ...) and in relation to the lexis "in-between" proposed by psychoanalysis. These terms suggest the construction of a new territory of thought, of utopia, but also of living. Territory of dialogue, mixing, confluence where proximity, juxtaposition would

346 Bonn, Garnier, and Lecarme, p. 224. [My Translation].
347 Hedi Boraoui, 'Introduction', in *La Traversee Du Francais Dans Les Signes Litteraires Marocains.*, ed. by Yvette Benayoun-Szmidt, Hedi Boraoui, and Najib Redouane (Toronto, 1996), pp. 9–16 (p. 10).

> need to be overcome to give way to sharing, cohabitation, and inter-with ("inter" bringing together the signified of two prepositions).[348]

To varying degrees, interculturality and heterogeneity mark Maghrebi writing from independence to the present day. If the language of the Other is the place of strangeness or alienation, it is also the place where a double desire for encounter and dissent is expressed. 'Interculturality here in this case does not let itself be understood only in the form of an intellectual relationship both privileged and conflictual with a particular partner', thus opening Maghreb writing to the lofty affirmation of its polysemic and polyphonic ambivalence, because, increasingly, these writings 'program an erudite reading, or at least a reader open to biculturalism, or even holder of the dual cultural and linguistic code that underlies it'.[349] Only, Khada legitimately states,

> Bi-language, bi-culture, bifid text, bilingual love are celebrated without, however, the proclaimed richness of a double heritage completely erasing the suffering of the great gap it sometimes imposes. On the contrary, suffering and discomfort themselves become wealth and enjoyment.[350]

We have seen this through the texts in this study, through the heterogeneity of the female characters, their linguistic, intellectual, religious, and ideological ambivalence that a single identity cannot express their complexity and uniqueness, because:

348 Delila Moursly, 'Interculturel et Langues', in *L'interculturel: Reflexions Pluridisciplinaire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), p. 178.
349 Mostapha Bensheikh, 'Quelques Reflexions Sur l'interculturel', in *L'interculturel Au Maroc. Arts, Langues, Litteratures et Traditions Populaires. Actes de La Journee d'etudes Organisee Par Le G.E.M et Le D.L.L.F a La Faculte Des Lettres de Rabat, Fevrier 1992.*, ed. by Abdellah Mdarhri and Abdemajid Zeggaf (Casablanca: Afrique Orient, 1994), pp. 75–79 (p. 67); Nadjet Khada, 'La Litterature Algerienne de Langue Frangaise: Une Litterature Androgyne.', in *Figures de l'interculturalite*, ed. by Jacques Bres, Catherine Detrie, and Paul Siblot (Montpellier: Praxling, 1996), pp. 15–56 (p. 16).
350 Khada, p. 53.

> To read a Maghrebi text is to read in two languages [at least] which, by their nature and function, work differently in the Maghrebi poetic language. One is maternal, oral, vernacular, referendum since it operates a recollection and a reconstruction of the past and therefore functions as a national and cultural language, mythical also since it refers to a spiritual, religious, or magical land [...]. The target language, in this case French, does not function strictly as a simple vehicular language of the Maghreb. It is also a referendum in the sense that it operates on expression as well as meta discourse.[351]

Ambivalence is particularly operative in women's writing in the Maghreb. This is mainly driven by 'the feminist utopian impulse emphasizing potentiality', the desire to provoke, through writing, changes relating to the condition of Maghrebi women.[352]As writing strategies and ambivalence manifest themselves in several forms, notably in the ways in which Maghreb women writers thwart or relocate instances of politics or power relations (the state / patriarchy / religion trinity) through the writing of the body, voice, memory and the subversion of spatial binarities (public / private; masculine / feminine; sacred / space) responsible for gender segregation and 'male supremacy [which] is based on the division' of these spaces.[353]

351 Zobida Haggani, 'Theorie et Critique En Defaut Dans Le Champ Litteraire Maghrebin', in *Litteratures Maghrebines. Colloque Jacqueline Arnaud. Villetaneuse, Les 2, 3, et 4 Decembre 1987. Perspectives Generales*, ed. by Jacqueline Arnaud (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), pp. 91–97 (p. 96).
352 Carinne Borget, 'L'lslam Dans Loin de Medine d'Assia Djebar', *Reecriture Des Mythes: I'utopie Au Feminin.*, 1997, 83–93 (p. 84).
353 Marie B. Tehon, 'Les Femmes et Le Religieux Chez Fatima Mernissi', in *La Traversee Du Frangais Dans Les Signes Litteraires Marocains. Actes Du Colloque International de I'universite York, 358 Toronto 20-23 Avril, 1994*, ed. by Yvette Benayoun-Szmidt, Hedi Boraoui, and Najib Redouane (Toronto: La Source, 1996), pp. 65–75 (p. 37).

All these approaches, brought together in the women's writings of Djebar, Sebbar, and the film of Obermeyer, are part of a broader debate on the importance of reinterpreting the Muslim heritage in the current historical context and reconciling Islam and democracy. The work of the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, which often reads as an intertext to that of Djebar or later, Sebbar, pursues this ideal of openness and liberation in several of her texts such as *Sex, ideology and Islam*, *The harem and the West*, but also the sociologist Fedwa Malti-Douglas, and the Egyptian Leïla Ahmed, among others.

Through their feminine writing, Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer paint the richness of the Algerian feminine essence, through what they have experienced themselves, as Algerian women, or women they've personally known: an essence and concept that is constantly shifting, regresses, and progresses through the history that shapes it, through unstable traces that have become elements of stability and comparison for the advent of the heterogeneous Algerian identity in its contemporaneity. Their feminine writings raise questions about the condition of women in Algeria in different contexts: historical, social, religious, and political reproduced and experienced in a feminine fictional world. A feminine writing of disclosure, they are part of the inexhaustible imagination of women, and their ability to describe a world of their own that they secretly haunted since their childhood. Djebar says of this: 'L'écriture m'a ramené aux cris des femmes sourdes de mon enfance, à ma seule origine. L'écriture ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de sœurs disparues.[354]

From orality to writing, Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer give their female characters a voice and a presence in the story. Thanks to the projection of female voices,

354 Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, p. 285.

the silence of Algerian women becomes speech, crystallized by the double use of "I" and "we" in their narratives as a polyphony of discourse.

In the female corpus examined in this study we have seen that the purifying aspect of the lived hammam – the main reason why the hammam was originally established – is not as highlighted in comparison with the pleasure aspect experienced by women in its interior. Sacred place for Maghrebi women, the female authors all highlight the hammam as a space of feminine enjoyment and sociability. This indulgence is synonymous with bodily, but also with discursive pleasure, where one opens up to others in cherished disclosure. A space of enjoyment and release, the women's hammam makes it possible to connect and retrieve awareness of self and connect to others in a traditionally safe and welcoming environment in our feminine corpus. The feminine enjoyment and bliss experienced in the lived space of the women's hammams of the selected women's writings translates into bodily and reflexive indulgence, where both can flourish freely. In these feminine representations of the hammam, female lived experience and pleasurability are not fragmented but are portrayed as a holistic sensation which involves the lived female body in its entirety; as Irigaray proclaims: 'to women the enjoyment of the [lived] 'body'; to men that of the 'organ'.[355]

In contemporary societies, Occidental or otherwise, patriarchal ideologies pervade, albeit with different patterns, and this diversity is particularly important for maintaining the continuity of various patriarchal systems. Put otherwise, misleading cultural comparisons support claims of superior status that divert attention from the processes by which women are (still) controlled in both worlds.

