

## **Voices of Errancy, Spaces of Silence and Traces of Writing in the Narratives of Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela and Assia Djebar**

Ghania Ouahmiche and Dallel Sarnou  
*University of Oran1, Algeria*

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to examine some Anglophone and Francophone writings produced by Arab women writers, namely Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela, and Assia Djebar, whose recent novels reveal an unremitting recall to the past to connect the self to the present and future in relevance to home/homeland. In Faqir's (2014) Willow Trees Don't Weep, Aboulela's (2011) Lyrics Alley, and Djebar's (2002) La Femme Sans Sépulture (The Woman Without a Burial Place), these writers point out their concern with gender, trauma and identity; wherein the memory joins the imaginary to resurrect the past and rekindle its vividness. Then, this paper endeavors to show the way "home" as an object of quest is figured in these writings in order to conceptualize a locus of identification for Arab women. It also touches on some issues relevant to the portrayal of home/homeland, the quest for newly-established spaces and voices in terms of exile, traumatic memories, patriarchy and matriarchy. It seeks then answers to the central question as how these writers of the diaspora would re-cognize the fragmented subjects' voices, re-present their in-between spaces, and re-identify their home (s) in the selected narratives.*

**Keywords:** *voice, silence, memory, trauma, home, deterritorialization*

### **1. Introduction**

Home is portrayed in Anglophone women writings as conflated with gender, identity, self-discovery, journeying; and closely related to distinct and various spaces (*hallucinating space, diasporic space, subversive space*). Rather, voices of subjects in loss are largely approached in Francophone women writings, and their voices are mostly inscribed and described against a backdrop of trauma, amnesia and genderization. Faqir's, Aboulela's and Djebar's recent novels which explore contemporary issues; mainly the aftermath of fundamentalism, colonialism and postcolonialism, may best fit the articulation of the elements of voices, spaces and traces.

The focus on voices of errancy may retrace the journeys of subjects in loss in their quest for truth, release and self-identification. This paper intends to show how Faqir voices the voiceless about Arab Afghanis who crossed Peshawar to join Al-Qaida by fictionalizing the life of a terrorist and his daughter, how Aboulela speaks the unspeakable in the unofficial History of Sudan by retracing the trajectory of the Abuzeid's family, and how Djebar unveils and spells out the forgotten history of Algerian women by relating the tale of a legendary mudjahida. In this light, this paper seeks to foreground the primacy of voices over silences and to explain their translation into written

testimonies featured in neatly distinct realms; notably Jordan, Afghanistan, Sudan and Algeria.

Although the time/space frames of the three novels are clearly very different, they converge when it comes to the effect of traumatic past on the subjects' physical and psychological displacement, disappearance and loss. Also, the way the emotional complexity of these subjects as scrutinized in the selected narratives shows significant convergences. Fragmentation is perceived here as the lack of the coherent sense of the self. Fuchs (2007: 379) conceptualizes it as a lack of "*narrative identity*" which "*implies a continuity of the personal past, present and future [and is]...essentially based on the capacity of persons to integrate contradictory aspects and tendencies into a coherent, overreaching sense and view of themselves*". However, one would argue that the fragmented subjects in their journeys of crossing borders will become whole and will attain the coherent sense of the self. For instance, Najwa becomes whole only when she unveils the secrets of her father's absence, Nur finds relief solely when he rediscovers his self in lyric writing and poetry, and Mina achieves recovery and solace only when she sorts out the mystery of her mother's disappearance.

This paper tends to articulate the depiction of home/homeland in the three novels to foster the idea that each character is a wanderer in-between space and continuously creates new spaces and voices. It centers on Mallett's (2004:64) conception of home: "*home is a virtual space, a repository for memories of the lived spaces*". Also, it treats some other issues like the different manifestations of the past, trauma, memory, and history. For this purpose, each narrative will be treated separately to end up with conclusions and bring to light parallels between the three narratives.

## **2. Deterritorialized femininity and masculinity in Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep***

Fadia Faqir is an acclaimed writer from Jordan who is best known as a novelist although she has written several short stories, plays and critical essays. Her early novels are more concerned with marginalization and genderization and are deeply rooted in the Arab/Muslim women's diasporic experience, notably *Pillars of Salt* (1996) and *My Name is Selma/The Cry of the Dove* (2007). In their discussions of both novels, Moore (2013) and Alghamdi (2011) consider the two narratives to be mainly directed towards diasporic voices in an everlasting search of proper places/spaces wherein main characters are portrayed ostensibly from the standpoint of subaltern and marginalized subjects. In her latest novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014), the author articulates memory and identity and explores the way introspection and retrospection feature the fragmented subjects in order to discuss thorny issues like fundamentalism, secularism, and existentialism.

In this novel, Faqir defeats censorship-phobia and writes about the life of a terrorist and his daughter. Initially entitled *The Terrorist's Daughter*, *Willow*

*Trees Don't Weep* relates the story of Omar Rahmane who embarks in an epic journey to save the Islamic world but winds up as a terrorist; and Najwa who sets out to save herself but ends up as a dislocated immigrant in Durham. To reconstruct the story of Najwa and her father, Faqir returns to her sites of memory (*lieux de mémoires*) which are mostly derived from the aftermath of the cold war, and the corollary of the Soviet Union's invasion on Jordan and the Arab World. In an interview ( ), Faqir features her novel as “a rite of passage and a narrative of initiation”, and states that “Physical journeys from one country and continent to another are intertwined with internal ones. The odyssey humanizes and leads towards compassion for self and others and ultimately forgiveness”. Similarly, “Lyrics Alley” and “The Woman Without a Burial Place” may be interpreted as ‘rites of passage’ ( ) for the protagonists (Najwa, Omar, Nur, Soraya, and Mina) inhabit liminal spaces before they yield up a kind of truth to reach the coherent sense of the self.

