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**The Image of Women in American and Algerian Fictions: A Case  
Study of Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925)  
and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009)**

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## *Dedications*



*To my dear family.*

*To my dear friends, especially Zahra, Aber and Hakim.*

*To my colleagues.*

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## **Abstract**

This Dissertation is a case study which compares the image of women in American and Algerian fictions through the works of Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009). The purpose of this dissertation is to show how close backgrounds may produce similar literary productions. This was achieved by applying Fredric Jameson's theory *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981). In fact, the interest of this theory lies in the fact that it helped us show how the two ideological battlegrounds that the American society of the 1920s and the Algerian society of the 1990s were rendered through fiction by the two authors. In the first chapter we have put emphasis on the analysis of the major female characters of each novel; in order to sort out the prevalent ideologies in presence during the time the two novels were composed. Our work has shown that though the two novels may seem different, they share the same representation of women; both authors portrayed ambiguously women's physical appearance, inner thoughts, desires, and their situation in society. Then in the second chapter, we have studied the two novels as socially symbolic acts, and reached the conclusion that close backgrounds may produce similar literary productions.

## Introduction

After centuries of struggle against their traditional subordinate status, women have made an enormous progress in their long march towards emancipation and equality, although this progress differs from one society to another. This evolution in the status of women has not been even nor has it been steady. It has alternated periods of stagnation and periods of rapid change following in this the transformation in socio-historical conditions. This evolution is often captured in the cultural production, and specifically the literature of the societies in which it takes place, bringing about changes in the way women are represented. This was the case in 1920s America and 1990s Algeria. The present research paper compares the image of women in the literatures of the two nations through two different literary works; Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009).

The major aim of the present research paper then is to offer some insight into the way American and Algerian women are portrayed in their national literatures at pivotal periods of their way towards emancipation: the Roaring Twenties in America and the Black Decade in Algeria. Indeed, although almost a century separates the two periods and in spite of the cultural differences, the image of women in the two different literatures bears many similarities.

In the United States, the women movement can be traced back to the colonial period. In the 1600s Anne Hutchinson of Massachusetts was already advocating women's right to decide for themselves how different aspects of the community would affect them. But it is only in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it became a visible force. In 1848 Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton held a women's convention in Seneca Falls, New York, where they drafted the Declaration of Sentiments that was inspired from the Declaration of

Independence, and which asked for women's rights. During the next two decades, women fought for both suffrage and the abolition of slavery that gave birth to the American Equal Rights Association which asked for the right to vote for women and blacks.

By 1900, the suffragist movement knew new figures such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Harriot Stanton Blatch. Finally, in 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was passed and it granted voting rights to all female citizens.<sup>1</sup>

After its independence in 1962, Algeria kept using the civil code inherited from the French colonizer. In fact, this civil code guaranteed an equal status to men and women, but since Algeria is a patriarchal society, women were not given their rights in spite of their involvement in the war of independence. Their situation worsened in 1984 with the adoption by a conservative assembly of the Family Code, largely inspired from Islamic Law (sharia) ignoring the protests of women rights activists. The rise of fundamentalism beginning from the late 1980s further undermined the few achievements of women by denying them any participation in public life. This happened at a moment when women's aspiration for equality had increased with the increase in literacy and employment rates aggravating thus the conflict between the progressive and conservative parts of Algerian society.

The two works then are both products of conflictual periods characterized by a confrontation between progressive and conservative ideologies in which the status of women was the yardstick. Fitzgerald portrays in his novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) the new social and sexual freedom enjoyed by women during the 1920s and the way different female characters of the novel Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson, cope with it. As for Amin Zaoui, he provides the reader, in his novel entitled *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), with two different images of women; the traditional one who is subject to men's authority and whose will is decided by others, and the emancipated one who is always cursed



because she does not conform to the norms of society and the authority of men and whose freedom is always interpreted as delinquency.

## **Review of the Literature**

Ivan Štrba, in his work entitled *Emancipated Women of the Great Gatsby*, argues that in Fitzgerald's writings women characters are decorative figures of fragile beauty, though they are mainly proud of their personal appearance and even destructive. Ivan Štrba goes on to say that women of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) are not capable of intellectual or artistic interests and do not experience any passion.

In fact, there is not a single female character who exhibits anything but a desire for a good time and material possessions. In addition, for Štrba the new economic and sexual freedom enjoyed by the emancipated girls of the Jazz Age makes their lack of ethical concern apparent. More explicitly, the artificial world of these women enables them to think of nothing but having fun and trapping men in position of power.<sup>2</sup>

Soheila Perhadi Tavandashti in her work entitled *A Feminist Reading of The Great Gatsby*, examines the ways in which this novel embodies the culture of discomfort which characterized the post- World War I New Woman. Indeed, the author states that this discomfort is seen in the way female characters are represented in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). The author argues that though the main female characters Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson are different from one another, they do have something in common; more precisely they all embody different versions of the New Woman of the 1920s America. In fact, women of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) are portrayed in a very negative way; most of them are mainly exhibitionist, revolting, insincere and deceitful.<sup>3</sup> This

is best illustrated by Nick Carraway's saying: "Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply."<sup>4</sup>

Contrarily to *The Great Gatsby* (1925) which is one of the classics and canonical works of western literature, *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) is not a well-studied novel. As far as we know, no thorough academic studies of the novel have been published yet. Our bibliographic research has only yielded a few articles.

Max Véga-Ritter in «*La chambre de la vierge impure d'Amin Zaoui: Dans l'antichambre du terrorisme*» (2009) states that Amin Zaoui's style is impregnated with sexuality. He adds that the characters of Amin Zaoui are always troubled, and in search for freedom; political, social, ideological, religious and sexual. According to him, this instability is the result of the oppression of terrorism. In addition, the author goes to say that female characters haunt and obsess male characters in their honor and profound being.<sup>5</sup>

Outoudert Abrous in his article entitled «*Le Roman "La chambre de la vierge impure" d'Amin Zaoui: L'écrivain des Tabous*», declares that Zaoui in his novel pushes away the barriers of taboos, considering the fact that the author tackles subjects and ideas which are not allowed to be dealt with, and lays bare the savage and hidden desires of the characters of his novel. In addition, Amin Zaoui makes reference to some literary figures that, like him, use the verb not to be liked by readers, but only to say things as they feel them.<sup>6</sup>

### **Issue and Working Hypothesis**

It appears from this review of the literature that Amin Zaoui's novel received much less criticism than Fitzgerald's, let alone in comparison with the latter. Until now, and as far as we are informed, no research comparing the two works has been conducted. Our purpose in this dissertation is to offer some insight into the way women are portrayed in both American

and Algerian literatures through Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009).

This comparative study is based on the assumption that though the two novels were written in different periods and different places, they have in common their ambiguous representation of women. At first sight, both Fitzgerald's and Zaoui's female characters are superficial, lustful and whose only ambition is to trap men, preferably in position of power, but whether this is the authors' intention is debatable.

## **Approach**

As for methodology, we will rely on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981). Indeed, Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) opposes the view that literary creation can take place in isolation from its political context. He asserts the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts, claiming it to be at the center of all reading and understanding, not just a supplement or auxiliary to other methods current today.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the interest of this theory lies in the fact that it will help us show how the two ideological battlegrounds that the American society of the 1920s and the Algerian society of the 1990s were rendered through fiction by the two authors (F. Scott Fitzgerald and Amin Zaoui).

## **Methodological Outline**

Our work will be structured following the IMRAD method. It will consist of four sections. The first section is the present introduction. The second section will be devoted to the method and materials. In methods we will provide an overview of the theory Fredric Jameson developed in his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) whereas in materials, we will provide the biographies of the authors (Scott Fitzgerald

and Amin Zaoui) and the summaries of the novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), in addition to the historical backgrounds of the novels (America of the Roaring Twenties and Algeria of the Nineties).

The third section will be the results, then the discussion section, which will be divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, we will deal with the analysis of the major female characters in relation to the prevalent ideologies of the period during which each work was produced, and try to apply Jameson's theory to lay bare the political scene of the different periods. Then in the second chapter, we will study the two novels as socially symbolic acts, relying on Fredric Jameson's theory.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Carrie Fredericks, ed., *Amendment XIX Granting Women the Right to Vote* (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 14-17.
- <sup>2</sup> Ivan Štrba, 'Emancipated Women of The Great Gatsby' (Institute of British and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Prešov University in Prešov, Slovakia)
- <sup>3</sup> Soheila Pirhadi Tavandashti, 'A Feminist Reading of The Great Gatsby' (Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch).
- <sup>4</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Penguin Books, 1925), 65.
- <sup>5</sup> Max Vega Ritter, 'La chambre de la vierge impure d'Amin Zaoui: Dans l'antichambre du terrorisme', in *Horizon*, ed.
- <sup>6</sup> Abrous Outoudert, 'La chambre de la vierge impure" d'Amin Zaoui: L'écrivain des Tabous', *Horizon*.
- <sup>7</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 296.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## **I-Method and Materials**

### **1-Method**

#### **a- Summary of the Theory**

To reach our purpose of comparing the image of women in the American and Algerian literatures through Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), we shall rely, as it is previously mentioned, on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981).