355 Irigaray, V, p. 97. [My translation].

Greatly influenced by Michel Foucault, Edward Said focused and exposed the innerworkings of imperialism and its Orientalist propaganda, especially the use of knowledge as a tool of cultural control – albeit lacking nuance in his approach as some argue (Mahdi Amal, among others). For Said, the focus of Orientalism revolves around the mechanisms through which the West managed its relationship with the East. Said described the process himself, saying that Orientalism is the understanding of the East in a manner based on the special place that this East occupies in the Western experience. [356] For Orientalists, the East is seen as a profound and recurring form of 'otherness'. The Orient has also played a significant role in shaping the West's image as its opposite - a contrasting idea, identity, and experience.[357] Said describes Orientalism as 'a Western method for dominating, rebuilding, and dominating the Orient.[358] Wherein it can be recognised as a specific kind of discourse and method in dealing with the East through talking about it, adopting certain opinions about it, describing it, teaching it to students, settling conditions in it, and controlling it. It is a conventional system whose incessant distribution allows the image of the East to be infiltrated into the consciousness of Westerners. [359] The issuing Orientalist images are seen as an idealistic and immutable synthesis. The concept of that 'acceptable imagination which enables the image of the Orient to be infiltrated into the consciousness of Westerners' is analogous to the process of image control and hegemony, feeding on and maintaining, then, stereotypes.[360]

It is the hegemonic Orientalist imagination, its sexualising and pejorative approach and frenetic obsession with colonised / oppressed women's bodies and desire for control

356 Said, pp. 1–2.
357 Said, pp. 1–2.
358 Said, p. 3.
359 Said, pp. 1–2.
360 Said, pp. 3–4.

over them that has influenced writers from the Arab-Muslim Maghreb, as in the case of our chosen male writer, Karim Nasseri. Victim himself of oppression and *mal-être*, the protagonist projects and morphs his frustrations with his society by taking refuge inside the women's hammam and exorcizing his powerlessness by transgressing social norms and expressing his sexual euphoria. Throughout *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam*, the Maghrebi author, just as Western Orientalists, projects his female characters as an object of desire in the Maghrebi male sphere but also, as discussed in chapter three of this study, symbolises the other sex as an object of despise and revulsion for him, simultaneously. The male protagonist describes women in some instances as an abject object that he cannot help but desire, and it is this visceral and instinctive lust that men are scared of, as it is synonym with losing (self-) control at the hands of the other sex.[361] It is indeed these complex gender dynamics that form the key difference between the imaginary shown in Nasseri's neo-Orientalist Maghrebi male depiction with that of colonial Orientalist tropes.

Djebar, Sebbar and Obermeyer show in their respective narratives how the gendered nature of the hammam and the closeness between women of different generations and backgrounds is what facilitates sociability, exchanges and chatting as argued in the study. It is always inside the exclusive women's hammam that we have noticed how these writers' female characters harbour the *parler-femme* – in its different aspects – specifically in this unique space which favours it. It is again in this lived space that the female characters of our female corpus re-write history and stereotypes by giving voice to their alterity and subjectivity as sexually aware, but also consciously aware, women, projecting their heterogeneity, through polyphony and individuality. They propose a vision other than the monolithic, fixed, and closed vision of the orientalising

361 Carlier, p. 1316.

discourse. On the contrary, they recognize the different elements and currents of influences in play in a post-colonial society and do not claim uniqueness of identity, but instead paint its heterogeneity. Our female authors and filmmaker's narratives emanate thus, in sharp contrast with the patronising essentialist perspective of Arab-Muslim men, and the Orientalists by whom some are inspired, such as Karim Nasseri.

Rayhana Obermeyer's film stages the theme of disclosure and liberation through the filmmaker's choice of setting, the women's hammam, to subversively screen in cinema, branding her film the first Arab film with such nudity[362]. Although Obermeyer portrays her female characters as bare or partly bare because it is a prerequisite in a hammam visit, she does not emulate neo-Orientalist traits due to the way she filmed them, and her choice of camera angles, as lens, but also as projector. Indeed, throughout the film, Obermeyer avoids eroticising close ups of the women's bodies and intimate parts when her female characters are filmed casually bathing inside the hot chamber of the hammam, or the changing room where they are seen changing or taking their clothes off to enter the hot room. Obermeyer displays the hammam atmosphere and focuses on the different exchanges and rituals the hammam harbours, avoiding unnecessary objectifications, which male representations have ever more performed in representing women's bodies. In some exceptions, the filmmaker to frame her camera angles closer to the skins of her female characters when they chat about their sexuality and start to become aware of their bodies and sensuality inside the hammam in a subtle, non-perverse scene.

Self-exploration through cultural and sexual affirmation is undoubtedly an important experience linked to the hammam ritual. Indeed, by regaining control over

362 Gopika K. P.

their own bodies, sexuality and eroticism, women in the hammam experience physical emancipation.[363]

In *Femmes d'Alger,* women discover their bodies and explore them through the pleasurable massages. With each rubbing movement, associated with hot water as an 'aphrodisiac',[364] the author describes the relaxing, and physically liberating ritual which intensifies and stimulates the female bodies' pleasure without, however, making crude, unnecessarily detailed sexualising descriptions of her female characters:

> Paisible, travaillant rythmiquement, la masseuse semblait elle-même se détendre. s'arrêtant pour reprendre souffle, versant alors lentement une tasse d'eau chaude sur le dos nu bronzé, tandis que, sous elle, s'exhalaient des soupirs rauques [...] Le couple de deux femmes installées sur la dalle, dominant les autres baigneuses, se renouait dans le rythme ahané, prenait forme étrange, un arbre lent et balancé dont les racines plongeraient dans le ruissellement persistant de l'eau sur les dalles grises.[365]

Nasseri's young male protagonist – granted exclusive access to the forbidden women's quarters by tricking the hammam manager about his age – finds pleasure instead in gazing onto, and exploring, the bodies the hammam visitors. This intrusion into the women's world, regardless of age, is for Bouhdiba what initiates males' sexual training, as they are exposed to bodies different from theirs.[366] The hammam therefore

363 Brinda J. Mehta, 'The Rituals of the Female Body', in *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (Sycaruse University Press, 2007), 318 (p. 131).
364 Brinda J. Mehta, 'The Rituals of the Female Body', p. 131.
365 Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*, pp. 38–39.
366 Bouhdiba, xx, p. 174.

becomes for boys a moment of ecstasy, as opposed to candid pleasurability for women, during which they allow themselves to spy on the bodies and movements of women - while they are still perceived as innocent beings and devoid of a sexual male gaze (until proven otherwise). Already sexually aware as a pre-teenager passing for an innocent younger boy, the narrator of *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam* is fully aware of the temptations to which he is subject within the women's hammam as he voyeuristically contemplates them and describes them, naked bodies, usually hidden in society by clothing - he feels the urge 'that we take care of [him], kiss [him], 'touch [his] genitals'[367]. He provides a description reminiscing of a sexualising Orientalist figure who intruded the hammam, exoticized women and fantasised about being served and satisfied by them, through a sort of 'sexual promise' owed to him / men due to the 'unlimited desire', and 'deep generative energies' the women urge in them.[368] Linked to this, Maghrebi male writer and avid critic of Orientalism, and consequently neo-Orientalism, Malek Alloula expresses his indignation of such stereotypical and pejorative representations. Owing to the propaganda and agenda enmeshed in (neo-) Orientalism (as debated by Edward Said and later Alloula himself, among many others), the presence of the oriental object is symptomatically of a perversion to which Alloula refuses to grant the status of eroticism, it is instead 'a pornography which does not yet admit to itself, comes to blatantly replace an eroticism whose only excuse is having never been there in the first place.[369] Nasseri offers his own male vision and experience of the women's hammam, as he finds refuge himself inside this uterine, safe space amongst women. What is interesting to note is that although Nasseri's young protagonist too is exacerbated with his society and with how he is treated by his oppressing masculine entourage who abuse him into manliness, he still

367 Nasseri, p. 71.
368 Said, p. 188.
369 Alloula, *Le Harem Colonial: Images d'un Sous-Érotisme*, p. 54.

emulates a certain *méprise* for the other gender.[370] He denigrates with obscene detailed sexual descriptions of the hammam scenery and the women's bodies, violating them and avoiding any type of relatedness or empathy, although both are victims of their society seeking refuge inside the hammam. He instead also seeks to feed his obsession for the other sex's bodies, and his sexual fantasies and instincts, in detriment of a wholesome representation of these women as equal being with bodies, but also voices and feelings.