After the death of her mother, Najwa decides to trace the father who abandoned her at the age of three and joined the jihad fighters in Afghanistan in a journey which metamorphoses her into someone who is possibly aware of very complex issues in the world. She wants to get to know why her father prioritizes religion over his loved ones. Najwa starts a journey from Pakistan to the centre of Taliban training, to Afghanistan and eventually to Britain to get answers to her queries. In a sense, Taheri (2014) and Bun (2014) characterize *Willow Trees Don't Weep* as a Bildungsroman ( ) that narrates the sore and arduous shaping of a young woman who accidentally gets involved with Islamist organizations and gets through nasty experiences in the various places she has visited as she uncovers her father's past. Undeniably, Najwa is similar to Mina in Djébar's novel as she uncovers her mother's past and memory. Mina also wants to get to know why her mother abandoned her to join the Maquis and prioritized the call of Jihad and the war of Algeria's liberation over her loved ones.

In *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Faqir explores ‘horrific spaces’ and ‘marginalized voices’ as paradigms of a testimonial type of writing largely based on remembering traumatic memories. In this ‘book of memory’ ( ), Faqir juxtaposes the voices of the father and his daughter in parallel narrations. The narration moves away from the daughter to the father, fades in, then it fades out and moves back to the father. The structure of the novel is marked by the interwoven narratives from the diaries of the father who relates the story ostensibly from his perspective to punctuate the story narrated presumably from the perspective of his daughter. Aladylah (2015: 225) touches on narration and focalization in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* that he perceives as “a forceful and cogent novel, about belonging, dislocation, love, forgiveness and loss”. Indeed, he puts in contrast Najwa who relates the story in retrospect and the absent father who relates his story in the first person pronoun, to foster the non-linear aspect of the novel which appears as a fractured narrative.

Although Tarbush (2014) posits Jihad and fundamentalism as the novel's central point, the narrative deals with some other issues like patriarchy, secularism, genderization, and even sexuality. In a sense, Faqir's book uncovers

some patriarchal practices in Jordan and other places. In the first chapter "*Behind the Poppy Field*", Najwa's grandmother unveils a truth about single women living on their own in Jordan: "*you know how it is in Amman and particularly in this neighbourhood. Chaste women don't live on their own*" (Faqir 2014:6). In fact, the life of Najwa represents the life of some other women who are caught between patriarchal practices, misinterpreted religious texts and failed attempts to get liberated. Amani and Gulnar; Najwa's step-mother and half-sister, are mostly archetypes of Afghani women who are torn between war and love. Najwa's journey in tracing her father can be perceived as a journey of finding a home to her unprotected femininity. Throughout the novel, Najwa expresses her fears and anxieties when she says: "*If my father died, I would live alone in that house... Only women of ill repute live on their own without a male guardian*" (ibid :23). She makes this point explicit "*On one side lived honorable women, those protected by their fathers or husbands, and on the other loose women like me*" (ibid: 69).

Despite the presence of the voice of the absent father in the narrative, women's voices invade most of the spaces. In the same way, women of Caesarea inhabit all the places in Djebbar's novel. In this regard, both novels can be considered as women's books in essence. Interestingly, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* portrays home differently; it depicts a home that is ruled by a woman and inhabited only by women. It must be a different home where matriarchy reigns; however, after the death of Najwa's mother, Raneen, this matriarchy falls down and the daughter decides to restore back the patriarchy that was excluded or forced to leave the house. Najwa states: "*A few weeks after the death of my mother, the imposer of rules and regulations, I had been free to search the house for clues, photos, documents -anything that would help me construct a father*"(ibid: 34).

Folding the many letters; Najwa could find hidden in a box, embodies a revelation, an unveiling of many truths related to decisive queries that could make her whole again. These letters helped her re-construct the father she barely remembers. A first truth she could unearth is that her father was a secular student of nursing, and that in five years; from 1981 to 1986, he turned from a normal loving father and a husband into a vagabond (ibid:36). It was this first truth that would prompt Najwa to begin her journey of finding a fatherly home after being exiled for more than twenty years. Najwa, thereafter, started a long journey of crossing borders to discover her father's past which would make her reach the coherent sense of the self. At this point, to recall Butor's ( ) statement about travel and writing "*to travel, at least in a certain manner, is to write (first of all because to travel is to read), and to write is to travel*" (1974:2), Najwa and her father's divergent journeys may convey a truer depiction of home and identity within fragmented spaces. Besides, the letters of Omar Rahmane

unearth striking truths on jihad and why people abandon their families for the sake of the sacred war.

*Willow Trees Don't Weep* blurs the line between fiction and history. In an interview, Faqir (2011) states that this book follows a documentary approach and a work of imagination wherein she transforms a real story of a young man from her neighborhood in Amman who achieved martyrdom in Afghanistan in 1987 into a story of a young woman abandoned by her father for the sake of Jihad. Such an appeal to a documentary background serves to foster the historical characteristic of the novel. Faqir argues that “*This book is also an attempt to document the history of Arab-Afghanis; fighters of Arab ethnicity, who travel to Peshawar, crossed to Afghanistan and joined Al-Qaida [...] The novel will documents their history and follow them on their journey from the Arab world all the way to Afghanistan*” (Chambers 2011: 71). Indeed, the novel reveals some historical facts about Taliban fighters, as shown in this excerpt:

Masada ‘Lion’s Den’ Training Camp, Afghanistan, April 1987... The five-star camp has seven caverns, each a hundred yards long and twenty feet high... It was built by Sheikh Osama’s construction company, mainly to house Arab Afghanis, mujahideen of Arab origins. The beds are comfortable and there is plenty of food, cooked by a Saudi chef [...] I felt like an imposter when we cried ‘Allahu akbar’ in unison in Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian, Egyptian, Sudanese and Saudi accents (Faqir 2014: 95-96).