Fredric Jameson in his book asserts the priority of political interpretation of literary texts, which according to him, are all political, 'This book will argue the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts.'<sup>1</sup> Indeed, according to Fredric Jameson, literary texts inform the reader about the history of a given society during a given period of time. One of the key achievements of Jameson is his success to bring together the two so far separate means of interpretation that psychoanalysis and Marxism are.

For Jameson, we can have access to the political unconscious of a given society at a given moment through the literary texts it produces in the same way as we can have access to the individual unconscious through dreams, neuroses and slips of tongue. He argues that the surface meanings of texts are not essentially trustworthy indicators of what is happening in the underneath surface, 'This is perhaps the place to answer the objection of the ordinary reader, when confronted with elaborate and ingenious interpretations, that the text means just what it says.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus, and according to Jameson, literature embodies the social and economic realities, out of which it is produced. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson combines Freudianism and Marxism and uses some key concepts from both in order to explain how literary texts are symbolic acts through which authors express all what was repressed by the

individual in order to conform to the norms of society, therefore, all what people repress is embodied in their literary productions,

the very closure of the "semiotic rectangle" now affords a way into the text, not by positing mere logical possibilities and permutations, but rather through its diagnostic revelation of terms or nodal points implicit in the ideological system which have, however, remained unrealized in the surface of the text, which have failed to become manifest in the logic of the narrative, and which we can therefore read as what the text represses.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to say that authors unconsciously write about the political scene during which their works were created, readers, thus, must pay attention to the symptoms of the text in order to have access to the conscious reality of the period during which the text was created.

To better explain his theory, Jameson stresses three main concepts. The first of these is Narrative, which mediates the unconscious reality of the text in relation to history. The second is Mediation whose role is to establish a relationship between a work of art and its social context. The third is History, that he says, exists in textual forms such as novels and it deals with events that happened through time. Jameson states that while the therapist examines the unconscious side of the patient and tries to learn about his unconscious mind, the literary critic should use literary production to decode hidden economic and political forces that shaped their production.

For this sake, Fredric Jameson coins a new concept, the *Ideologeme*, to name the units of meaning the critic should endeavor to identify in a literary text: 'our object of study will prove to be the **ideologeme**, that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.'<sup>4</sup> Jameson defines it as the smallest intelligible unit of an ideology that can manifest itself through different expressions:

This larger class discourse can be said to be organized around minimal "units" which we will call ideologemes. The advantage of this formulation lies in its capacity to mediate between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion, class value, and the like, and the narrative materials with which we will be working here. The ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudo idea—a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice--or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are the classes in opposition.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout our work, we will appropriate and make use of this concept in order to sort out the different ideologies in presence in the two novels.



## **2-Materials**

### **a- Biographies of the Authors:**

#### **1- Francis Scott Fitzgerald**

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald is one of the most recognized figures in American literary and cultural history and a major writer of the twentieth century. He was born in ST. Paul, Minnesota on September 24, 1896. From 1908 to 1911, Fitzgerald attended St. Paul Academy. His first writing to appear in print was *The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage* a detective story published in the school newspaper when he was 13. During 1911-13 he attended the Newman school, a Catholic preparatory school in New Jersey, where he contributed three stories and a poem to the school newspaper, and he wrote plays for the Elizabethan dramatic club in St. Paul during summer vacation.

Fitzgerald entered Princeton University in September 1913; he neglected his studies for his literary apprenticeship but educated himself through wide reading. He joined the army in 1917 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the infantry. In June 1918 Fitzgerald was assigned to camp Sheridan, near Montgomery, Alabama. There he fell in love with Zelda Sayre, the youngest daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court judge.

The war ended just before Fitzgerald was sent overseas; after his discharge in 1919, he went to New York to seek his fortune in order to marry. He wrote a lot of stories but none was accepted to be published. He was also discouraged by Zelda's hesitation to marry him. In winter 1919, Fitzgerald returned to St. Paul to rewrite his novel *This Side of Paradise*; it was accepted by Scribner's editor Maxwell Perkins in September.

In winter 1919, Fitzgerald commenced his career as a writer of stories for the mass-circulation magazines. His first novel made Fitzgerald famous almost overnight. On April 3

he married Zelda in New York, and they embarked on an extravagant life as young celebrities. Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on December 21, 1940. Among his best literary works; *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender is the Night* (1934), *The Last Tycoon* (1940), *The Crack-Up* (1945).<sup>6</sup>

## **2-Amin Zaoui**

Amin Zaoui is an Algerian novelist, academic and journalist, born on November 25, 1956 in Bab el Assa (District of Tlemcen). Holder of a doctorate in comparative literature in 1988, he has taught for several years at the University of Oran (Department of foreign languages, Department of translation) and held several positions such as director of the Palace of Arts and Culture of Oran and director of the National Library of Algiers. As a journalist, Zaoui was the producer and host of the broadcast literary program *Parenthèses*.

In addition, Zaoui is a bilingual writer; he writes in French and Arabic. He escaped death at a car bomb in 1992, then he took shelter at Caen; a French city of shelter for writers. Adding to this, he was a teacher at Paris VIII and elsewhere in Europe. In his writings, Zaoui denounces hypocrisy of the traditionalists, submission of women, the madness of extremists, and the gravity of taboos. Nowadays, Amin Zaoui lives in France, teaches at different universities there. He also publishes each Thursday two columns; one in Arabic in the arabophone daily *Echorouk* and the other in French in the daily francophone newspaper entitled *Liberté*.<sup>7</sup>

His novels are translated in twelve languages including English, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and Serbian. Among his novels one can mention: *Le Hennisement du corps* (1985), *Sommeil du mimosa* (1997), *Sonate des loups* (1997), *La Soumission* (1998), *La Razzia* (1999), *Haras de femmes* (2001), *L'odeur de la femelle* (2002), *Les gens du parfum* (2003), *Le Huitième Ciel* (2008), *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), *Le dernier Juif de Tamentit*

(2013). He also wrote essays ; *Fatwa pour Schéhérazade*(1997), *L'Empire de la peur* (2000), *La culture du sang* (2003).

## **b- Summaries of the Novels:**

### **1-*The Great Gatsby* (1925)**

*The Great Gatsby* (1925) is one of the immortal classics in the world of American literature. It is, in fact, a portrait of American society during the Roaring Twenties; the events of the novel take place in in summer 1922. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is the story of a new rich man who claws his way from rags to riches; Jay Gatsby, is in fact, the central character of the novel, he is known for the lavish parties he throws each weekend at his ostentatious Gothic mansion at West Egg.

The events of the novel are told by Nick Carraway; a young man from a prominent Midwestern family, who came to New York to enter the bond business. Once in New York, Nick visits his cousin Daisy Buchanan, and her husband Tom Buchanan. Indeed, the Buchanans live in Long Island district of East Egg, while Nick as Gatsby, resides in West Egg, a less fashionable area and home to the Nouveaux riches. At the Buchanans, Nick meets Jordan Baker, a young beautiful woman with “a cold, cynical manner”, with whom he will later on be romantically involved. Jordan tells Nick that Tom has an affair with Myrtle Wilson, a married woman who lives in the Valley of Ashes.

Nick Carraway attends a party at Gatsby’s mansion where he met the host and the owner of the mansion beside his residence. Later on Nick became Gatsby’s friend and the latter wanted Nick to do him a favor by inviting his cousin Daisy to tea. The old love between Gatsby and Daisy is now revived and the latter attends Gatsby’s parties accompanied by her husband Tom, who despises the “new rich”. Although Tom is himself having an affair with a married woman, he is furious at the thought that his wife Daisy would be unfaithful to him.

The Buchanans, Gatsby, Jordan and Nick drive into the city and in the Plaza Hotel, Gatsby had a bitter confrontation with Tom and the latter reveals to Daisy that Gatsby’s

fortune has been made through illegal activities. As a result, Daisy's true nature is revealed and her allegiance to Tom too. On their way back to East Egg, Gatsby allowed Daisy to drive his car, and she accidentally hit Myrtle Wilson; who was killed instantly.

After the death of Myrtle, her husband George Wilson, driven nearly mad by the death of his wife Myrtle is desperate to find the killer. Later on, Tom Buchanan tells George Wilson that Jay Gatsby is the owner of the car which hit his wife Myrtle. As a result, Wilson thought that the driver of the car was certainly the lover of his wife, so Wilson shoots Gatsby before committing suicide himself. After the murder, the Buchanans leave town and Nick is left alone to organize Gatsby's funeral, to which only few people attend. Disgusted with life in New York, Nick decides to return to the Midwest.

## **2- *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009)**

*La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) is a modernist novel written by the Algerian novelist Amin Zaoui. The book is about the living of the Algerian society during the Black Decade. Indeed, this period was characterized by a clash between the Muslim fundamentalists who led an armed rebellion against the state, on the one hand, and the progressives who were seen as unbelievers and supporters of the government on the other. This conflict reduced drastically the freedom of people and confined it to the extreme practice of the Islamic religion.