Although I have chosen to focus on one particular Maghrebi male perspective and representation of the women's hammam in *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam*, as neo-colonialist and derogatory, there are – as mentioned in the second chapter – nuances as to how Maghrebi male writers perceive and subsequently portray the hammam experience, and the women who govern it. In our case, Nasseri's vision represents a mimicking of Western Orientalism, a neo-Orientalist representation which perpetuates known tendencies of Orientalist artists and travel writers fascinated by such forbidden places as the women's hammam, inspired too by the stereotypes and exoticism of *Les Milles et une Nuits*. I have focused mainly on Nasseri's rendition of his experience in the women's hammam but the other masculine representations of this space such as *La Boite a Merveilles* (1954) by Ahmed Sefrioui or *Hafaouine, l'Enfant des Terrasses* (1990) by Férid Boughedir are included briefly to show: first, that Nasseri is not the only one to be fascinated by this space, and second, that there are nuances in approaching the women's hammam as men in Maghrebi culture.

Obermeyer's projection of the women's hammam is a more daring and striking representation in comparison with the earlier narratives offered by Djebar and Sebbar as the story is set in the midst of the Civil War and Islamist terrorizations, while her female

370 Huddleston, p. 86.

characters experience the lived space for self-affirmation, to voice their frustrations, and by refusing to surrender to islamist and patriarchal oppression. Through her polyphonic narrative and heterogenic female characters, Obermeyer portrays the agency of Maghrebi women, characterized by an eagerness for liberation, by using the symbolism of rejection: of control over their bodies, of being silent, of society and of extremism. In comparison with the two other women's writings, Obermeyer's film does not tackle straightforwardly Orientalism, nor does the filmmaker necessarily write back to its pioneers, it does however project what Djebar and Sebbar's representations and vision of what an authentic Maghrebi hammam experience enmeshes and represents to its heterogenic visitors. That is, how they feel inside it, what they do, how they behave once inside, and what they think and have to say. As it were, Obermeyer's takes the textual narratives (her own, and Djebar and Sebbar's) and projects them by including an audio-visual dimension, but through her more daring script and visuals, propels these representations to have an even bigger subversive impact.

Representing the hammam for the Maghrebi women and male writers necessitates to portray its essential characteristic: a public bathing establishment. In representing the bathing experience inside the hammam, orientalised or not, the authors and filmmaker's depictions of this space are indissociable with the bare bodies who experience it. However, what sets apart the women's depictions of their female characters bodies with the colonial and neo-colonial male representation of women's bodies is the manner with which these latter are described and filmed.

Art historian Kenneth Clark, former director of the National Gallery in London and author of *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form,* synthesizes the cultural history of Western sensibility, with an impressive gallery of artists which spans the history of art, from Greek

sculpture to Delacroix and Picasso; of the poetry of forms and perceptual psychology, to the art of the nude – being the ideal receptacle for this. Clark explores the theme and essence of the nude, or 'nudity', along with the motives behind the art which displays it – all detrimental in understanding art and why it is shaped this way. Clark defines and differentiates 'nakedness' and 'nudity' in the arts, stating that: 'to be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word "nude", on the other hand, carries in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone'.[371] For Clark, displaying nudity of characters should transpire without depriving them of their dignity and consent. He argues that the main difference lies in that nudity is 'the vague image it projects into the mind' which 'is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous and confident body'. [372]

Kenneth Clark's work relates essentially on Western forms of expression, and Orientalist painter such as Delacroix, who is one of the major artists the female authors chose to denounce and write back to; while, the rapport of the male author Nasseri with the Delacroix's approach to the subject/object represented in his work is one of influence, as a contemporary revival of Orientalist strokes. Also, Clark's concepts of nudity and nakedness are here taken as they are, unclothedness as a motivated choice of the artist, away from cultural and religious norms, and as result, should not be limited to the Western world but as an inclusive approach to free artistic expression throughout history, in all forms of art: paintings, photographs, literature, or films. What is, however, a determining and differentiating factor between a representation or piece of art featuring unclothedness and another, here, is the motivation behind choosing to undress one's

371 Kenneth Clark, 'The Nude : A Study of Ideal Art', 1976, 408 (p. 153).
372 Kenneth Clark, 'The Nude : A Study of Ideal Art', 1976, 408 (p. 153).

muse(s), relating then to what makes the artist's display of unclothedness 'legitimate', or not – i.e., representing either nudity or nakedness of the featured muse(s).

Barbary's feminine subjects perceived by Delacroix as ideal Homeric women are imbued with great lyricism, and Delacroix is undeniably a known enthusiast for the picturesque and the oneiric – the very characteristics of Orientalism. It is important to ask however: What would the women inside the gynaecium say about themselves? Would they agree with others' interpretations of them? For Sebbar in *Femmes au Bain*, Orientalist artists perceived the women of this newly-conquered Barbary as 'femmes de chair pure', sensual statuesque figures enshrouded in exoticism and idealistic beauty traits, catering to Western viewers' gaze: 'le corps oui, l'âme, pour quoi faire?'.[373] Orientalist artists and their audience thus, 'cannot see her (the North African woman), being too blinded by [their] ideal', ' [they] modify nature to match a canonical ideal of beauty and of classic representation, far from reproducing photographic reality' because, 'the orientalist desire involves a conscious act of producing "meaning" for the public from one's personal experience in Oriental countries without interest in, or recognition of, the Other's subjectivity or culture'.[374]

Orientalist characteristics were revived by later generations, much like Karim Nasseri, who devotes himself to a neurotic attraction towards the 'beautiful', while deploring and degrading even further the not-so-beautiful he encounters during his oneiric voyage into the women's hammam which render his hammam experience nightmarish instead of picturesque. Subjects which did not meet Delacroix or Nasseri's beauty expectations were entirely muted and avoided, favouring aesthetic and idealistic

373 Sebbar, p. 32.
374 Draï, Sabrina, The Gaze in the Model-Painter Relationship: Fictions of Art by Zola, The Goncourts, Poe, and James. (2002), p. 30 ; Behdad, Ali. Belated Travelers : Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution. (Duke University Press : 1994), p. 21.

symmetry rather than verisimilitude. Delacroix, as mentioned before, strived to 'forget the details as to recall only the poetic aspects', while Nasseri, when encountering a cancer survivor inside the hammam who went through a mastectomy sees her as a 'vision traumatisante', and for him 'vu le *tableau*' , 'pas envie d'en savoir plus' he judges, as these details jeoperdize their vision of the beautiful and exotic to offer less poetic representations.[375]

The difference in perception here is due to the fact that, as Kenneth Clark explains, the artistic nude is considered as 'the perfect example of the metamorphosis of matter into form'; this in turn means that the body has become a form and not a subject, to soothe the artist's stolen male gaze inside forbidden women's quarters.[376] Such representations, thus, do not reproduce a faithful image or identity of the subject / object, but instead they are used to translate an idea (eidos), in the sense that Plato understood it, that is to say a perfection. These representations also emulate the artist's attitude and perception of his muse(s), which in Delacroix and Nasseri's case, is bathed in eroticism and exoticism through the choice of scenery (forbidden and private), and how these women are portrayed (unaware of the artist's gaze, offered, and supressed in idealism when not entirely ignored), to nourish their personal fantasy and that of their Western audience. It is thus this quintessential difference that sets apart the representations offered by Delacroix, Nasseri, and the feminine representations and self-representations rewritten and offered by Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer who have seen and depicted beauty, in all its shapes, recognising individuality and heterogeneity.