The Masada ‘Lion’s Den’ Training Camp is a real life camp that Osama Bin Laden did build near Jajhi Afghanistan, where only Arab fighters were allowed. It is known as al-Masada or The Lion’s Den: a series of barrack, ammunition, stores, firing ranges, makeshift first-aid clinic, and so forth. The Mujahedeen al-Masada had been constructed by Bin Laden so as to have a training facility and not to rely on Pakistan ( ). Omar Rahmane’s letters uncover untold stories of Taliban camps, battles, training and social life. Taliban is depicted as a home that Najwa’s father was forced to inhabit “*When Hani and I arrived here [Aybak, Afghanistan], we knew what we were doing: we were fighting the communist Soviets and trying to get them out. I was not and didn’t wish to be a combatant like him, no matter how hard the warlords tried*” (ibid:114).

The home Omar was looking for was rather the love his first wife could not offer. His journey to Afghanistan is at heart a journey of love for his best friend, Hani. In Peshawar, Omar meets Gulnar and falls in love with her. About the love he found in and with Gulnar, his Afghani wife; Omar says: “*I looked for the sea in her, migrating birds, fields of wheat swaying in the wind. I searched for a centre, a walled garden with grape vines and jasmine, my country*” (ibid: 143). Gulnar was Omar’s new home after having been displaced away from his uptight frigid wife. Similarly, Najwa’s home was not Amman,

neither Peshawar not even Durham where she ends residing. Najwa was looking for an emotional home where she could be re-territorialized after being exiled in all places she went to; the father may represent the home Najwa is tracing.

In her homeland, Amman, Najwa was different because she was a woman left on her own; she says: *“I knew I was different. I was not allowed to cover my head, wear a long school uniform or trousers, recite the Qur’an [...] I would stand by the iron gate, listening to them sing, ‘Welcome Ramadan!’ The house was secular and it took me years to understand the meaning of that word”* (ibid: 9). Being different from other conservative girls of Amman excludes Najwa from a space she inhabits physically but cannot adhere to its rulings emotionally. Even in her own family, the protagonist was exiled from a secular authoritarian mother who imposed on her secularism the same way the whole society wanted to impose on her Islamism. Najwa accuses both her mother and father for her bewilderment; she says: *“You’re as bad as each other. You abandoned me and she deceived me”* (ibid:4). During her journey to different places, mainly Pakistan, Afghanistan and even UK, Najwa was looking for a home where to settle serenely. The home she was looking for is the only place where she could reterritorialize; to use Deleuze’ and Guattari’s ( ) concept, her identity that she lost between her mother’s extreme secularism and her father’s extreme fundamentalism. All she was looking for is herself; as she states: *“Yes. Lucky indeed. Unlike me, my grandmother knew who she was, where she came from and what she believed in”* (ibid:138).

Najwa was also experiencing different odd moments that would help her re-construct her lost identity. In Afghanistan, while travelling in a car to go to Peshawar, Najwa wears a chador, head wrapped in hijab and sits next to a woman wearing burqaa: *“My mother, who went out of her way to secularise me, would vomit blood, if she saw me wearing the blue shroud”* (ibid:101-102). Also, when she meets her step-mother Gulnar and half-sister Amani, she discovers the cruel, dark side of herself due to the absence of affection:

Amani sat next to me playing with a cloth doll [...] Perhaps you had spoiled her so much that she could hang on her childhood? You must have showered her with your love [...] Her tears spurt out at the least provocation. I, the abandoned daughter, on the other hand, weathered and dried-up like a prune, would always remain dry-eyed” (ibid: 151).

Even when her sister is murdered, “her sister [Najwa] couldn’t shed a tear (ibid:162).

In this passage, Najwa understands that having been abandoned by her father is behind her cruelty. After the death of her half-sister, Najwa leaves *“the land of the wronged, of victims and hard-done-bys, and entered the country of the guilty”* (ibid:161), that is Britain, comprehending that Afghanistan is never the home she can belong to just like her father.

Arriving in Britain, Najwa meets her father and other British people in Durham; like Andy with whom she had her first sexual experience. After having hosted her with unexpected generosity in their ‘pigeon loft’, Andy and his mother gave up on her knowing she was coming from the Middle East and she was a daughter of a terrorist: “*I got up and walked towards him. He stepped back [...] Why was he so cold with me? My grandmother had said that men were predators...He might not have wanted to get involved with a foreigner*” (ibid:208-210). In Durham, Najwa also meets Elizabeth and it was only in her house that she could find inner peace. Najwa was interested in knowing all the trees in the neighborhood. At the end of her journey, she finally feels liberated after having understood that her father’s love for his friend Hani, was the only motive for his flee to Afghanistan: “*You loved him dad? He took off his glasses and wiped them. Too much, perhaps*” (ibid:274). She feels released after having seen and talked to her father who was sentenced to death. As her name indicates in Arabic, Najwa is “*a whisper or a secret conversation*” (ibid:269). Omar reveals that Najwa could find answers to her queries in his whispers: “*At dawn and after morning prayers, I imagined you [...] I whispered my answers and blew them, hoping that the breeze would carry them to you. Also, life is secret conversation*” (ibid:269). Najwa finally finds solace and creates her own home; a space where she reaches the sense of the self:

Liberated by the spaciousness, I stretched my arms out and said to the chariot-shaped cloud, ‘Peace be upon you, wherever you are!’ After months of studying British trees, and much quizzing by Elizabeth over many dinners, I had begun to recognize them [...] I must go back to sweep my mother’s grave” (ibid:276).

At the end of the novel, Najwa announces her return to Jordan in order to change certain practices in a patriarchal society. She lastly finds a way in-between her mother’s secularism and her father’s fundamentalism. She creates a way to perceive the Truth solely from her own standpoint. Similarly, Soraya and Nur approach the Truth of Sudan’s nation as well as their inner truth from their own perspectives in *Lyrics Alley*.