The author portrays the wrongdoings of Muslims who used religion to mask their amoral practices, vices and lack of faith. The novel, in fact, is full of sexuality, for the author uses it to highlight the inner and savage desires of the characters and their will to transgress the laws of their religion. Amin Zaoui in his novel describes how religion became a source of trouble for the characters. In fact, the main female character Sultana is obsessed by the reading of the Coran, while she does everything that opposes its principles. In addition, men are portrayed as being hypocrite because they preach Islam and at the same time disrespect it.

*La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) is not only about sexuality and the taboos of the Algerian society but also a book of resistance. The first part of the novel is told by Ailane, a boy of thirteen years old. He recounts the living of his family in a small village called Carmoussa and tells how he was taken by unknown men and driven to the Maquis to fight against government and to preach Islam. Ailane also tells the immoral practices of the men and women there.

Later in the novel, the narration shifts to Sultana; Ailane's cousin and by her turn, she describes daily life of an Algerian family in general and a family without a man in particular. Sultana relates how she earns the living of the family in the absence of the males. She

describes how men were taking profit from her innocence and body. She also describes how the world of women is seen through different angles. Finally, the novel is also a mirror of the Algerian society during the Black Decade, and this is emphasised by the novel's tragic end.

## **c- Historical Backgrounds**

### **1-America of the Roaring Twenties**

The 1920s in the United States of America were a decade dubbed The Roaring Twenties. This decade was characterized by prosperity, productivity, technological advance and the emergence of women movements, the facts that contributed to a change in the popular culture of the United States. Indeed, the 1920s witnessed an explosive cultural transformation that affected the lives of the natives, of the African-American population and women. This period was also identified with prohibition, bootleggers and bathtub gin, the Harlem Renaissance, the Lost Generation, the Jazz Age and the flappers. As Rodney P. Carlisle put it;

With nostalgia, evident even as early as 1930, after the Great Crash, Americans looked back at the 1920s as an age of breaking with the past, and of a clash between an older “Victorian” or “Puritan” generation and a young, 20<sup>th</sup> century generation. Disillusioned with grand causes and reforms, young men and women turned away from political parties to cocktail parties, away from reformers to performers, and away from social causes to socializing. Whether the youth were more liberated and vibrant, or more hedonistic and self-indulgent, was a matter of point of view.<sup>8</sup>

As it was mentioned above, one of the dominant features of twenties America was the Prohibition. Indeed, Prohibition was meant as a struggle against the evils of alcohol and its roots go back to the founding, in 1873, of the Women’s’ Christian Temperance Union, which believed that ‘beer, bourbon and other alcoholic drinks led not only to intoxication and addiction but to the erosion of family bonds and the abandonment of Christian values.’<sup>9</sup> As a result, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919 prohibited the manufacture, transport, and consumption of intoxicating liquor. In addition, Prohibition gained the support of the majority of political parties and women because ‘for many women banning drink was key to their moral agenda.’<sup>10</sup>



Another conservative turn in America of the twenties was a resurgence of old time religion and values which were known as fundamentalism. Adherents of this movement saw in modernism a threat to the church. All those who supported higher criticism and those who believed in the evolutionary theory of Darwin were seen as a danger to the American society. The best illustration of fundamentalism was the Scopes Trial. Indeed, John T. Scopes was a young teacher from Dayton who was declared guilty of teaching Darwinism and was fined \$100.

Beside prohibition and fundamentalism, 1920s' America saw also the revival of Nativism, the old anti-immigrant hostility. Indeed, this period witnessed the revival of the Ku Klux Klan which vowed to protect American values and targeted blacks in the late 1860s, but was also hostile to Catholics and Jews in its post-1915 incarnation. In reality, this xenophobia combined ethnic hostility and racism against foreigners.

This Nativism reached its peak with its most famous expression of those times, the Sacco and Vanzetti case, which symbolized the disconcerted climate of this decade. In fact, Nicola Sacco (1891–1927) and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888–1927) were Italian immigrants and anarchists living in Massachusetts, who were arrested in May 1920 for payroll robbery and murder. Consequently, the two were executed without a fair trial on August 23, 1927.

Yet, one of the most popular images of the Roaring Twenties was the New Woman or the flapper. In fact, the term "flapper" first appeared in Great Britain after World War I. It was there used to describe young girls, still somewhat awkward in movement who had not yet entered womanhood.<sup>11</sup> In reality and as Rodney P. Carlisle stated;

Flappers were young women, especially those from late teenage years to 30, who engaged in a score of scandalous activities and flouted the conventions of the previous generations. While every generation has its rebellious teenagers, there was a common thread among flappers that went beyond their bobbed

hair and cigarette holders: they openly and proudly disdained authority, presumably in response to the obvious ubiquity of drinking despite Prohibition, and the signal therefore that authority was limited in its real power. They were the first generation of women to vote, but they did so in a climate tainted by the widespread contempt for Prohibition, which other than suffrage itself had been the first significant political change brought about by female activists. They knew they had more power than women before them, in other words, but had even more reason to distrust that power.<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned above, a new generation of women emerged during the twenties. This generation of women was the first to enjoy the right to vote granted to them by the Nineteenth Amendment of 1920. In addition, the participation of the United States in the First World War allowed them to experience financial autonomy gained with their employment in the industries of the war to fill the positions left vacant by the men sent to the front. Ever since, the number of working women kept rising. At the end of the war, it was for the majority of these women practically impossible to go back home and experience again their dependence upon men.

These factors and others participated in the radical transformation of the American women. These new women broke with the traditional values and way of clothing and incarnated a new way of life. Their most apparent feature was their clothes, for their skirts became shorter and arms were bared, in addition to their hair which was bobbed in a strange way. Women of that period were also ‘the first generation for which the use of make-up was widespread, especially lipstick (often “kiss proof”) and eye-liner.’<sup>13</sup>

Another defining feature of the 1920s new woman was the fashionable dances which were in adequacy with their new clothes, and the manners which were completely different from that of women of the Victorian era. These factors and others participated in the radical transformation of the American women.

Among the first writers to incarnate the decadence of the Roaring Twenties was Francis Scott Fitzgerald. Indeed, Gertrude Stein dubbed the writers of the period The Lost Generation; in which Fitzgerald was a member. Fitzgerald wrote several short stories and novels which depicted the decadence and emptiness of the American society of this period. Among his well red works, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which was considered by T S Eliot as the ‘first step the American fiction had taken since Henry James.’<sup>14</sup>

## **b- Algeria of the Nineties (1988-2000)**

Since its independence, Algeria had a one-party system and Islam had been its state religion. In fact, before 1988 no social or political movement was allowed to exist. The only forces opposing the ruling regime in Algeria were all clandestine because any attempt to protest was fiercely repressed. The first mass demonstrations to challenge the government came only in 1980 with the Berber Spring. But starting from the mid-eighties, the economic situation worsened and provided a favorable ground for the development of social protest. The social unrest culminated in the fall of 1988. In October, riots broke out in Algiers and expanded to other regions, and were only suppressed with the bloody intervention of the army. Nevertheless, these riots forced the government to introduce some liberal reforms in the political and economic fields.

Among these reforms was a new constitution that allowed the creation of political parties. Tens of parties were created but only a few out of the existing clandestine political movements. Some Islamic leaders grasped the opportunity and created the *Islamic Salvation Front* (FIS) which was headed by *Abassi Madani*. Because of the lack of serious religious or political parties, the *Islamic Salvation Front* (FIS) gained a huge public all around the different regions of the country becoming, thus, the pioneer of political Islam in democratic Algeria.

Therefore, starting from 1988, Algeria witnessed endless strikes and riots which were at each time repressed by the government forces. In fact, the *Islamic Salvation Front* ideologies which turned around a radical practice of Islam were at the heart of the conflict, because they wanted to govern Algeria not through democracy which they considered a heresy but rather through Islamic law (*chari'a*). Besides, the party leaders wanted to plunge Algeria in absolute obscurantism; ordering Algerians to stick to religious values and to

maintain their traditional way of living, banning thus, any expression of modernity. As a result, those who were for the modernization of Algeria were considered as a threat to the Algerian community.<sup>15</sup>

The status of women was at the heart of the ideological battle of this party. For its leaders, women's freedom is an invention of the western unbelievers. Moslem women should return to the private sphere and should not appear in public unless covered. After the interruption of the electoral process following the Front's victory in the first round of the legislative elections of December 1991, the followers of the party started an armed insurrection against the government marking the beginning of what will be labeled the Black Decade which caused tens of thousands of casualties. This insurrection targeted mainly members of state administration, journalists and intellectuals who were considered to be allies with the regime.

On the other hand, there was a part of the population, which was primarily headed by intellectuals that asked for the democratization of the country and its development into a progressive and modern society. As a result, Algeria witnessed the strongest clash of ideologies ever known in its history, as the followers of radical Islam allowed no tolerance towards modernity. The only thing which remained for the progressives was intellectual actions through which they tried to denounce the aims of conservatives. Though the allies of democratic and modern Algeria used the pen and the weapons to fight the obscurantism of extremists, the latter were stronger and more determined than ever to repress any attempt from the progressives to democratize or free Algeria from traditionalism and obscurantism.