The display of confidence through self-awareness and self-disclosure of the female lived nude bodies inside the hammam in the women's writings, is here in sharp contrast then,

375 Nasseri, p. 76.
376 Kenneth Clark, 'The Nude : A Study of Ideal Art', 1976, 408 (p. 54).

with Delacroix's exotically re-embellished and muted odalisques and Nasseri's crude and desensitized representation through degrading and at times bordering pornographic projections and commentaries on his female characters' naked bodies.

In Obermeyer's film, the projection and self-disclosure of women's heterogenic nude lived bodies on screen for the first time in the Arab world serves as a capital of attention, emotion, and power, and in our case also: faithfulness to women's individuality and the real-life bathing experience, and the disclosure it enmeshes - all multiplied tenfold, by the complete revelation of a usually concealed, private women's space.

Transgressing gender binary systems: Using the veil / haîk to infiltrate the men's world vs. Child-passing to infiltrate the women's world:

The enforced exclusion endured by Nasseri's young male protagonist, as explained in chapter two, is distressing for him whereby it embodies the breaking of the bond with the feminine world, which is originally set to reinforce the delimitation of gendered spaces. In this sense, since the gender delimitation of roles and the gendering of spaces are rather well applied and generally well respected, this proves that certain transgressions exist in societies like the Arab-Muslim Maghreb. The fact that the Maghrebi male protagonist has prior knowledge of customary and expected gender separation rules in his society but chooses to use ruse to keep the feminine bond as long as possible suggests then, the existence of a space of resistance to the binary system and its enforcement.

The protagonist's resistance, use of ruse, and ensuing reaction to the subsequent rejection can also be owed to the lack of control he has over it as man, in a patriarchal society. Undeniably, the women's hammam is the only female-exclusive space, commanded by women, where men are banned and thus have no control over, which would account for the protagonist's transgression and psychological state following his ban, signifier of his

social maturity into manhood in a patriarchal society, which in turn, involves the symptomatic obsession with hyper-masculine performativity (obsession over control, and fear of losing it).

In contrast with Nasseri's male protagonist who seeks to tactically overturn the mandatory gender separation, Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer's female characters seek to maintain their conventional control of and on the women's hammam, evocative of a sovereign institution in an otherwise patriarchal society. A clear example of the feminine control over the women's hammam, who accesses it, and how, is in the scene discussed in chapter four of this thesis on Rayhana Obermeyer's film. The segment of the film shows, with a touch of humour, how a male plumber causes confusion and commotion when seen standing at the interior glass front door of the women's hammam. The hammam manager, Fatima, comforts the other women that it is at her request that the plumber approached their forbidden domain to fix a plumbing issue. Throughout the plumber's presence inside the women's domain, Fatima was the one in control of his movements, guiding him inside as his entire head was the one ironically veiled with a towel over his head, to conceal his vision from beholding anything he is not permitted to.

Another point of convergence that can be noted between Nasseri's male vision and the feminine writings of this study is the desire to overturn the conventional gender spatial separation, in association with the traditional dichotomous spheres of private / public in relation to female / male typologies. A clear transgressive trait in Maghrebi literature and cinema, it is intriguing then, that these Maghrebi writings are a clear shift from the imposed social muteness associated with Maghrebi culture and the established order and dogmas pertaining to it. Indeed, Nasseri's young male protagonist uses an escape clause – in taking advantage of his small figure to pass for a non-pubescent child

who can exceptionally access the women's hammam – to transgress Maghrebi social norms and trespass onto the women's world unnoticed. Some of the female characters in Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer writings use their own gender-specific escape clause detected in their patriarchal society's norms and conventions to transgress them.

In *Vaste est la Prison*, Assia Djebar tackles the power her female protagonist Isma feels when wearing the traditional Algerian white *haîk*, an entire body covering cloth at the exception of a monocular vision for its wearer, which she wears in order to be freely, and invisibly trespass onto the male's public domain, gazing onto them without being gazed onto. Djebar transcribes her desire to re-appropriate the outside space traditionally intended for man, and to express the urgency to overturn the masculine rules of the gaze. The male gaze on women has hitherto been based on domination, control, and possession of the female body. Indeed, the author's eye, symbolised by Isma's eye, constitutes an authentic look for all women of the past and present who remain prisoners in the domestic sphere where the control of man is still present: 'Ce regard, je le revendique. Je le perçois comme 'le nôtre'.[377] 'Cloistered women of yesterday and today,' they are now represented by the 'image-symbol' of a veiled woman's eye looking through the slit of her veil:

> [...] C'est elle qui voit soudain [...] elle qui, par un trou libéré dans un visage caché, dévore le monde. [...] L'œil, interrogateur [...] échappe au regard des hommes. Parce qu'ils regardent, ils observent, ils scrutent, ils espionnent ![378]

377 Djebar, *Vaste Est La Prison*, p. 174.
378 Djebar, *Vaste Est La Prison*, pp. 174–75.

The narrator highlights this subversion as follows: 'Nous toutes, du monde des femmes de l'ombre, nous renversons l'approche: nous qui regardons enfin, nous qui commençons'.[379] The narrator is the first to overturn the social order through a reversal of the gaze. This change allows the transition from passive invisibility to active invisibility of the narrator. Subversion is done from the privacy of the *haîk*. Women do not tear off their veils, however, instead of being the object of the gaze and control of others, they now see, from the sole eye, that the veil does not cover. Their eyes seek other spatial horizons, other complicities, and sensitivities, within the limits that protect in the threatening outside male world, other than inside the women's hammam.

Similarly, forced to cover their entire bodies by islamists during the Civil War, Rayhana Obermeyer's female characters, veiled and non-veiled, unanimously agree to use this enforced rule in *A mon âge* as an escape clause to protect their friend and neighbour, Myriam, from her vengeful Islamist brother who seeks to perpetrate an honour killing after knowing about Myriam's illegitimate pregnancy. As discussed in chapter four of this study, the women of the hammam decide to all wear the same traditional white *haïk* to trick the Islamist brother, Mohamed, and his accomplices to sneak Myriam out of the hammam without the men being able to distinguish which of the fully covered women is his sister.

The different references to the power of trickery and disguise associated with the traditional Algerian white *haîk* is not a trivial happening, far from it. It is also important to note that in these carefully curated references in Obermeyer and Djebar's works allude to the crucial role this traditional attire played in the victory of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). As it were, Algerian war heroines purposefully disguised

379 Djebar, *Vaste Est La Prison*, p. 175.

themselves in *haîks* to conceal weapons and bombs from the French colonialist militia to exact tactical attacks on the enemy.[380] Recently, young women gathered in Algiers, capital of Algeria, to defend and promote the patrimonial Algerian *haïk* and what it symbolises:

> The Algerian woman was the carrier of bombs and machine guns under this *Haïk.* It was she who crossed the streets carrying, from one point to another, these weapons against the French colonizer. [...] French soldiers searched men but did not touch women.[381]

Another publication in the Algerian Online Magazine 'Dialna' further confirms:

> As men were continually hunted down by the French army, women provided indispensable help since they moved more easily and could effortlessly blend in with the crowd. The *haïk* […] would be used as a means of transporting weapons or crucial letters.[382]

Frantz Fanon addresses the question of *haïk* in more detail in *Sociology of the Revolution (Year V of the Algerian Revolution)*. Knowing that the French colonization of Algeria was a clear attempt at cultural and ideological colonization, for Fanon: 'any colonization [...] carries in germ at least a genocidal dimension', and the *haïk* or veiling in general means, especially at this time of resistance, an Algerian national feminine identity that clashes precisely with the imperialist agenda. In the chapter of the same manuscript, "Algeria reveals itself", Fanon writes: 'To the colonialist offensive around the veil, the colonized