### **3. The vicissitudes of home/homes’ depiction in Aboulela’s *Lyrics Alley***

Leila Aboulela is a Sudanese writer, currently a resident of Aberdeen. Known as a British Arab novelist, Aboulela wrote a collection of short stories titled *Coloured Lights* (2001), and four novels *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2011), and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015). Aboulela’s early novels are featured as religiously inflected narratives and are mostly located in diasporic spaces (Hassan 2008; Abbas 2011; Dimitriu 2014). Their focus has often been on those places that *metonymize* a journey of self-discovery in a place

or at a time where marginal subjects are dislocated, invisible and deterritorialized. Yet, Ball (2010:118) argues that Aboulela's novels are born out of the secure boundaries of faith-based community and identity, in which the establishment of roots are posited as central to the diasporic experience.

*Lyrics Alley* is distinct from Aboulela's previous writings in that it is set entirely in Sudan of mid 1950s and it underpins faith and the religious values of Islam differently. Aboulela frames her text within a Muslim setting and presents her characters with different shades of religious devotion and naturally the paradox East/West that predominantly features *The Translator* and *Minaret* appears undermined. Conversely, *Lyrics Alley* has mainly been categorized by many critics as historical (Awad 2014; Chambers 2011). What is, indeed, specific to *Lyrics Alley* is the way Aboulela portrays patriarchal figures in Sudan at the time leading up to independence. Each part of the novel is introduced by the illness of a key male protagonist: first Mahmoud the patriarch, then Nur, paralysed in a diving accident. Yassin-Kassab (2011) considers that these dramatic devices serve to gather the extended family and also act as pivots in the struggle between the two wives.

*Lyrics Alley* is structured around polyphonic voices that uncover untold stories/ histories of the Abuzeid's family and Sudan. Unlike other novels, *Lyrics Alley* traces the life of heterogeneous characters and deftly delineates their fates. Events are clearly depicted from the characters' standpoints. Nur's accident is viewed from Soraya's perspective while its aftermath is mostly portrayed from Mahmoud's standpoint. When events move to London, scenes are seen from Nur's stance. However, this layering of viewpoints has been erroneously interpreted by Awad (op.cit) who advocates that the novel is populated by heterogeneous characters whose intertwined voices create a certain discordance or cacophony. Rather, these multiple voices may be understood as multiple layers of Sudan's History. In this sense, Akbar (2010) suggests that Aboulela's "*book is capturing an optimistic time before the whole thing descends. The story of the [central character] Nur is showing the history of Sudan, the dashed hopes after independence*".

Like *Willow Trees Don't Weep* and *La Femme Sans Sépulture*, *Lyrics Alley* interlaces history and (auto)-biography. Though many critics claimed the novel historical, the reflections on *Lyrics Alley* germinate when Aboulela decides to capture her father's youth and his childhood growing up in Umdurman by setting the scenes and events in the 1950s. Indeed, the novel was inspired by the life of the cousin of Aboulela's father, the poet Hassan Awad Aboulela -fictionalized in the character of Nur who found success in the 1950s when his lyrics became popular songs sung by the leading singers of the time.

Aboulela has taken the risk to fictionalize the history of her homeland in the most critical period Sudan has ever experienced: the independence years. The 1950s were the most critical years in Sudan's contemporary history which has been plagued by many internal conflicts, particularly the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972), the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005), culminating in the secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, without excluding



the War in Darfur (2003-2010). This historical fact was dismissed in *Lyrics Alley* for the focus of the author was (auto)-biographical rather than national.

The novel is not only about a history of a nation; it explores other issues like polygamy, female circumcision, the juxtaposition of Sudan/Egypt, tradition/modernity; faith and love. In their discussions of the novel, Hunter (2013) insisted on Aboulela's representation of Muslim characters' faith while Dimitriu (2014) focused on other aspects. In this concern, Dimitriu (2014: 78) says:

Aboulela's latest novel, *Lyrics Alley* -although its setting is not contemporary (pre-independence Sudan of 1950s)-is also deeply preoccupied with issues of dislocation and faith; and how individual characters move between and across cultural and political lifeworlds, between modernity and tradition, patriotic duty and individual freedom, while retaining their faith and dignity in the face of the political and personal upheaval.

The novel also focuses on the depiction of language, writing, home and displacement. The main characters (Nur, Soraya, Nabilah and Waheeba) *metonymize* the journey of being dislocated from one home to another. The novel may also be understood as a continuous discovery of the self. Aboulela's choice of the characters' names may support this claim; she elucidates that Nur in Arabic means 'light' and Soraya (Thurayah) is the Arabic name of the Pleiades while Badr means full moon. She explains that she might be circling around the idea of a source of light refracting and bouncing off. Besides, the novel's central focus is Nur's accident and his journey of deterritorialization; and around them orbited the different characters. Some were directly affected by Nur's accident like Soraya and his parents, while others more obliquely like his stepmother Nabilah and his tutor Badr.

In *Lyrics Alley*, every character creates his/her own home. Despite of their living in the same house, their conception of home varies. The Abuzeid's house gathered different families that Aboulela introduces at the beginning of the novel. The peculiarity of the way Aboulela introduces her characters is how she distinguishes between characters by adding a 'married' or a 'deceased' characteristic to some principal characters while singles are marked by no identification. This big house has become a place of grief where many characters feel displaced: "*Over the years Soraya heard the story of their mother's premature death from an asthma attack over and over again. In her mind she saw their house burning with grief and loss while she, little and soft, toddled unscorched, like an angel passing through Hell*" (Aboulela 2011:6). It was a dark home for many characters: for Soraya, the little orphan girl, for her father Idris, for Halima, Fatma, Nur and others.