In addition, the government could not win over the terrorists because, unlike the military which was composed of young and inexperienced men, the insurgents were better equipped and trained. Therefore, terrorism was at its height during the Black Decade, because

it was fed by its leaders' strong will to keep Algeria far from democracy and modernity, and also their desire to govern their country by the principles of chari'a.

Consequently, the Algerian society saw the blackest decade in its history as its population's faith in democracy and religion was strongly shaken. Terrorism instilled terror within the Algerian society, especially within women who were the target of the conservatives who believed that all women should be covered in order not to transgress the principles of the Islamic religion which considered women the root of all evils.

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- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 33.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 72-73.
- <sup>6</sup> Mary Jo Tate, *Critical Companion to F.S. Fitzgerald: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 481.
- <sup>7</sup> Abrous Outoudert, 'Les Cahiers de LIBERTE' (Alger : Journal liberté, 2009) ,11.
- <sup>8</sup> P. Carlisle Rodney, ed., *Handbook to Life in America: The Roaring Twenties* (New York: Facts on file, 2009), 9.
- <sup>9</sup> Niall Palmer, *The Twenties in America Politics and History* (Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2006), 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Rodney, *Handbook to Life in America*, 51.
- <sup>11</sup> Flapper, Wikipedia, accessed on September, 2014. <<http://en.Wikipedia.org/Wiki/flapper>.
- <sup>12</sup> Rodney, *Handbook to Life in America*, 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>14</sup> George Mc Micheal, ed., *Anthology of Literature* (New York:
- <sup>15</sup> Frédéric Volpi, *Islam and Democracy: The Failure of Dialogue in Algeria* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 37-92.

## Results

In this part of our dissertation, we shed light on the results reached in our comparative study of the image of women in the American and Algerian literatures, through Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) from a Jamesonian perspective.

In the first chapter, we have put emphasis on the representation of women in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) in order to reveal the ideologies which were in presence at the time the two novels were written. In fact, we noticed that, although the two novels were written in different periods and different geographical areas, they have in common their ambiguous representation of women.

Indeed, the two authors wrote in periods characterized by a clash between the conservative and the progressive forces in their respective societies: America of the Roaring Twenties and Civil War Algeria. Therefore, women were the center of this clash and their freedom or oppression reflected the balance of power between the opposing forces. In fact, the female characters in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) share some common points with those in *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009). The two authors, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Amin Zaoui focused in their description of women on their physical appearance, their desires and wishes, and the degree of their commitment to the tenets and values established by their societies.

Then in the second chapter, we came to the conclusion that Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) function both as socially symbolic acts as Frederic Jameson would say. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) was Francis Scott Fitzgerald's portrayal of the events which characterized America of the Roaring



Twenties, and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) was also Amin Zaoui's portrayal of the events which occurred in Algeria during the nineteen nineties.

More broadly, this comparative study of the image of women in the American novel of Francis Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and the Algerian novel of Amin Zaoui *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) has shown that similar backgrounds may produce similar literary productions.

## Discussion

### a- The Representation of Women:

Our intention in this chapter is to examine the way female characters are portrayed in Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's novel *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009). Indeed, the chapter will analyze the portrayal of the main female characters Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, Myrtle Wilson, Sultana, Lalla Nouara, Laya, and Rokia, by relating each of these female characters to a prevalent ideology of the 1920s America and 1990s Algeria.

#### a-In *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

For Fredric Jameson, 'certain texts have social and historical — sometimes political resonance.'<sup>1</sup> *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is, in fact, a mirror of the social, historical and political scene of the 1920s America. In fact, 1920s America was characterized by prosperity, technological advance and the new woman. Indeed this newness in women was seen in their clothing, manners, hairstyle and behavior which were no longer compatible with old Victorian religious values, but rather with a new American spirit.

Jameson adds that

One does not have to argue the reality of history: necessity, like Dr. Johnson's stone, does that for us. That history—Althusser's "absent cause," Lacan's "real"—is not a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re) textualization.<sup>2</sup>

From Fredric Jameson's words we can conclude that to approach history, one must make use of literary texts which themselves are mirrors which reflect given periods of history, because the latter is not accessible except through textualization or re-textualization.

For Fredric Jameson, a text is nothing but an individual utterance within a 'great collective and class discourses':

When we pass into the second phase, and find that the semantic horizon within which we grasp a cultural object has widened to include the social order, we will find that the very object of our analysis has itself been thereby dialectically transformed, and that it is no longer construed as an individual "text" or work in the narrow sense, but has been reconstituted in the form of the great collective and class discourses of which a text is little more than an individual *parole* and utterance. Within this new horizon, then, our object of study will prove to be the *ideologeme*, that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.<sup>3</sup>

According to Fredric Jameson, then, to understand an ideology and its manifestation within a literary text we have to make use of its ideologemes; which are as he states the smallest intelligible units of a whole ideology. Following Jameson's statement, our task in this chapter is to study the different views of gender roles represented in the novel of Fitzgerald by making reference to its ideologemes which are; the new woman, the flapper and the traditional woman. Therefore, this study will put emphasis on female characters and relate each of them to an ideologeme.

### **1-Daisy Buchanan as the Traditional (Victorian) Woman:**

One of the major female characters in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is Daisy Buchanan. Partly based on Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda Sayre, Daisy is a beautiful young woman from Louisville, Kentucky. She is the cousin of Nick Carraway the narrator, and the object of Gatsby's love. 'Like Zelda Fitzgerald, Daisy is in love with money, ease, and material luxury. She is capable of affection (she seems genuinely fond of Nick and occasionally seems to love Gatsby sincerely) but not of sustained loyalty or care.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in Fitzgerald's conception of America in the 1920s, Daisy represents the amoral values of the

aristocratic East Egg set, and the decadence of the American society. In addition, the portrayal of the character of Daisy Buchanan stands for the corrupted America of the Roaring Twenties.

In fact, Daisy is the wife of a wealthy man from East Egg. Before marrying Tom Buchanan, Daisy Fay was a popular young girl in Louisville and in love with an officer of the American Army named Jay Gatz. During the war, Jay Gatz was obliged to go overseas, so Daisy promised to wait for him. Sometime after she married Tom Buchanan from East Egg who bought her a “string of pearls” valued at \$350,000. From this minute detail, we are introduced to the real image of the character of Daisy Buchanan, which is a materialist. Thus, all what is important for Daisy Buchanan is money and the extravagances which it can offer.

As it is mentioned above, Daisy is in love with money and luxury. Yet, though she has everything and mainly all the commodities which make her life easier and funnier, she always expresses a dissatisfaction with everything that she does and what surrounds her. Indeed, she is a typical representative of the American traditional woman, and this is illustrated by her portrayal in the novel. In fact, Daisy stands for the perfect wife of old times; she married Tom Buchanan, gave birth to a child, and stood at home to perform her role of a good wife. Thus, Daisy did not achieve anything except a respectable social rank, and a false sophistication.

To illustrate the statement above, we may cite what Daisy said to Nick Carraway when he came to visit her:

You see I think everything's terrible anyhow," she went on in a convinced way. "Everybody thinks so — the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything." Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like *Tom's*... The instant her voice broke off... I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said.<sup>5</sup>

From the above quotation, one can notice the dissatisfaction of Daisy with the whole world, in addition to a blurred vision of the meaning of life, her insincerity and lack of hope. In fact, Daisy is portrayed as being sophisticated and indifferent even to her little daughter,

whom she wishes will become a fool ‘I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.’<sup>6</sup> From what Daisy said, we can conclude her determination that the best thing a woman can be in this world is a beautiful little fool. Daisy, thus, wishes the same life as hers for her daughter; for her, since she was a fool and succeeded to win her place in society, her daughter also must be a fool. In addition, Daisy thinks that as long as a woman does not challenge the authority of men, she will get everything she wants.

In fact, when Nick Carraway saw the unhappiness of Daisy he thought, ‘It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to rush out of the house, child in arms- but apparently there were no such intentions in her head’<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, though Daisy is not happy with her life with Tom Buchanan and she knows that her husband has an affair with some woman in New York, she continues to live with him. The fact of not leaving Tom reveals that Daisy cannot give away everything she has (money, luxury and the name Buchanan) just because Tom is unfaithful.

Another negative representation of Daisy is her lack of seriousness and credibility, for she has a ridicule conception of life; for her the only important thing to do is have fun. She smiles for anything she says or hears; ‘She laughed again, as if she said something witty.’<sup>8</sup> In addition, Daisy is so bored with her life that in one of her sentences she says: ‘What’ll we do with ourselves this afternoon,’ cried Daisy, ‘and the day after that, and the next thirty years?’<sup>9</sup> In fact, this utterance is mainly the result of the routine and the meaningless life which Daisy has.

Indeed, Daisy represents the emptiness of the American dream; though she has money and everything, her mind and spirit are empty like the American dream which is deprived of material and sense. In addition, except her social position Daisy has not achieved anything; she is just the victim of her social rank and her old status as the wife of an old aristocratic wealthy man who in his turn considers her as an object among his possessions.