380 Fanon, p. 42.
381 'Des Algériennes Défilent En Blanc Pour Préserver La Tradition', *Oumma Magazine*, 2013. [My translation].
382 Nadia Benzaaza, '[Histoire] Les Femmes Algériennes et La Guerre d'indépendance - Djamila Bouhired - Dialna', *Dialna Magazine*, 2022. [My translation].

opposes the cult of the veil', believing that 'vehement and aggressive exhibitionism' is the only answer to the acculturation imposed by colonialism on Algerians.[383]

The *haïk* then, has historically, and continues to this day, to serve as a powerful symbol, but also at necessary times, as a tactical instrument for Algerian women in a patriarchal society. One such tactical function it serves for Algerian women, as discussed earlier, is to easily trespass into and momentarily acquire the other sex's gendered space, that is the outside world. This strategic transgression, along with Nasseri's young male protagonist's masqueraded trespass into the women's hammam, can be interpreted as a momentary decoding of the spatial social code of the Arab-Muslim Maghreb society. Decoding and encoding are interpreted here as Blunt and Rose use them in their seminal work *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographie,* whereby they consider gender-specific spaces as 'a social process of symbolic *encoding* and *decoding.* This socially dependent ambivalence of the lived women's hammam, and its opposite outside sphere are then ambivalent 'practised places' which can be overturned, but which can also create analogous 'spatial, symbolic, and social orders' depending on the user-specific recoding. Again, the use of such strategies in the feminine and male writings of Djebar, Sebbar, and Nasseri crystallise the recoding of the gendered spaces.[384]

Concerning the women's hammam more specifically, it is Nasseri's male narrative which attempts to overturn and recode the principles attached to the lived space of our study in relation to Arab-Muslim Maghrebi culture, as it 'reconfigures etymological associations between sacredness, inviolability, sanctuary, and sin' which 'cluster around the notion of feminine space' in such environments.[385]

383 Fanon, p. 43. [My translation].
384 Blunt and Rose, p. 3.
385 Moore, p. 101.

Conclusion:

Women writings in the Algerian postcolonial context more specifically, confront the very specific challenges faced by women due to their colonial past but also their contemporary, post-independence society, plagued by patriarchal oppression, combined with the 1990's extremist religious pressure whose impact is still felt to this day.

The chosen feminine corpus of this study reveals the eagerness of Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar, and Rayhana Obermeyer to respond to men, as women, through their subversive literature and cinema, to criticise and render void the historic masculine discourse and rhetoric that has muted Maghrebi women and ventriloquised their voices, so they can then cast their own stories in their women writings. Each of the chosen novels and film discredit one or many of the myths generated by the colonial, postcolonial and contemporary situation in Algeria, all inside the favourable safe and intimate space of the women's hammam.

Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar confront the colonial Orientalist myth of muted lascivious odalisques in several of their works and contrast this hegemonic mythical rhetoric with their own lived imaginations and experiences as Maghrebi women inside the lived space of the hammam. All of Djebar, Sebbar, and Obermeyer tackle the postcolonial patriarchal myth of the male hero who mimics colonial intimidation and violence by relegating women, equal heroines of the War of Independence, to a subordinate status where he can claim control on them. Leïla Sebbar, and predominantly Rayhana Obermeyer, address confrontationally the horrors and melancholy surrounding the Algerian Civil War and its impact on Algerian society, but expressly on women, as targets of islamist obsession with controlling / concealing them.

Karim Nasseri's *Chroniques d'un enfant du hammam* represents an alternative, contrasting perspective on the women's hammam and the women inside it; what these women experience or have to say is insignificant for the male Maghrebi author. The male author is influenced by Orientalist arts and patriarchal misogyny while he depicts the women's lived space, although it represents a safe place for his protagonist too as he seeks refuge inside it from the reprimanding violent male outside world. A clear contrast with the women's writings, but reminiscent of Orientalist arts, Nasseri's female characters are projected through the lens of a young male, granted exclusive access to this space, using an overtly patronising and sexualising tone, bordering pornographic writing at times, to express his frustrations and break taboos. Nasseri's interpretation of the women's hammam does not claim to speak for or directly mute Maghrebi women who visit and control it, but instead paints an unflattering, perverse, and essentialist portrait through the eyes of a young, sexually frustrated Maghrebi adolescent who uses ruse to penetrate the women's lived space and exact his repressed fantasies.

General Conclusion:

In literature and film, the concept of liberation has come to be interpreted in a myriad of ways. Liberation in philosophy for instance, can mean acquiring self-consciousness, knowing who you are or what your essential nature is or knowing the truths concerning yourself and the world in which you live. Liberation can also mean breaking free from social norms and societal pressure into conforming and abiding by certain religious or social commandments. In literature, the conception of liberation emerges wherever individuals are engaged in a struggle to have their voices heard, advocating for the fundamental decency of their existence and fighting for justice and freedom. The role of literature as a tool for liberation is deeply significant and will continue to hold sway as long as oppression and exploitation persist. Throughout this study, I have considered the theme of liberation through disclosure, of the lived body and its feminine voice, and how these come to play inside the unique lived homosocial space of liberation in Arab-Muslim Maghrebi societies. Liberation, as we have seen in this study, has resonated through several aspects related to the lived space of the women's hammam, whether it is through its favourable intimate architectural configuration, the atmosphere it hosts, or through the exclusive exchanges, experiences, and rituals held inside it.

By intersecting theories offered by human geographers and phenomenologists with feminist literary theory, this research has offered a unique reading of the women's hammam as lived space, a safe and empowering haven and sole microcosm where feminine disclosure is cultivated, and maintained, in an oppressive patriarchal society for Maghrebi women. I have addressed the gap surrounding the significance of women's hammams in Arab-Muslim Maghrebi feminine culture and their representation in literature from the region, by means of a unique approach which reads and recognises the

hammam as the only site where spatial and social practices specific to feminine culture are cultivated. This has involved investigating how lived spaces, as foregrounded in phenomenology and human geography, which was extended and enriched through feminist literary theories which pose specific attention to the dynamics of homosociality and exchange governing female lived spaces like the women's hammam, rather than exploring imaginings erected in verticality and isolation. By exploring both the spatial and social dynamics and configurations of the women's hammam, I have gained insights into how gender, homosociality, and self-indulgence in times of oppression shape and give sense to this lived environment. In other words, the focus has been on understanding the experiences and interactions of female characters within the hammam as they navigate their womanhood and express their subjectivity.

Djebar's *Les femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and Sebbar's *Femmes au bain* delve into the complexities of representing the hammam, offering contemporary literary critiques that go beyond merely responding to Orientalist narratives. Djebar and Sebbar's writings provide critical commentary on Orientalist portrayals of Algerian women in Maghrebi hammams while also shedding light on ongoing patriarchal issues that persist even after Algeria gained independence in 1962. The two authors explore, as argued in this study, themes such as patriarchy, colonialism, postcolonialism, and their impact on both pre- and post-independence Algeria, Djebar and Sebbar advocate for a decolonial feminine perspective that empowers Algerian women while unravelling the exoticized lens through which the hammam has historically been viewed by male representations. Through an analysis of Sebbar and Djebar's narratives, it becomes evident that they offer a nuanced response to the problematic portrayals of the hammam and its association with static odalisques. These writers actively subvert the stereotypes surrounding this

forbidden feminine space, challenging preconceived notions, and offering alternative perspectives beyond mere fantasies and imaginings.