As for Idris, as a widow he was: "*Sore? A little, like any man in his situation. Often lonely, too, but a good wife was expensive and, though he was a difficult, heavy-handed father, he did not want to saddle his daughters with half-*

*brothers and half-sisters*" (ibid.). He may represent the dislocated patriarchy which seeks refuge in money or a home in the absence of femininity. What marks this narrative is the way dead male and female characters contribute to the displacement of the living. Soraya's mother's death illustrates this case in point for which "*the result was a dry and hollow home, a house Soraya did not particularly like to spend time in*" (ibid.). Soraya, as a motherless child, becomes homeless: "*She became a nomad. At every family occasion: wedding, birth, illness or funeral she would pack up and move to where the company was. No Abuzeid family gathering was complete without her*" (ibid.). Eventually, Soraya finds a home where she could be reterritorialized. She was different from her elder sisters because she loves writing and reading: "*Soraya loved reading romantic novels in which the heroine was beautiful and high-spirited. She relished drama and action. Halima thought it insular to shut off the world and read*" (ibid:7). This may be a hint of the rise of a new young generation in the 1950s which also coincides with the rise of nationalism followed by independence in 1956.

After his paralysis, Nur creates a new space and relocates his self in a new home. He finds release in poetry and achieves recovery and solace in lyrics writing. Nur sees "*words on the page are a mirror. They reflect his secrets and his beauty*". Nur was a music lover, word lover and art lover. "*She [Soraya] remembered how [...] he had loved to sing... But when he sang at a wedding outside the family, the wrath of his elders descended upon him. He was shaming the Abuzeid family, they said*" (ibid:30). Nur's displacement from his family is their rejection of his love of art. "*Soraya remembered him crying, when, as a consequence, his father punished him and forbade him from going out*" (ibid.). Nur was confused and exiled: "*She remembered his confusion and broken spirit, crying the way boys cry, with a lot of pain and little noise*" (ibid: 13). It was another exclusion from a home which is supposed to be a family, a house and a nation.

For both Soraya and Nur, home is not the physical space. This fact complies with Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) idea which states that an individual is deterritorialized from a home mentally and emotionally to engage in a long search of one's suitable home to be reterritorialized again. The two characters have experienced different journeys of psychological displacement from a family where members are supposed to construct a common home. The Abuzeid's family is an archetype of the whole nation and Sudan in the 1950s. It was the elite and educated young people who were the most bewildered among other subjects. Awad (2014) claims that knowing and observing the nation from the margin were behind this bewilderment.

*Lyrics Alley* is about the home Lowenthal (2015) describes as the past we live. The author's fictionalizing of a past she lived as a child corresponds to Lowenthal's (ibid:25) idea that "*the past was safe! We are at home in it because the past is our home- the past is where we come from*". The image of the house as a metaphor of the past as advocated by many critics is the way Aboulela

depicts Abuzeid's house which reflects the past of Sudan, and the characters echo voices from the nation's past and most critical historical era.

#### **4. Women's voices in the haunting home in Djébar's *La Femme Sans Sépulture***

Assia Djébar is the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayen, an Algerian novelist, translator filmmaker, poet, essayist and playwright. Most of her writings (novels, short stories and essays) are clearly related to Arab Muslim women's issues and particularly focused on trauma, memory and marginalization in colonial and postcolonial Algeria. Djébar's early works did not really treat issues in relation to political engagement. Recent works; however, mark a new tendency in her writing privileging war's memory and women's place within a patriarchal society. For instance, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie [Algerian White]* (1995) uncovers Algeria of 1990s and highlights an elegiac discourse reflecting Djébar's mourning and bereavement of the death of her friends assassinated by Islamists. In her most recent novels, namely *La Femme Sans Sépulture [The Woman Without a Burial Place]* (2002) and *La Disparition de la Langue Française [The Disappearance of The French Language]* (2003), Djébar sets out a genealogy of Algerian women as suggested in Hiddleston (2006) and appeals to the poetics of hauntology ( ) through speaking the dead to mitigate the shadows of the colonial past.

*La Femme Sans Sépulture* explores silence and voice as paradigms of a particular type of writing mostly grounded on trauma, testimony, and memory. The novel is about writing Algerian women's struggle for a release from marginalization, a healing from the wounds of trauma, and more particularly for a relief from patriarchal sequestration. In this sense, the novel revolves around marginalized subjects, Algerian women whose contribution in the war of liberation was undermined after independence. Moreover, it is about the double violence inflicted upon women's bodies in colonial and postcolonial Algeria; it is about subjects in loss whose specter is still haunting the different spaces it inhabited. Rather, the narrative is structured around polyphonic voices interwoven in a dialogical way to reveal the truth of Zoulikha the protagonist, a moudjahida (freedom fighter) who was tortured and killed by the French army, and her body was never recovered. Indeed, Zoulikha incarnates a subject in loss as portrayed in Boutler's (2011:3) view "*the subject, in loss, becomes an archive of loss, a site where the memory of loss and trauma is maintained in a kind of crypt*".

In this narrative, Djébar retraces the life of Zoulikha Oudai from Caesarea who joined the Maquis, then arrested, tortured and killed by the French, and her body was never found. Initially, Djébar portrays herself as a journalist who returned to her home city (ville natale) Cherchel, once called Césarée, to reconstruct Zoulikha's tale. Yet, Zoulikha's life is conjured in a fragmentary manner through the testimony of several women including Zoulikha's daughters, Hania and Mina, her fortune-teller friend, Dame Lionne or L'la Lbia, her sister-in-law Zohra Oudai, the author-narrator (Djébar herself), and Zoulikha's own voice speaking from beyond the grave.

The author-narrator reconstructs in an authentic way Zoulikha's life by transcoding the stories narrated by these women into fragments of writing intermingling elements of history and autobiography. Besides, the text conjures up elements from reality and fiction (Medeiros 2007; Donadey 2008) to rewrite history, to write against the sentence of history, to rewrite oblivion, to write against oblivion. Djebbar places Zoulikha at the centre of a large female fresco as indicated in the notes to the reader (Avertissement) "*au centre même d'une large fresque féminine*" in order to bear witness to the fact that Zoulikha still lives on in the heart of the city "*Je suis revenue seulement pour le dire. J'entends, dans ma ville natale, ses mots et son silence, les étapes de sa stratégie avec ses attentes, ses fureurs* (Djebbar:214) (I came back only to say it, in my native city, I hear, in my native town, her words and her silence, the various stages of her strategy with her moments of waiting and furies) ( ).