When Daisy Buchanan is invited for the first time by Jay Gatsby into his mansion, and the latter started to show her his house and clothes; Daisy's reaction was sophisticated and ridiculous. Therefore, when she saw his clothes she says: 'They're such beautiful shirts, she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. 'It makes me sad because I've never seen such-such beautiful shirts before.'<sup>10</sup> Daisy's words are a proof of her materialistic vision of life, for Daisy, the beauty of life can only be achieved and measured through the possession of beautiful things, which by their turn can only be achieved through having much money.

In addition to her materialistic vision of life, the character of Daisy Buchanan is meant to show the inner vices of the human being when confronted to danger or death. For instance, in the last pages of the novel, when the car of Jay Gatsby accidentally hit Myrtle Wilson; the mistress of Tom Buchanan, they all took Jay Gatsby for responsible, but in fact, Daisy was the driver of the car. Though she knows that she is responsible for the murder, she allowed her lover Gatsby to take the blame for something he did not do, and by doing so, she condemns Jay Gatsby to death. Therefore, Daisy can be considered as selfish and hypocrite.

Another act of the cruelty and egocentricity of the character of Daisy Buchanan is her sudden leave with her family after the death of Jay Gatsby. The narrator Nick Carraway expected them; Tom Buchanan and his wife Daisy Fay, to attend the funeral of the deceased Jay Gatsby, but discovers that the Buchanans have no such intention. Instead of supporting Nick and helping him to organize the funeral, the Buchanans ran away without leaving an address or even a note.

Through our analysis of the character of Daisy Buchanan, we can conclude that she is a typical portrayal of the American traditional Victorian woman, who was subject to man's authority and whose will is always decided by others. This is well illustrated in the case of Daisy; she accepted to marry Tom only because she 'wanted her life shaped now,

immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand.’<sup>11</sup> Indeed, society has shaped Daisy into someone who has accepted her position as a woman and a wife; although she had many choices to make, she maintains her fickle attitude and acts just as a woman was supposed to.

Therefore, the character of Daisy Buchanan represents a category of women that characterized America of the Roaring Twenties; they were traditional Victorian women who were in between traditionalism and modernity. Indeed, these women failed to maintain old Victorian values and way of living and also to embrace the new American spirit and its practices. Fitzgerald then, through his depiction of the character of Daisy Buchanan aims at showing the impact of the new American spirit which characterized the twenties on old Victorian people.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald also meant his female character Daisy Buchanan to say that though 1920s America was an era distinguished by urbanization, prosperity and modernity, there were a category of American people who stood away from this novelty, and who did not know which current was the best to follow. Thus, Daisy stands for the conservatives of old Victorianism who wanted to preserve old values and way of life from the devastating modernity of that period, but could not succeed to maintain.

## **2-Jordan Baker as the Flapper**

Another major female character of *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Jordan Baker is a young woman from Louisville; she is Daisy’s friend and Nick Carraway’s woman, for they were about to be involved in a love relation. Indeed, Jordan Baker is a golf player; she is characterized as being boyish, cynical and self-centered. When she was first introduced by the narrator Nick Carraway, he says: ‘She was extended full length at her end of the divan,

completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall.’<sup>12</sup> From Nick’s description of Jordan Baker, we notice that she does not conform to old values and practices and thus, represents one of the “new women” of the 1920s.

Jordan Baker is described as being beautiful, cynical and gravely dishonest. When Nick hears her name for the first time, he was convinced that he knew her somewhere, ‘It occurred to me that I had seen her, or a picture of her, somewhere before.’<sup>13</sup> After his cousin Daisy introduced her as the golf player, Nick remembers that he read something about her which accused her of cheating in order to win the golf tournament. In addition and throughout the novel, Jordan Baker is always associated with the white color, which suggests innocence and purity, but her actions and thoughts suggest something else.

Thus, when Jordan was first introduced, the reader is given the impression that she transgresses the rules and the norms established by the society of that time. The scene that best illustrates the statement above is in the opening of the novel, when Tom and Daisy had a dispute and Jordan was with Nick in the saloon. In fact, Jordan Baker tried to listen to them. So Nick notices ‘A subdued impassioned murmur was audible in the room beyond, and Miss Baker leaned forward unashamed, trying to hear.’<sup>14</sup>

Another instance which shows Jordan Baker’s transgression of laws is when she met Nick Carraway in Gatsby’s party and after a short time told him: ‘Let’s get out,’ whispered Jordan, after a somehow wasteful and inappropriate half-hour; ‘this is much too polite for me.’<sup>15</sup> In fact, Jordan Baker is mainly the unique female character in the novel who is independent and who does not experience man’s authority. Indeed, her status as a professional golf player funds her financially; in addition, she has no family except an old aunt, escaping thus the authority of men and gaining self-independence and free will.



Maggie Gordon Froehlich in her article entitled *Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing in The Great Gatsby* (2010), argues that Jordan Baker is at first sight indistinguishable from other female characters, but in the course of the novel, she is revealed to be so different from the other women portrayed in the novel because she is a lesbian but tries to keep this secret by being careful.<sup>16</sup> The critic rests on Nick's saying about Jordan that,

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever shrewd men...because she felt safer in a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage, and given this unwillingness I suppose she has begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard jaunty body.<sup>17</sup>

In this passage, the narrator Nick Carraway reveals the true nature of Jordan Baker who avoids mixture with clever people in order to safeguard her sexual taste for women, a sexual orientation which was at that time considered as being immoral and condemned by religious values and society. The critic goes on to say that if Jordan Baker is familiar with Nick, it's because he is also gay. The critic argues that Jordan Baker and Nick Carraway are similar, because both of them are queer and do their best to hide their sexual tastes to be able to live in a world in which they are both considered as being outsiders.

In addition, Maggie Gordon Froehlich concludes that Fitzgerald tackled such subjects because he was familiar with them during his lifetime, and he mainly experienced them. She goes on to say that, 'Biographers of both Fitzgeralds recognize Zelda's exploration of her own lesbian desire (dismissed by many as a symptom of her mental illness and response to her suspicion that Fitzgerald was himself homosexual.)'<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the character of Jordan Baker stands for one version of the 1920s new woman in America; she represents the flapper. Actually, the flapper was the name given to a category of new women of the twenties; they were characterized with short clothes, bobbed hair in a

strange way, and were more familiar with Jazz music. In fact, flappers manifested a strong desire to live and experience all the opportunities which life offers. They also consider their body as an asset which must be used in order to have fun.

In addition, Emily S. Vincent in her article entitled *Fitzgerald's Women: Motherhood and Masculinity in the Flapper Era*, states that, 'the flapper era forces women to become independent beyond spheres of sexual freedom and the working world.'<sup>19</sup> This is in fact the case of Jordan Baker, who is sexually and financially independent, and who does not experience any authority from men.

Consequently, the character of Jordan Baker represents the flapper who during the Roaring Twenties was widespread in America. In fact, flappers stand for the image of women which was long repressed by the American nation in order not to deviate from old Victorian norms, and maintain women under the control of men. Fitzgerald through his portrayal of the character of Jordan Baker makes reference to the new women which characterized the era, and to put emphasis on what a woman can achieve when she is independent and free.

### **3-Myrtle Wilson as the New Woman:**

Myrtle Wilson is the mistress of Tom Buchanan and the wife of a poor garage owner named George Wilson who works hard in order to have money and achieve wealth. She represents the lower class living in the Valley of Ashes which Fitzgerald describes as the wasteland. In fact, the character of Myrtle Wilson is meant to give us a glimpse into the life of the poor during the Roaring Twenties. When she was first introduced, she was described by the narrator Nick Carraway as,

...the thickish figure of a woman blocked out of the light from the office door. She was in middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her flesh sensuously as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crêpe-de-chine, contained no facet or gleam of beauty, but there was an

immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body continually smouldered. She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom.<sup>20</sup>

As it is said above Myrtle Wilson belongs to the lower class. She established a love affair with a wealthy man from East Egg in order to flee her social rank and have access to the upper class. In addition, Myrtle Wilson represents the eagerness of poor women to own money and become wealthy. We have seen in an instance of the novel how Myrtle conceives being wealthy; for her, the dress she wears is a sign of wealth and power. Indeed, the narrator Nick noticed, 'With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change.'<sup>21</sup> Thus, from the above quotation we discern that Myrtle employs her dress to feel rich and important, while she forgets that apart from her physical appearance, she is but the wife of a poor and miserable garage owner.

Throughout the novel, Myrtle Wilson tries aimlessly to hide who she really is and masks herself under expensive clothes; she is in a way expressing her misfortune of being born into the poor sphere, and tries to force herself into the upper class through Tom Buchanan. In the course of the novel, Myrtle is always shown eager to accumulate money and the commodities of the rich. In the apartment reserved for her love affair with Tom, the reader notices that it is 'crowded to the doors with a set of tapestried furniture entirely too large for it.'<sup>22</sup> We can interpret this over possession of furniture as a sign of Myrtle's eagerness for commodities; all what she has not been able to get with the poor George Wilson, she got it with the wealthy Tom Buchanan. Myrtle Wilson, thus, depends on a man to accumulate money and become rich.