In an effort to address further gaps in the research surrounding lesser-known contemporary Maghrebi works, this study examined them and brought them into focus. This exploration aims to stimulate further discussions and uncover fresh angles on narratives involving hammams, such as *À mon Âge Je me Cache encore pour Fumer* by Rayhana Obermeyer and *Chroniques d'un Enfant du Hammam* by Karim Nasseri.

As we have seen, Nasseri skilfully crafts a narrative that delves deeply into a young male protagonist's descent into his own fantastical realm Immersed in a tumultuous and suffocating world outside, characterized by an endorsement of toxic masculinity. Our reading of Nasseri's narrative has revealed valuable insights into the male perspective on the women's hammams, the implicit motives driving the continuous obsession with this space and nude women's bodies it nurtures. Nasseri displays the tactics and strategies some males can ingenerate to gains – illicitly – access to the intimate and forbidden realm of the women's hammam. Nasseri's chosen male angle to representing the hammam has been through a taboo and individualistic storytelling approach devoid of dialogical exchange with any of the visitors to the hammam; instead Nasseri gives free reign to his young protagonist's sexual instincts, although fully aware of the customs of his society and the sacredness of the women's hammam he has penetrated. It becomes apparent that Idriss possesses an overpowering desire to assert dominance over these women within the confines of this inner sanctum; their bodies merely instruments for indulging his personal fantasies. In doing so, he unwittingly mirrors both forms of misogynistic oppression perpetrated by colonizers as well as colonized men – ironically critiquing and denouncing them throughout his narration.

Through *Chroniques,* Nasseri's hammam depiction has revealed an almost neurotic focus on conveying meaning through the body, the desire for the flesh, and sexual expression ignited by observing naked bodies of those who occupy society's most marginalized position, Maghrebi women. While male authors like Karim Nasseri have attempted to depict the women's hammam, he has attributed his own personal experience inside it: a place where sexual frenzies occur because male erotic fantasies come true inside it. Much like Orientalist Western depictions of this the women's space, Nasseri's portrayal lacks nuance and profound consideration for women's voices and experiences. Despite being a victim of the oppressive system himself, Nasseri's narrative is part of a broader body of subversive masculine literature that falls short in addressing discrimination against women in his society, reinforcing it instead.

In the realm of contemporary feminine representation, Obermeyer's *À mon Âge Je me Cache encore pour Fumer* presents a captivating multimedia portrayal of the women's hammam. This cinematic piece, an exceptional Arab film with such nudity and transgression by an Arab women filmmaker featuring Arab women, envelops viewers in an immersive experience by employing acoustics, compelling dialogue, and striking visuals to showcase not only the physical space of the hammam as it really is but also the profound interactions and personal journeys of its female characters.[386] My analysis of Rayhana Obermeyer's film, for instance, has shown that it is a film that stages the theme of feminine liberation and disclosure first through her bold choice of location, the women's hammam where she ought to portray nudity, and second by reference to the most repressive and silencing time for women in Algerian history. Obermeyer has stressed, as shown in chapter four, how women have used this space for self-affirmation,

386 Gopika K. P.

to voice their frustrations and by refusing to surrender to male oppression during a Civil War governed by Islamist oppression.

In Obermeyer's work, the portrayal of Maghrebi women is imbued with a profound sense of agency. The characters in her narrative exhibit an unwavering determination for liberation, symbolized through their rejection of societal constraints on their bodies, and voices to adherence to extremist agendas. Against the backdrop of the Algerian Civil War, Obermeyer vividly captured how these women are desperate for safety, solace, and self-determination in the hammam — a temporary refuge from both their everyday lives and the harrowing atrocities unfolding beyond its walls. Just like Djebar and Sebbar before her, Obermeyer too has shown in *À mon âge* that women have suffered subjugation for the longest, from misogynistic relatives to the illegitimate anti-regime extremists who have exacted their intimidations using women as the first tactic of getting to a people's discernment and future.

Through *Les femmes d'Alger, Femmes au bain*, and *À mon Âge Je me Cache encore pour Fumer*, Maghrebi women authors and filmmakers reclaim ownership over their cultural heritage by offering unique perspectives that intricately weave together notions of identity, agency, and lived experiences within this traditionally sacred space for women. These works not only challenge dominant stereotypes imposed by Western Orientalism but also actively intervene in redefining the cultural significance of this space for Algerian women.

This research explored the cultural significance of the women's hammam in contemporary Maghrebi literary and cinematic works, particularly in relation to oppression, violence, and resistance against historical erasure. By representing marginalized women's feminine discourse and lived bodies, branded as silent odalisques

and sexual objects, subservient to both the coloniser man and the colonised man, these texts, reinscribe women's subjectivity and agency. They are therefore creators through the published and screened expression of the self and the feminine collective, of the shaping and staging of reality. More broadly, they are participating in unveiling and deconstructing the games and issues of power at the foundation of relations of domination (gendered, colonial, class, et cetera):

> Parvenant, au moyen de l'expression littéraire [et cinématographique], à une réappropriation de ce qui fait leur singularité autant ontologique d'un groupe, c'est, en contestant le rapport de force symbolique de cette parole qui ne se parle pas au regard des normes dominantes, donner une forme légitime à ce qui était considéré jusqu'alors comme un stigmate. […] langue et corps sont ici partie prenante de la même logique.[387]

This research has revealed the significance of women's hammams in the daily lives of Algerian women within an Arab-Muslim context. It has also revealed how feminine writings emphasize and portray the hammam as a central element in Muslim Maghrebi culture and traditions. As a result, we have seen how the hammam, as a homosocial lived place, is central to Maghrebi women in the way they interact with it and experience it. A unique locus of self-expression and self-disclosure, the hammam is conclusively a safe and welcoming place where womanhood is negotiated, subjectivity nurtured, and agency cultivated.

387 Hervé Serry, 'La Littérature Pour Faire et Défaire Les Groupes', *Sociétés Contemporaines*, 4.44 (2001), pp. 7, 11.

Bibliography:

Ahmed Bouguarche, 'Le Hammam; Sexualité, Purification et Régénérescence Dans l'oeuvre d'Assia Djebar', in *L'Eau: Source d'une Écriture Dans Les Littératures Féminines Francophones.*, ed. by Peter Lang (New York, 1995)

Ali Muhammad Bhat, Ali Muhammad Bhat, 'Significance of Personal Hygiene from Islamic Perspective', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10.5 (2013), 35–39 <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-1053539>

Alloula, Malek, *Le Harem Colonial: Images d'un Sous-Érotisme*, 2nd edn (Paris, 2001)

———, *The Colonial Harem*, ed. by Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich, Translated (University of Minnesota Press, 1986)

'"Anecdotes Du Film À Mon Âge Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer" - AlloCiné'

Asli, Farouk Omar, and Radhi Jazi, 'The Hammam in Manuscripts and Ancient Works of the Arabic Medical Literature', *Revue d'histoire de La Pharmacie*, 56.358 (2008), 177–88 <https://doi.org/10.3406/pharm.2008.6478>

Assia Djebar, *Nulle Part Dans La Maison de Mon Père*, Babel (ACTES SUD, 2007)

At-Tirmidhi, Jami`, '[What Has Been Related] About the Virtue of the Day of Jumu'ah (Friday)', in *The Book on the Day of Friday - كِتَاب الْجُمُعَةِ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) - Book 4*

Austin, Guy, *Algerian National Cinema*, *Algerian National Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019)

Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space:* (Orion Press, 1957)

Baskin, Cyndy, 'Contemporary Indigenous Women's Roles: Traditional Teachings or Internalized Colonialism?', *SAGE Journals*, 26.15–16 (2019), 2083–2101

Behdad, Ali. *Belated Travelers : Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*. (Duke University Press : 1994).