Although Djebbar (2002) claims her novel a fiction narrative with an autobiographical/ documentary background, the text explores other issues like home and displacement, exile and language, culture, gender and sexuality. The author-narrator attempts to reveal her hybridity and her plural being through this narrative and inscribes this plurality in a mosaic space settled by bird-women of Caesarea. In this regard, Djebbar tries to reinforce the masculine absence within this mosaic and thereby inverting what Zimra (1992:71) termed "genderization of space" to convey the idea that "*the masters of the outside are conjoined in an upward movement towards justice and freedom. In order to participate and so liberate themselves, the creatures of the inside must move from the inner to outer space*".

Throughout this testimonial journey, the women of Caesarea are referred to as birds of the mosaic "*les oiseaux de la mosaïque*" and figured out in the image of "Odysseus and the Sirens" as displayed in the town's museum. Nonetheless, the author-narrator situates herself at the centre of the mosaic and substitutes Odysseus as a traveller searching his/her home. Like Odysseus who was delighted by the sirens' chant, Djebbar was enchanted by women's songs that she transcribed in a piece of writing to liberate them from sequestration and voice out their silences.

Des femmes, celles de Césarée! De longues pattes d'oiseaux prêts à s'envoler au-dessus de la mer -c'est une scène marine, elles sur le rivage, contemplant un grand vaisseau au centre de la scène, flottant au-dessus des vagues. Leurs faces sont si belles, leurs couleurs nuancées ont traversé les siècles et conservent leur éclat. (Djebbar 2002: 116-7)

Women, those from Caesarea! With long bird claws ready to fly away above the sea -it is a marine scene, with women on the shore contemplating a big ship in the middle of the scene, floating above the waves. Their faces are so beautiful; their nuanced colors traversed centuries and preserved their brightness.

In this narrative, Djebbar dispels the notion of home as a fixed entity in either space or time and suggests instead a portrait in motion in order to

excavate the multiple layers of her characters' stories. She digs the metamorphoses of her characters that turn around the ghostly figure, Zoulikha. In this respect, the time of the narrative complies with Kristeva et al.'s (1981) "Women's time" which is considered to be a monumental time, cyclic in nature but not linear while the space is but spectral. In Djébar's haunted narration (Ben Salem: 2015), masculine negation is conveyed within a purely feminine space through absent or dead men. Mina bitterly disappointed by a love story or rather decline with a man who admitted he was homosexual. L'la Lbia lives alone as well as aunt Zohra after losing her husband during war-time. Zoulikha whose trajectory is nearly similar to that of the narrator remains widow after her third marriage.

Each of the narrative's characters creates his/her proper home despite their haunting by the specter. Zoulikha's eldest daughter Hania is plagued by deep anguish caused by the loss of her mother and the ambiguities surrounding her disappearance. In a section of the second chapter entitled '*Voix de Hania, l'apaisée*' (Hania's voice, the appeasement), Hania truly believes that her mother still lives in the city "*Zoulikha restée là, dans l'air, dans cette poussière, en plein soleil[...] Si ça se trouve, elle nous écoute, elle nous frôle*" (ibid:50) (Zoulikha remained there, in the air, in the dust, in the light of the sun [...]) Perhaps she is listening to us, touching us). Besides, Hania imagines her mother's ghost inhabiting her, and spurring her in order to find the lost body to bury it according to Islamic rites: "*Quêter sans fin sa mère, ou plutôt, se dit-elle, c'est la mère en la fille, par les pores de celle-ci, oui, qui sue et s'exhale*" (ibid:61) (Questing continually for the mother, or rather, she says to herself, it is the mother in the daughter, who sweats and exhales herself through the daughter's pores). Hence, Hania's quest for her mother's sepulcher provokes her psychological displacement and explains the origin of her sufferings, insomnia and the end of menstruation. The fact that she cannot mourn Zoulikha's death exacerbates her melancholic state and increases her feeling of being homeless. Hania's emotional displacement can be located within a wounded space (*la place blessée*) as conceived by Blanchot ( ) in his book '*l'écriture du désastre*' that makes her different from others, exiled at home since she lives in the shadow of her mother, she embodies indeed the metaphor of Zoulikha's spirit. The sepulcher becomes then the only place where she could reterritorialize but in a journey full of errancy Hania finds again the lost self and rediscovers the essence of her being after deliverance. After being able to speak about her mother's traumatic memories to the anonymous visitor, finally the suffocated voice finds release and the haunted body attains deliverance. Hania peels off the sepulcher as a mourning space to reach appeasement as her name indicates "*Hania semble en accord avec son nom: apaisée redevient t-elle, avec un vernis de courtoisie toute citadine*" (op.cit: 87) (Hania appears in harmony with her name, she becomes appeased, with a varnish of courtesy; entirely a city dweller).

Zoulikha's youngest daughter, Mina or rather Amina is the symbol of refuge and protection as put forth by Dame Lionne "*ta presence m'apporte*

*l'aman, pardon ou reconciliation*" (ibid: 26) (you bring me peace, forgiveness or reconciliation). Unlike her eldest sister, Mina does not lap into a prolonged melancholy but rather escapes the bitterness of losing her mother's love by occupying a new space in which she embodies the modern woman of Algeria. Mina is identified at the beginning of the narrative as Zoulikha's orphan '*l'orpheline de Zoulikha*'. As a motherless child, Mina creates her *wounded space* in which she relives the torments of her mother's traumatic memory differently: "*le souvenir est une fleur, une gardénia oui [...] Non, le souvenir de ma mère, je le porte comme un cercle fermée sur lui-même,...*" (ibid:184) (The memory is a flower, a gardenia Yes...No, the memory of my mother, I carry it as a circle closed in on itself,...).