In fact, the character of Myrtle Wilson is portrayed by Fitzgerald as a very ambitious woman who wants to rise from rags to riches; the only way available for her is being the mistress of a wealthy man. Contrary to Daisy Buchanan who accepted her status of a subdued

wife, Myrtle Wilson refused and rebelled against being the poor subdued wife and worked for the betterment of her social and personal status. Consequently, when Myrtle was with Tom, she completely delved into her new role as a rich woman, and even forgot her true origins. This is seen in the scene when Tom and his mistress invited Nick, the McKees and Myrtle's sister Catherine to the apartment. Once the guests there, Myrtle started to behave in a strange way, and tries to capture the attention of the guests by her clothes and manners.

Therefore, Nick notices, 'The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment...' <sup>23</sup> Myrtle Wilson thus, was completely involved in her new role and in a way is begging her audience to look and admire her little person. Albeit Myrtle Wilson is depicted as being miserable and poor, she is the only female character who is aware of what she wants in life; in fact, wealth is the sole goal in her existence, so she decided to do whatever it takes to reach her purpose.

Consequently, Myrtle Wilson represents the new woman which characterized 1920s America; she refused her present situation and claimed her sexual and financial independence. Myrtle Wilson is even seen in one of the scenes defeating man's authority;

Some time toward midnight Tom Buchanan and Mrs. Wilson stood face to face discussing, in impassioned voices, whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name. 'Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!' shouted Mrs. Wilson. 'I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai-!' Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. <sup>24</sup>

Throughout the novel Myrtle Wilson is revealed to be a typical representation of the American new woman of the 1920s. Unfortunately, her ambition and eagerness to become wealthy bring about her downfall and death. Therefore, Myrtle pays for her ambition and

unfaithfulness to her husband George Wilson with her own life; she was accidentally hit by the car of Jay Gatsby. The narrator Nick Carraway commented her murder,

...but when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped a little at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she has scored so long.<sup>25</sup>

According to Nick then, Myrtle Wilson is punished for her vitality, ambition, awareness, and unfaithfulness to George Wilson. In addition, Myrtle also pays for the decadence of the American society of that time. Nick added, 'Myrtle Wilson's body, wrapped in a blanket, and in another blanket, as though she suffered from a chill in the hot night...'<sup>26</sup>

## **b -In *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009)**

As it was mentioned at the beginning, this chapter tends to give some insight into the way women characters are portrayed in two different novels. The first part of it dealt with Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and the current part will deal with gender roles as represented in Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009).

Indeed, Amin Zaoui in his novel *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) deals with the problem of the status of women in Algeria's patriarchal society. The author depicts women's daily lives and puts emphasis on their relationships with men. The novel is set during one of Algeria's most critical periods which is the Black Decade (1988-2000). In fact, this period was characterized by a clash between the progressives and the conservatives in Algerian society. While the conservatives proclaimed the necessity to stick to the tradition and religious values, the progressives asserted their right to live in a modern liberal society.

### **1-Sultana and Lalla Nouara as Moderate Muslims**

One of the novel's main female characters is Sultana. She is the cousin of the narrator Ailane and the daughter of Rokia; a courageous woman who defeats the authority of men and ran away from home. Sultana is portrayed by the author as a beautiful young woman; she is clever, ambitious and passive. Indeed, Sultana lives with her aunt Lalla Nouara, her mother's sister and the mother of Ailane, her cousin with whom she is involved in a love affair. Despite her lack of school instruction, Sultana is eager to know and learn about the different religions and their prophets.

In the first pages of the novel, Sultana is introduced by her cousin Ailane as a young beautiful girl with an attractive body, which haunts him all the time. She is then described as the object which proclaims him pleasure; for Ailane has a bodily relation with her, and he talks only about her sexual qualities. Therefore, the character of Sultana transgresses the

norms and values established by her society, for we always have reference to religion in the novel.

But with the novel's progression, the author provides us with a different image of Sultana; that of the woman who is responsible when men are away. When Ailane and his father were absent, Sultana is obliged to work in order to earn money and provide for herself, Sultana works as a peddler; going door-to-door to sell items.

J'ai acquis ce transistor avec mon propre argent gagné en faisant du porte-à-porte... Plus tard, quand j'ai accumulé une petite expérience, je n'ai pas hésité à proposer à quelques-uns de mes clients du haschich, du vrai haschich cultivé en Algérie ou provenant d'Afghanistan ou du Maroc.<sup>27</sup>

At first, her job was limited to selling goods, but afterwards it developed into prostitution. The men to whom she sells items did not hesitate to take profit from her body and innocence. In fact, these men with their immoral practices terrorized Sultana, 'J'essayais d'oublier mais je n'arrivais pas à effacer l'image de mes hommes, ceux qui avaient déversé leur liquide dans ma bouche ou dans mon derrière.'<sup>28</sup>

In spite of her immoral practices, Sultana is convinced of her good deeds and her educational values; 'J'étais une fille bien élevée. Religieuse.'<sup>29</sup> In a way, Sultana is obliged to sell her dignity to earn money, but albeit her sufferings, she was happy with her gains. Though she suffered 'Malgré mes vomissements et mes douleurs aux fesses, le porte-à-porte nous rapportait de l'argent.'<sup>30</sup> Sultana has no choice; she must suffer to earn her living. She is convinced that denouncing her torturers would only dry up her resources: 'J'étais sûre qu'une révélation de ma part eût incité ces hommes qui me faisaient subir des actes en désaccord avec l'Islam à ne pas m'accorder plus d'argent.'<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Sultana is the victim of her social rank; her being born into a poor family condemned her to suffer silently. Throughout the novel, the character of Sultana is revealed to be so moderate; first she tolerates being engaged in relations which are forbidden by her religion. Second, she also tolerates to believe and practice two different religions at the same time; Islam and Christianity. Indeed, Islam is the religion practiced by her ancestors, and she decided to learn and read the sacred book of Coran because of her favorite singer;

J'ai écouté Oum Kalsoum interpréter la chanson d'un film intitulé *Sallama*, où la diva avait le rôle principal, en chantant majestueusement quelques versets du saint coran. Fascinée par cette lecture, j'ai décidé de m'adonner, moi aussi, à la lecture coranique.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Sultana is involved in reading the sacred book of Coran not because she is fascinated by it, but because she is fascinated by the voice of her favorite singer. The same thing happened for the Bible; she hears a sweet voice reading from the bible, as a result, she wants to learn and know more about this unknown religion, 'Moi qui aimais le Coran et les livres de Gibran Khalil, je trouvais dans cette lecture-prière une evasion.'<sup>33</sup> Therefore, by listening to the passage from the Bible Sultana feels free and finds a kind of refuge; as if she is freed from the burden of Islam. Consequently, Sultana's moderation pushes her to transgress all kinds of rules and principles established by her society and family.

Indeed, in Amin Zaoui's novel, Sultana is among the few female characters that push away the barriers and taboos established by her community. She also indulges an unusual moderation in a society to which religion stands for the norm, especially during the period dealt with in the book. Sultana then represents the mentally emancipated moderate woman who acts in opposition to the traditional one. In fact, the description of Sultana immediately tells the reader who she is and what she is capable of; she has no problem in dealing with different men. Thus, Sultana embodies the moderate Muslim who avoids all excess of extremes.



In the last pages of the novel, Sultana is accused of heresy and she is cursed by all the villagers, under the instigation of Hedi El Manchot:

Nous avons parmi nous une *yahoudia* dans le village. Une malédiction envoyée du ciel d'Allah sur nos têtes. Elle a abandonné l'islam, religion de nos parents et de nos arrières-arrières-grands-parents, au profit d'une autre, celle des juifs et des roumis, celle des impies et des colonisateurs. Nous avons une *nassrania*, dans le village. Une *mourtadda*, il faut l'égorger, il est licite de verser son sang.<sup>3 4</sup>

The quotation above shows how any deviation from the norm is considered a sin. Hedi El Manchot, who acts as the moral authority of the village, even asked the villagers to kill her. For him Sultana deserves to be killed because she dirties their religion. We can conclude that the Algerian society of the Black Decade stuck so much to its religious beliefs to the extent that it reached extremism. The latter was mainly directed towards women who are meant to believe blindly in what men perceive as the norm and especially to submit to their authority.

In addition to Sultana, her aunt Lalla Nouara also represents the same category of female characters that represent secular Islam which was practiced by the majority of Algerians before the introduction of radical Islam. In fact, each of these characters transgresses the rules of their advocated religion; they all pretend being true believers and followers of Islam, but do not hesitate to transgress its principles.

With her job Sultana earned some money, but also experienced all kinds of abuses from the men of her village. In fact, the men in the village of Carmoussa did not hesitate to take profit from Sultana and even abuse her sexually. In an instance of the novel, Sultana is suffering from the aftereffects of one her sexual abuses; so we see her aunt Lalla Nouara worried about her virginity, and thanking God she is still virgin,

Dieu soit béni, ma chère Sultana, on t'a fait l'amour par derrière. Dans notre religion, cela n'est pas très grave, ce n'est pas interdit ! Notre honneur est

sauf. Ta virginité est encore là, intacte, bien protégée. Tant que ton futur mari n'est pas fâché, cela n'est pas considéré comme un viol ! <sup>35</sup>

In the quotation above, Sultana's aunt Lalla Nouara thanks God to have protected the honor of her family by keeping Sultana virgin. From what she says, we notice a kind of tolerance unusual in a society which sticks so much to religion and its values, and for Lalla Nouara, as far as Sultana is still virgin no principle is transgressed.