Bensheikh, Mostapha, 'Quelques Reflexions Sur l'interculturel', in *L'interculturel Au Maroc. Arts, Langues, Litteratures et Traditions Populaires. Actes de La Journee d'etudes Organisee Par Le G.E.M et Le D.L.L.F a La Faculte Des Lettres de Rabat, Fevrier 1992.*, ed. by Abdellah Mdarhri and Abdemajid Zeggaf (Casablanca: Afrique Orient, 1994), pp. 75–79

Bentahar, Ziad, 'Beyond Harem Walls: Redefining Women's Space in Works by Assia Djebar, Malek Alloula and Fatima Mernissi', *Hawwa*, 7.1 (2009), 25–38

Bhatt, Tara, 'Emic and Etic Perspectives' (India: Lucknow University, 2012)

Blunt, Alison, and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (Guilford Press, 1994)

Bonn, Charles, Xavier Garnier, and Jacques Lecarme, *Litterature Francophone: Le Roman* (Michigan: Hatier, 1997)

Boraoui, Hedi, 'Introduction', in *La Traversee Du Francais Dans Les Signes Litteraires Marocains.*, ed. by Yvette Benayoun-Szmidt, Hedi Boraoui, and Najib Redouane (Toronto, 1996), pp. 9–16

Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab, *Sexuality in Islam*, ed. by Alan trans by. Sheridan, *Sexuality in*

Islam (London: Saqi Books, 2013), xx

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Language and the Symbolic Power, Trans. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson*, ed. by John B. Thompson, Polity Pre (Seuil, 1991)

Bullough, Vern L., and Michel Foucault, *Histoire de La Sexualite*, *The American Historical Review* (Gallimard, 1985), xc <https://doi.org/10.2307/1852672>

Carinne Borget, 'L'lslam Dans Loin de Medine d'Assia Djebar', *Reecriture Des Mythes: I'utopie Au Feminin.*, 1997, 83–93

Carlier, O., 'Les Enjeux Sociaux Du Corps: Le Hammam Maghrebin (XIXe-XXe Siècle), Lieu Pérenne, Menace Ou Récréé.', *Annales (Paris, France : 1946)*, 55.6 (2000), 1303–33

Cavallaro, Dani, *French Feminist Theory: An Introduction* (Continuum, 2003)

Charpentier, Isabelle, *Le Rouge Aux Joues: Virginities, Sexual Prohibitions and Gender Relations in the Maghreb* (PU Saint Etienn, 2013)

Chebel, Malek, *La Féminisation Du Monde. Essai Sur « Les Mille et Une Nuits* (PAYOT, 1996)

Cheryl F. Giuliano, 'Marginal Discourse: The Authority of Gossip in Beppo', in *Rereading Byron: Essays Selected From Hofstra University's Byron Bicentennial Conference*, ed. by Alice Levine and Robert N. Keane, 1st Editio (Routledge, 1993), pp. 151–64

Cixous, Hélène, 'Le Rire de La Méduse: Et Autres Ironies', *L'Arc*, 1975, 39–54

Claire Mauss-Copeaux, '"Deux Femmes Parmi d'autres Dans Un Monde Dominé Par Les Hommes", Algérie 1954-1962, Hadjira et Doukha', *Histoire Coloniale et Postcoloniale*, 2020

Clark, Kenneth, 'The Nude : A Study of Ideal Art', 1976, 408

Collins, Patricia Hill, *The Politics of Theory*, *Raisons Politiques* (Colchester: University of Essex, 2021), LXXXIV <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.084.0053>

Cordova, Sarah Davies, and Rafika Merini, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of Their Works*, *World Literature Today* (P. Lang, 2000), LXXIV

Cresswell, Tim, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004)

Déjeux, Jean, *La Littérature Féminine de Langue Française Au Maghreb*, ed. by Karthala (Lettres du Sud, 1994)

Delila Moursly, 'Interculurel et Langues', in *L'interculturel: Reflexions Pluridisciplinaire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995)

'Des Algériennes Défilent En Blanc Pour Préserver La Tradition', *Oumma Magazine*, 2013

Détrez, Christine, 'Orientalismes', *Colonialismes*, 25 (2008)

Deventer, Rachel Van, 'L'Agentivité et La Naissance de La Femme-Sujet Dans La Littérature Algérienne Contemporaine', *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 72.8 (2012), 2812–13

Djebar, Assia, *Ces Voix Qui m'assiègent ...En Marge de Ma Francophonie*, PUM (Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2018)

———, *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981)

———, *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (Albin Michel, S.A, 1993)

———, *Ombre Sultane*, Albin Mich (LGF, 1987)

———, *Vaste Est La Prison* (Albin Michel, 1995)

Draï, Sabrina, *The Gaze in the Model-Painter Relationship: Fictions of Art by Zola, The Goncourts, Poe, and James*. (2002)

Duncan, Nancy, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', BodySpace, 1996, 135–52

Fabienne, Bradfer, 'A Mon Âge, Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer Violent et Drôle, Intime et Cru - Le Soir Plus', *Le Soir Magazine*, 2018

Fanon, Franz, 'Sociologie d'une Révolution', in *L'An V de La Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1959)

Faulkner, Rita A., 'Vaste Est La Prison: Assia Djebar Tracing a New Path - Writing the Algerian Woman out of Her Confinement', *Journal of North African Studies*, 13.1 (2008), 75–89 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380701579591>

Graiouid, Said, 'Communication and the Social Production of Space: The Hammam, the Public Sphere and Moroccan Women', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 9.1 (2006), 104–30

Grigsby, Darcy Grimaldo, *Orientalism in 19th-Century French Painting*, *Department of Art History, U. C. Berkeley*, 2009

Heath, Nicola, 'The Historic Tradition of Wedding Night-Virginity Testing', *Sbs*, 2018 <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/relationships/article/2018/01/10/historic-tradition-wedding-night-virginity-testing> [accessed 30 May 2021]

Hiddleston, Jane, *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria*, *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria*, 2011 <https://doi.org/10.5949/UPO9781846312601>

Hübinette, Tobias, 'Orientalism Past and Present : An Introduction to a Postcolonial Critique', *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies*, 13 (2003), 73–80

Huddleston, Diane M, 'The Harem : Looking Behind the Veil', 2012

Irigaray, Luce, *Ce Sexe Qui n'en Est Pas Un*, *Les Cahiers Du GRIF*, Collection Critique (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), v

Janov, Arthur, 'The New Primal Scream: Primal Therapy 20 Years On.', 1991, xiii, 380–xiii, 380

Johnson, Allan G., *The Gender Knot : Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Temple University Press, 2005)

Jones, Deborah, 'Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3.2–3 (1980), 193–98

Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press: Reissue edition (1994), 1991)

Khada, Nadjet, 'La Litterature Algerienne de Langue Frangaise: Une Litterature Androgyne.', in *Figures de l'interculturalite*, ed. by Jacques Bres, Catherine Detrie, and Paul Siblot (Montpellier: Praxling, 1996), pp. 15–56

Khannous, Touria, 'The Subaltern Speaks: Assia Djebar's La Nouba.', *Film Criticism*, 26.2 (2001), 41–61

El Korso, and Malika, 'La Mémoire Des Militantes de La Guerre de Libération Nationale',

3, 1997, 25–51

Krouch-Guilhem, Circé, 'Leïla Sebbar : Entretien Sur Les Femmes Au Bain', *La Plume Francophone: Les Litteratures Du Monde Francophone*

Labontu-Astier, Diana, 'L ' Image Du Corps Féminin Dans l ' Œuvre de Assia Djebar' (UNIVERSITÉ DE GRENOBLE, 2012)

Laronde, Michel, *Leïla Sebbar* (Harmattan, 2003)

Lazreg, Marnia, 'Féminisme et Différence : Les Dangers d'écrire En Tant Que Femme Sur Les Femmes En Algérie', *Les Cahiers Du CEDREF*, 2010, pp. 73–105