Mina provides an instance of a resilient subject who continually refuses to hear or discuss certain facts related to her mother's loss. Mina finds it tough to express her sentiment of obfuscation into words and admits that she has not recovered yet from her mother's loss, she says: "*Jamais je n'ai pu pleurer, un nœud me reste là*" (ibid.) (I have never cried, a knot is still here). In order to jugulate her deterritorialization; Mina seeks refuge in another space to substitute the uninterrupted parole smearing her "*pour la première fois, avec Rachid, je m'entendais enfin donner réalité à ce manque*" (ibid:95) (for the first time, with Rachid, I finally succeed to give sense to this lack), her home is no longer Zoulikha's truth but her love for Rachid. Yet, this new home also brings her disillusionment and Mina finds herself double-wounded "*une histoire que je peux oublier[...]Je ne sais si la blessure est celle de l'amour toujours vivant-tournant à vide, à vif, mais vivant!*" (ibid:93) (A story that I could never forget [...] I don't know if the wound is that of the love still alive, idling, but alive). Near the end of the novel (ibid: 208), Mina transforms from an orphan child to a strong woman, she symbolizes not '*Jeanne d'Arc*' of France but of Algeria, she is the future of Algeria. Hence, the reader realizes that the cathartic effect of sharing her mother's memories finally brings her healing and solace.

Other women create their homes in this testimonial journey, mainly Dame Lionne and Zohra Oudai. Dame Lionne or L'la Lbiya in Arabic "*enjambe les temps, elle est mémoire pure*" (ibid: 167) (she strides the times, she is a pure memory). She represents a mythical pure memory and embodies a timeless and neat history; she portrays tradition, a metaphor of Zoulikha's memory (Zoulikha's interrogatories by Costa, her flee to the Maquis, and her torture). Her first home is the world of spirits enabling her to foresee the future. After a pilgrimage to Mecca, she ceases reading cards and her new home becomes the past: "*le passé, les jours partagés entre ta mère et moi dans leurs poids et leur lumière ...*" (26) (the past, the shared days between your mother and me in their load and light..). Zohra Oudai, Zoulikha's sister-in-law and Mina's aunt, embodies also memory. She represents the voice of the women of Caesarea, as shown in this excerpt: "*replongée dans le passée pour le revivre... Elle est devenue conteuse presque voyeuse, en tout cas impétueuse, comme si le 'temps de la lutte ouverte' subsistant; une incandescence invisible*" (immersed in the past to relive it...She becomes a storyteller almost a viewer, in any case

impetuous, as if the ‘the time of the open fight’ subsists; an invisible incandescence). After the death of her husband, Zohra Oudai becomes homeless. But, she no longer considers the past her home; Mina becomes her new home.

In this novel, the reader is constantly confronted with a slippage from one voice to another in which the women’s narratives give way to the spectre of Zoulikha from beyond the sepulcher to relate her story from her own perspective. Zoulikha related untold stories and voiced out unveiled truths about herself in four monologues. In fact, Zoulikha’s trajectory reveals that she has no fixed home, even as a dead woman she has no burial place. Initially, Zoulikha or ‘*Fille Chaieb*’ (Chaieb girl) finds home in school, she is portrayed as an educated girl as proclaimed by her father “*la première Arabe, ma fille, à avoir eu son certificat d’études dans la région, peut-être dans tout le département!*” (ibid:166) (my daughter, the first Arab girl in the region, perhaps in the whole administrative department, to have received her diploma!). She is also depicted as the Chaieb girl disguised as a Christian “*la fille Chaieb déguisée en Roumia!*” (ibid.). As a young woman, she finds home in the love of her three husbands but it is only with her third husband El Hadj Oudai that she is reterritorialized. Zoulikha asserts that: “*Dans l’ombre de la maison où je pénétraï, dans cette cité romaine que je connaissais jusque-là que la réputation... Mariée à El Hadj, je reprenais moi-même, et tout naturellement le voile ancestral*” (ibid:172) (In the darkness of the house where I entered, in this Roman city that I knew until then only reputation [...] married to El Hadj, I regained myself, and naturally the ancestral veil). For Zoulikha, the house was not home at the beginning but with El Hadj, it becomes what Bachelard ( ) termed ‘*un espace heureux*’ (felicitous space). In Zoulikha’s journey, the Maquis becomes home for the mother of Maquisards to reach Algeria’s liberty. After being arrested, tortured, humiliated sexually and killed by the French army, Zoulikha is haunted by her daughter Mina who symbolizes the future of Algeria. At the end of the novel, Zoulikha refuses to be buried and views burial as a betrayal.

In this novel, the voices of errancy marking feminine characters are transcribed and translated into voices of writing that the narrator (Djebar) prefers to transmit in the language of the colonizer. The narrator herself is constantly in a state of errancy when she depicts her return to home through blurring temporalities and fragmenting spaces. Indeed, the narrator is nameless, anonymous and stands as a listener (*écouteuse*) and a mediator. The novel is also about discovery and self-discovery. By reaching the truth of the legendary Zoulikha, the narrator rediscovers herself:

Moi, la fillette de la ville revenue de l’exil pour quelques jours, pas plus, oui, décidément ‘l’étrangère pas tellement étrangère,’ moi, à force d’avoir écouté Mina et Hania, Dame Lionne ainsi que, dans les collines, au-dessus de la ville, Zohra Oudai (ces deux dernières dames, combien leur reste-t-il désormais à vivre?), me voici de retour” (ibid:215).

Me, the little girl from the city, who has returned from exile, for few days, no longer than that, yes, really “the not so foreign foreigner”, me by dint of having listened to Mina and Hania, Dame Lionne as well as Zohra Oudai in the hills above the city (how much longer do the latter two have to live?), here I am back again.