Moreover, Lalla Nouara knows that the source of the money gained by Sultana is prostitution but she keeps encouraging her to earn more, and even tries to appease her suffering from sexual abuses, 'Ma tante Lalla Nouara avait camouflé l'horreur de mon sang, et, afin d'apaiser mes douleurs, elle m'avait fait lamper un grand bol de boisson chaude...' <sup>36</sup> Lalla Nouara thus, claims that she sticks to religion, but in reality she does not. Religion, then, is a kind of cover for amoral practices.

Through his portrayal of these two female characters, Amin Zaoui aims at denouncing the hypocrisy which characterized the period during which his novel is set (the Black Decade). The author also describes the impact of radicals' oppression over people; the latter were obliged to become hypocrite, because if they do not show that they were Muslims they will be probably killed. Thus, in public they are religious people, but in private they are free to commit all what is forbidden by their religion.

Through our analysis of the character of Sultana we noticed her awareness about her rights and what was happening in her society at that time. Theoretically speaking, she is aware but she does not undertake any action to change her situation. She is then, a passive character who contents herself with the present situation and never tries to improve it or rebel against it.

## 2-Laya as the Jihadist Muslim

An ambiguous character, Laya is a Jewish Spanish woman who came to Algeria in order to support and fight beside the radicals against their government. The narrator Ailane met her in the maquis, she is described as strange, reserved and attractive; 'Comme chaque soir, elle était là, distante, frigide et sans réaction, aucune.'<sup>37</sup> As the narrator defines her, Laya is distant, frigid and with no reaction; she is indifferent to her surroundings. Indeed, Laya is different from the other female characters portrayed in the novel, contrary to them, she joined the maquis in order to defend Islam and rebel against the government.

In spite of the faith in religion she claims, Laya transgresses all the norms. She for example smokes hachisch, 'Laya ou Lova, en cachette, la cigarette de hachisch au bec, planait dans les cieux les plus lointains, au huitième ciel.'<sup>38</sup>, and in the same time devotes part of her time to learning Coran and preaching, '...la belle voix de cette Espagnole ou Marocaine qui récitait tantôt le coran, tantôt des poèmes, psalmodiant le prophète Mohammed, que le salut soit sur lui.'<sup>39</sup>

Laya haunts the narrator Ailane; he looks for her wherever she goes, he is always by her side. In addition, he wonders why she is so indifferent and frigid towards him, 'Laya me hantait. Elle était givrée, cette femme.'<sup>40</sup> After the coming of another woman (Sabine) to the maquis, Ailane notices a change in the behavior of Laya, she no longer listens to his stories, 'Depuis le débarquement de cette femelle dans le baraquement, Laya ne me prête plus aucune attention.'<sup>41</sup>

As it is said above, with the introduction of another woman into the maquis, Ailane is intrigued,

Je constate que Laya est de plus en plus attachée à Sabine. Cette relation m'intrigue, me dérange. Sous prétexte de faire la prière commune loin des

yeux des hommes du baraquement, Laya, accompagnée de Sabine, se réfugie dans la carcasse du vieux camion abandonné au fin fond du camp, à la lisière de la forêt sauvage qui nous entoure. Je les suis. De loin, en cachette, j'observe le spectacle : elles se déshabillent.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Ailane discovers the secret of Laya, and knows why she was frigid and indifferent to his presence by her side. After he saw her with her girlfriend Sabine, Laya told Ailane the truth,

Et quand Nacer s'est aperçu que j'étais attirée par les femmes plus que par les hommes, et que je vivais parallèlement en concubinage avec une jeune femme, maître-assistante en musique à la faculté des arts et des lettres de l'université de Madrid, on a décidé de se séparer.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, the character of Laya represents the jihadist woman who is independent and liberated from all the chains which tie her to the norms of society. Unlike other female characters in the novel, Laya is associated with weapons and resistance; she is in the maquis to fight against the injustices of the government and preach Islam, albeit she is a Jew who converted to Islam. In addition, Laya is not only free from man's authority, but also rejects his presence; she is a lesbian, so she does not need men. We can conclude that Laya proclaims an equal status to that of man.

At the end of the novel, Laya is killed by Ailane because he was jealous of her relation with Sabine and wants Laya to love him, 'J'ai sorti mon arme et n'ai pas hésité à la décharger dans la tête de Laya.'<sup>44</sup> The tragic end of Laya is the price to pay for her emancipation; she is the victim of her ideas and deeds, in addition to her hypocrisy towards religion; she holds the sacred book of Coran, but does everything which is forbidden by it.

The character of Laya stands for a category of new women who emerged in Algeria during the black decade; they were emancipated women. Outwardly, Laya is a jihadist Muslim who is in the camp base in order to fight against the injustices of the government and

to protect the Muslim religion. But in reality she is there because she felt an outsider to her society; she can be free only with hypocrite people like her.

The character of Laya is meant by Amin Zaoui to denounce the hypocrisy of a category of people who overtly advocate radical Islam but secretly do not hesitate to do all what is forbidden by its principles. Through his depiction of this female character, the author ridicules a group of people known as Multinational Islamists who are foreign people who converted to Islam out of personal deceptions and came to Algeria to join the insurgents and fight against the government.

### **3-Rokia as a Laic**

Another major female character, Rokia is the aunt of the narrator Ailane, and the mother of Sultana. Rokia is described as the courageous woman who left her family for Turkey in order to conquer the heart of a prominent figure there; Mustafa Atatürk. She does this against the conservative moral code of the village since from a religious point of view, it is a sin for a woman to leave home alone without a harem; a man of her family.

Amin Zaoui resorts here and in many other passages to Magical Realism which allows him to introduce in his fiction not only elements of fantasy but also historical and mythical figures that function as symbols. Authors make use of magical realism which is defined as ‘a literary movement associated with a style of writing or technique that incorporates magical or supernatural events into realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of these events.’<sup>45</sup> Magical realism contains an implicit criticism of a given society. Amin Zaoui’s *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) is full of magical realism which the author uses at each time to achieve different criticism, especially when he invokes historical figures such as Mustafa Atatürk, Abdullah Öcalan, Benazir Bhutto, and Boabdil.

When Rokia was first introduced in the novel, Ailane said:

Cela signifie que cette chaîne appartenait à ma tante maternelle, la dame aux longues et houleuses histoires, celle qui par un jour du mois sacré de Ramadan, avait osé fuguer, préférant abandonner son mari impuissant, pour aller sur les traces de ce Mustafa Atatürk...Eprise par ce Mustafa Atatürk, ma tante avait décidé de s'installer définitivement à Istanbul.<sup>46</sup>

From the description provided by the narrator Ailane, we detect that Rokia, unlike the other female characters, is not a hypocrite; she does not hide her preference for someone else than her husband, and does not care about how people perceive her. Rokia is guided by her ambition and heart; she is in a way, rebellious and indocile. Once in Turkey and regardless of her society's curse, Rokia succeeds to win her place among the rich people of that country; she is the owner of a lot of brothels there and she hired women from the different Muslim countries. Rokia also has another fruitful activity which allows her to deal with businessmen of the Islamic country; she is La reine de la pistache (dealer of drugs).

When the news of Rokia's running away spread in the village, the villagers began to invent stories about her and her mysterious trip to Istanbul, 'Les histoires se versent et se déversent, à propos d'elle.'<sup>47</sup> In addition, her family hide the fact that she fled to Istanbul in order to follow her lover Mustafa Atatürk, and spread the rumor that she died the night she ran away from home, '...notre tante, la nuit même de sa fugue, avait été retrouvée morte au bord du chemin qui menait au port, le cœur arraché et les yeux creuvés: une mort maléfique. La malédiction des pécheresses!'<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the family of Rokia wanted to hide the fact that their daughter dared and challenged their authority as men, transgressing thus all the norms established by her society. At first people did not believe that Rokia was not dead and was living in Turkey, but afterwards, people who went to visit the sacred lands saw her there and confirmed this fact,

D'autres pèlerins prétendirent que ma tante Rokia était assise sur une immense fortune, sur une mine d'or, qu'elle détenait cinq hôtels, trente-trois

hammams à Istanbul et à Izmir et tous les bordels de la vieille ville de son très cher amant Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Cent vingt mille prostituées, les plus belles femmes du monde, de soixante-six nationalités différentes, étaient sous ses ordres.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, Rokia after her success in business did not hesitate to tackle politics, and if she does so, it was not because she has a tendency to politics, but to proclaim the liberty of a Kurdish militant, 'À Istanbul, ma tante Rokia avait constitué un parti politique qui réclamait la libération d'Abdullah Udjalane.'<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Rokia broke all the barriers and challenges authorities. It is as if the novelist Amin Zaoui provides his female character Rokia with all the opportunities which her society deprived her of. In addition, Rokia regrets the fact of not being involved in politics earlier, and is jealous of a prominent Pakistani political figure; Benazir Bhutto:

J'aurai dû faire de la politique. La politique et la prostitution sont les deux faces d'une même médaille. J'ai bien réussi dans la prostitution, donc je suis capable de réussir parfaitement dans la politique. Les partis politiques sur toute la terre d'Islam sont gérés comme des bordels. Ils ne sont que des maisons de tolérance!<sup>51</sup>

Rokia then, compares politics and prostitution and concludes that they are the same, and she maintains the view that since she succeeded in prostitution, she will probably succeed in politics. From the quotation above we notice the author's view about politics in Muslim countries, for him, political parties are managed like brothels. Amin Zaoui mocks the politics of Muslim countries like Turkey where Rokia lives.