'Maghreb Voices', *حظر للإبداع أم حماية للمجتمع.. تجدد النقاش حول الرقابة على الأفلام في الجزائر [Ban on Creativity or Protection of Society? Renewed Debate on Film Censorship in Algeria]*, May 2023

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word : Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*, 2019th edn (Princeton University Press, 1991)

Marie B. Tehon, 'Les Femmes et Le Religieux Chez Fatima Mernissi', in *La Traversee Du Frangais Dans Les Signes Litteraires Marocains. Actes Du Colloque International de I'universite York, 358 Toronto 20-23 Avril, 1994*, ed. by Yvette Benayoun-Szmidt, Hedi Boraoui, and Najib Redouane (Toronto: La Source, 1996), pp. 65–75

McCormack, Jo, *The Algerian War in French/Algerian Writing: Literary Sites of Memory. By Jonathan Lewis*, *French Studies*, 2020, LXXIV <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knaa052>

Mehta, Brinda, 'Fractures Historiques, Trauma et Résistance Dans l'écriture Féministe Algérienne : Maïssa Bey, Assia Djebar et Leïla Sebbar'

Mehta, Brinda J., 'Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices against Violence', *Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices Against Violence*, 2014, 1–282

———, 'The Rituals of the Female Body', in *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (Sycaruse University Press, 2007), p. 318

Mernissi, Fatima, 'Sexe, Idéologie, Islam', Deux Temps Tierce, 1983, 198

———, *Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, ed. by Mary Jo Lakeland (Perseus Books Publishing, 1991)

———, *Women in Moslem Paradise* (South Asia Books, 2002)

Messaoudi, Samia, 'Rayhana: « A Mon Âge, Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer »', 2017

———, 'Rayhana: "À Mon Âge Je Me Cache Encore Pour Fumer" - Clara Magazine', *161*, (May 2017)

Meziane, Sophia Lina, 'Invisibility and Dis-Identification of Algerian Women:Feminist Jurisprudence Eyes on the Legal Provions Related to Personal Status and Criminal' (American University in Cairo, 2023)

'Middle East Online', *سينمائيون يمتعضون من الرقابة الرسمية على الأفلام في الجزائر ['Filmmakers Resent the Official Censorship of Films in Algeria']*, (September 2018)

Mills, Janice, 'Orientalism and the Culture of "Other"', (2015).

Mitsi, Efterpi, 'Private Rituals and Public Selves: The Turkish Bath in Women's Travel Writing: Women Negotiating , Subverting , Appropriating Public and Private Space', (September, 2019)

Moghadam, Valentine M., 'Gender Regimes in the Middle East and North Africa: The Power of Feminist Movements', *Social Politics*, 27.3 (2020), 465–85

Moore, Lindsey, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2014)

Mortimer, Mildred, 'Reappropriating the Gaze in Assia Djebar's Fiction and Film', *World Literature Today*, 70.4 (1996), 859 <https://doi.org/10.2307/40152314>

Mostowlansky, Till, and Andrea Rota, 'Emic and Etic', *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, (2020), pp. 1–16

Nadia Benzaaza, '[Histoire] Les Femmes Algériennes et La Guerre d'indépendance - Djamila Bouhired - Dialna', *Dialna Magazine*, (2022)

Nasseri, Karim, *Chroniques d'un Enfant Du Hammam* (Paris: Denoël, 1998)

Nicole, Sophie, and Isabelle Tanniou, 'Decoding Identities in "Francophone" African Postcolonial Spaces: Local Novels, Global Narratives', (March, 2015)

Pasin, Burkay, 'A Critical Reading of the Ottoman-Turkish Hammam as a Representational Space of Sexuality', *Metu Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, 33.2 (2016), 121–38

Petre, Zoltán, 'The Romantic Eugène Delacroix and Orientalism', *Astra Salvensis*, 1.2 (2013), 27–42

Petty, Sheila, *Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film, by Kaya Davies Hayon*, (*Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 2021)

Rabah, Belamri, *Le Soleil Sous Le Tamis.* (Publisud, 1982)

RAVI, ARCHANA, 'It's My Right to Smoke: Rayhana Obermeyer', *DECCAN Chronicle*, (2017).

Rohloff, Caroline, 'Reality and Representation of Algerian Women : The Complex Dynamic of Heroines and Repressed Women', *French and Francophone Studies*, (2012), p. 38.

Romane, Malika Laïchour, 'Le Cinéma Algérien: En Quête de l'intime', *Pensee*, 384 (2015), 67–78

Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books India, 1994)

Schaaf, Anne-catherine, 'Woven Words in the Iliad : Gender , Narrative , and Textile Production in the Scholia of the Venetus, A Manuscript.', *College Honors Program*, (2022), p.49.

Sebbar, Leïla, *Les Femmes Au Bain* (Paris: Bleu Autour, 2009)

Serry, Hervé, 'La Littérature Pour Faire et Défaire Les Groupes', *Sociétés Contemporaines*, 4.44 (2001)

Shifrin, Malcolm, *Victorian Turkish Baths* (Historic England, 2015)

Sivananthan, Anetha, 'Harems, Neo-Colonial Patriarchies and Understanding Modernity for Postcolonial Maghrebian Women in Morocco and Algeria, with Reference to the Works of Assia Djebar, Fatima Mernissi and Leïla Abouzeid.'

Smail-Salhi, Zahia, 'Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 190.190 (2008), 79–101

———, 'The Occidental Mirror', in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. by Ian

Richard Netton (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), p. 321

Spacks, Patricia Meyer, 'In Praise of Gossip', *The Hudson Review*, 35.1 (1982), 19

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *In Other Worlds: Essay in Cultural Politics* (Routledge, 1987)

Staats, Valerie, 'Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women's Baths in Morocco', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 14.3 (1994), 1

Still, Edward, 'Representing the Algerian Woman in Francophone Literature of the Late-Colonial Period : Une Dissymétrie s'évoque', (2016).

Still, Edward John, *Representing Algerian Women*, *Representing Algerian Women* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019) <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110586107>

Stora, Benjamin, 'Women's Writing between Two Algerian Wars', *Research in African Literatures*, 30.3 (1999), 78–94

Teets, Samuel, 'The Work of Assia Djebar : (Re) Imagining Algerian Women ' s Embodied Experiences', (2014).

Temple, Walter S., 'Transitions Within Queer North African Cinema', *Screen Bodies*, 2.2 (2018), 64–77 <https://doi.org/10.3167/screen.2017.020205>

Tillion, Germaine, *Le Harem et Les Cousins* (Seuil, 1982)

Topping, Margaret, 'The Proustian Harem Source : The Modern Language Review', *Modern Language Review*, 97.2 (2002), 300–311 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3736861>

Turshen, Meredeth, 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From

Active Participants to Passive Victims?', *Social Research*, 69.3 (2002), 889–911

Wiredu, Kwasi, 'An Oral Philosophy of Personhood: Comments on Philosophy and Orality', *Research in African Literatures*, 40.1 (2009), 8–18

Woelert, Peter Christian, 'Materialisations of Space: Phenomenological-Archaeological Investigations Concerning the Relations between the Human Organism, Space and Technology', (2008) <https://doi.org/10.26190/UNSWORKS/13776>

Zine, Jasmin, 'Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation', *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 19.4 (2002), 1–22

Zobida Haggani, 'Theorie et Critique En Defaut Dans Le Champ Litteraire Maghrebin', in *Litteratures Maghrebines. Colloque Jacqueline Arnaud. Villetaneuse, Les 2, 3, et 4 Decembre 1987. Perspectives Generales*, ed. by Jacqueline Arnaud (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), pp. 91–97

Zohra Drif, 'La Mort de Mes Frères', ed. by F. Maspero, *Libertés*, (1960).