At the end of the novel, the author-narrator contemplates her estrangement in her homeland despite her feeling of nostalgia. She asserts that she feels nowhere in her father’s house. Unequivocally, the house of her ancestral origin no longer resembles the place of the imagined space she creates of her father’s and ancestors’ reminiscences. Djebbar refuses to return home emotionally and physically and decides to voice the voiceless in the unofficial History of Algeria through women’s voices (Boibessot: 2001, Bacholle-Boškovic: 2003).

## 5. Conclusion

Although the three novels are proclaimed historical by many critics, they blur the line between fiction, history and (auto)-biography. Rather, the past and the present are intermingled in a way to inscribe blurred memories within diverse spaces to reveal the characters’ ambivalence, and their hybrid state of being in their quest for truth. However, the representation of truth is issued from the standpoint of subjects in loss, fragmented subjects within patriarchal societies: Nadjwa, the terrorist’s daughter in *Willow Trees Don’t Weep* in the quest of her father’s truth, Nur in *Lyrics Alley* in quest of Soraya’s love, and Mina in *La Femme Sans Sépulture* in quest of her mother’s lost body.

Along these disparate journeys, the reader constantly finds himself/herself confronted by characters who appeal to an imaginary reconstruction of their mother’s or father’s trajectory. For instance, the dialogue between the father and his daughter does not take place in real life, but it is rather of Najwa’s figment of imagination. Similarly, Mina narrates fragments of her mother’s tale from within a world she creates on the basis of what her oldest sister, L’la lbila, and aunt Zohra told her about the legendary Zoulikha.

The three novels mostly adopt a documentary approach forged in historical accuracy with varying degrees. Though Djebbar declares her narrative founded on such an approach, she refers to her novelistic freedom ‘*liberté romanesque*’ to reach Zoulikha’s truth. In fact, the disappearance of Zoulikha is related to all lost women in the warfare of 1990s of Algeria and likely associated to the victims of 11 September’s attacks to give it a contemporary resonance. Similarly, Faqir relies on a research material and appeals to a work of imagination in order to enhance the inner truth of Jihad in Afghanistan. Likewise, Aboulela reconstructs Nur’s story in the light of real facts drawn from the History of Sudan, as indicated in: “*I had to do a lot of research, although most of the novel is based on things my father had told me, and his friends and generation. It’s easy to get sidetracked with the research; I had to pull myself back and not to put too much information into the novel*” (Chambers 2011: 102).



Despite the similarities, these writers have deployed distinct literary devices. Djebbar preferred polyphonic narratives with a special focus on myth. Faqir privileged fragmentary narratives where she referred to the parallel synchronic re-telling of events by the daughter and the father simultaneously while Aboulela favored linear temporality and characters' heterogeneity. Yet, these narratives may be understood as a quest for deliverance and embodiment of feminine voices. They are about writing wounds, trauma and recovery. Their central focus is beyond rewriting history; they aim at breaking down women's silence and leasing their voices to be heard and their resilient bodies to be deliberated.

\* Corresponding author: Ghania Ouahmiche

[ghaniaouahmiche@gmail.com](mailto:ghaniaouahmiche@gmail.com)

Cité des Oliviers Bloc 44 N° 10 Maraval, Oran, Algérie

### Notes

1. Zaghmout, Fadi. (2015). Willow Trees Don't Weep: Interviewing Fadia Faqir.
2. The way Lott feature British Muslim Bildungsromane fits into Faqir's novel in that they "explore networks of affiliations, representing the desire for a fixed mode of identifying by engaging with the trauma of its absence. The disorientation engendered by a collapse of meaning is explored via the trope of the absent father and through a return to realist mode of writing" (2015:31).
3. The term of 'the rites of passage' was defined by Van Gennep (1960: 11) as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position or age". He categorizes the stages in any rite of passage as: *preliminal*, in which the subject is separated from his/her previous life; *liminal* during which the subject remains in a liminal space to integrate a new status; and *postliminal* whereby the subject realizes integration. This explanation is drawn from Maria del Mar Gallego (2002: 146).
4. Faqir considers the novel "The Terrorist's daughter" as one part of writing 'the book of memory' in Chambers (2011:70).
5. Butor (1972:4) states that: "pour moi voyager, au moins voyager d'une certaine façon, c'est écrire (et d'abord parce que c'est lire), et qu'écrire c'est voyager".
6. <http://www.tmba.tv/broadcastanimation/history/osamas-hideouts/al-massada-lions-den/>  
Brown Vahid (2008:24) also gives clear insights about Arab Afghani fighters from a historical standpoint.
7. The two concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization were first coined by the French scholars Deleuze and Guattari (1986). The two terms are used to characterize a constant process of transformation. While

detrterritorialization is the process in which to undo what has already been done, reterritorialization usually follows. It is the process to re-do what has been undone to what has already been done.

8. <http://www.leila-aboulela.com/books/lyrics-alley/inspiration/>
9. All the translations from French to English are mine.
10. In his analysis of “*La Femme Sans Sépulture*”, Michael O’Riley (2004; 2006; 2007) refers to the “*poetics of hauntology*” to foster the idea that all the characters are haunted by Zoulikha’s specter.
12. The term “wounded spaces” is borrowed from Blanchot’s book (1986: 30) “*l’écriture du désastre*” which is translated into English by Smoke as “*The writing of the Disaster*” to refer to “[...]the wounded space, the hurt of the dying, the already dead body which no one could ever own, or ever say of it, I, my body. This is a body animated solely by mortal desire: the desire of dying - desire that dies and does not thereby subside”.
13. The term “*espace heureux*” is coined from Bachelard in “*la poétique de l’espace*” (the poetics of space) to designate the intimate space, a space defended against hostile forces wherein the subject reaches comfort by reliving memories of protection and physical pleasure.

Ghania Ouahmiche & Dalel Sarnou  
 University of Oran1, Algeria  
 Cité des Oliviers Bloc 44 N° 10 Maraval, Oran, Algérie  
 Email: [ghaniaouahmiche@gmail.com](mailto:ghaniaouahmiche@gmail.com)

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