The female character Rokia transgresses all the rules because she does not conform to neither the principles of society nor to religion. Once again, she is involved in another trade; she is the dealer of drugs. There too Rokia succeeded and became,

La reine de la pistache, ainsi l'avait-on surnommée. C'est Hafez le poète qui l'avait aidée à exercer ce commerce juteux et risqué. Et c'est lui qui lui avait

attribué ce sobriquet. De grandes personnalités religieuses et politiques iraniennes, saoudiennes et pakistanaises étaient ses complices et ses collaborateurs.<sup>52</sup>

Once again, Rokia is involved in a business hitherto strictly the preserve of men and succeeds. Rokia's association with man's business means that woman is the equal of man, and in her case it is true, 'Ma tante Rokia était une femme qui faisait le poids de dix hommes!'<sup>53</sup> In the same time the author mocks the religion and politics of Muslim countries. These countries are themselves transgressing their own rules and principles in the name of their sacred religion. Amin Zaoui by doing so lays bare the immoral practices of people who proclaim themselves to be clean and faithful.

All in all, the character of Rokia represents a category of people who belong to secular Islam, they are people who stand for a current in Algeria, which can be termed laic. In the novel, we noticed the association of the female character Rokia to a historical figure of Turkey; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In fact, the latter is the father of modern Turkey and the advocate of secular Islam in Turkey. In fact, Amin Zaoui does not mention this figure fortuitously, but to symbolize the desire of Rokia to be free and to practice no religion.

Amin Zaoui also meant his character Rokia as a representative of a new kind of people who emerged during the Black Decade; a category which in reaction to the oppression of radical Islamism became laic. Once again, the novelist Amin Zaoui ridicules Islam and the faith of its followers.

Throughout our comparison of the way women are represented in the American and Algerian novels through Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), we noticed that, although the books are from different origins they share the same representation of women. In fact, though the authors are different from one another and wrote their novels during different periods, they portray



women in the same manner. This can find its explanation in the similarity of the two contexts, America of the Roaring Twenties, like Algeria of the Nineties, witnessed the same conflict between conservatives and progressives.

Thus, female characters are depicted in the same way by both Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Amin Zaoui. Indeed, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, Myrtle Wilson, Sultana, Lalla Nouara, Laya, and Rokia are all women who are ready to do everything in order to reach their purposes and desires. Besides, each of these women transgresses a rule or violates a law in order to achieve something. Finally, all these women are under the mercy of society or men, so each of them responds to the oppression in her own way.

We can draw some parallels between these female characters to illustrate the previous statement. The characters of Daisy Buchanan, Myrtle Wilson and Sultana and to a lesser extent Lalla Nouara resemble each other in the way they are depicted; they are young beautiful ladies and full of femininity, they are also the target of men's desire and love. Furthermore, all of Daisy, Myrtle, and Sultana strive to own money and the commodities which can make their lives easier and funnier. As a final point, all of them are victims of their social rank, ambition, and their will to trap rich men in order to take profit from their position and power.

Another female character can be added to this category of women who transgress the rules established by their society in order to achieve their desire, be it material or sexual. In fact, Amin Zaoui's character Lalla Nouara also transgresses the rules of her society and religion in order to satisfy her desire of accumulating money. Yet, in spite of their ambition, Daisy Buchanan, Myrtle Wilson, Sultana, and Lalla Nouara do not rebel against the authority of men and continue to depend on them. In other words, these female characters are under the traditional circle of family and marriage, and do not put into question neither their rights nor

the institution of marriage. Though Myrtle Wilson and Sultana are aware of their rights and are emancipated, they do not put into question their status and do not work to free themselves from men's authority; each of them depends on a man to earn money or achieve a goal. In fact, these female characters are tied to the traditional vision of life.

Another parallel can be drawn between the characters of Jordan Baker, Rokia, and Laya; in fact, these figures represent the new independent women in both novels; they do not depend on men and make their way against the stream of their societies. Moreover, they are the sole female characters who gained independence; be it sexual or financial, and escaped the authority of men. Besides, Jordan Baker and Laya share the same sexual taste; they are both lesbians. At last, each of these characters is associated with men's activities; Jordan Baker is a golf player, Rokia is a business woman, and Laya is an insurgent, therefore, these three female characters reject and challenge men's authority.

In conclusion, both Francis Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui in *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) provide the reader with an insight into the role and status of women in two different societies. Although the two novels may seem different from one another, they share the same ambiguous representation of women.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 67.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>4</sup> The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald (Spark Notes).
- <sup>5</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Penguin books, 1925)
- <sup>6</sup> Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 24.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 27.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 124.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 99.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 17.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., 51.
- <sup>16</sup> Maggie Gordon Froehlich, 'Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing in The Great Gatsby', *The Space Between*,
- <sup>17</sup> Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 64-65.
- <sup>18</sup> Maggie Gordon Froehlich, 'Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing in The Great Gatsby', *The Space Between*,
- <sup>19</sup> Emily S. Vincent, 'Fitzgerald's Women: Motherhood and Masculinity in the Flapper Era' (PhD diss., Department of English, College of Arts and Sciences, 2010).
- <sup>20</sup> Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 31.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 34-35.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 144.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 145.
- <sup>27</sup> Amin Zaoui, *La chambre de la vierge impure* (Alger: Barzakh, 2009), 147.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 147.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 152.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 152.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 152.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 137.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 156.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 160.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 151.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 152.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 49.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 46.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 41.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 57.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 67.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 69.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 71.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 169.
- <sup>45</sup> Ira Mark Milne, ed., *Literary movements for Students* (New York: Gale, 2009), 437.
- <sup>46</sup> Amin Zaoui, *La chambre de la vierge impure* (Alger: Barzakh, 2009), 14.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 130.

## ***The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) as Socially Symbolic Acts**

Our intention in this chapter is to study the two novels (*The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) as socially symbolic acts, by relying on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981).

Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), states that the author unconsciously portrays the social and political scene present at the moment of writing his/her novel. He goes on to say that all what is repressed by the people in a society, the writer produces it in his novel; granting, thus, free course to all what is forbidden by the norms of a society and repressed by the people. Hence making his novel as the political unconscious of a whole society in which he lives.

Jameson adds that;

Interpretation proper—what we have called “strong” rewriting, in distinction from the weak rewriting of ethical codes, which all in one way or another projects various notions of the unity and the coherence of consciousness—always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconsciousness itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a *latent* [Italics mine] meaning behind a *manifest* [Italics mine] one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, and as Fredric Jameson states it, the interpretation of literary texts is always blurred or mystified by some mechanisms such as repression, and this is why the reader must always search a latent (hidden) meaning behind the manifest one. This means that, the text does not always mean just what it says, and that there is always a hidden message that the text

wants to transmit. Here comes the role of the reader, who must read literary texts and interpret them as socially symbolic acts.

#### **a-*The Great Gatsby* (1925) as a Socially Symbolic Act**

Francis Scott Fitzgerald in his novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) portrays America of the Roaring Twenties, a period which was marked by a shift of the American society from a provincial to a modern urbanized society. Indeed, this shift is also seen in the new conceptions which replaced old religious values, and in the new woman which characterized the era. Thus, the American society was in a way freed from all the chains which enchained it, and was engaged in a new freedom and spirit. This new spirit is well represented in *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

Indeed, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a novel based on class struggle; the upper bourgeois class represented by the Buchanans (Daisy and Tom) tries to keep its rank and wealth, and refuses any attempt from the class below it to ascend to the same status. In addition, the new rich class embodied by Jay Gatsby worked hard through illegal activities to climb the social ladder and become as wealthy as the bourgeois class. At last, the lower class exemplified by George Wilson and his wife Myrtle Wilson also works hard to climb the social ladder. George Wilson works hard in his garage, whereas Myrtle through being involved in an immoral love affair with a wealthy married man in order to have access to wealth and power.

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels state in *The Communist Manifesto*;

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed—stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a

fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.<sup>2</sup>

For Fredric Jameson indeed, ‘Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential mystery of the cultural past.’<sup>3</sup> In other words, only Marxism can give us some insight into the prevalent condition of the past of any given society, and especially into its class struggles. But in addition, Jameson relied also on Freudianism which helped him analyze the individual self. That is why 'repression', which is a typical Freudian term, occupies a central position in his *The Political Unconscious*.

Indeed, Jameson states that the author in his novel unconsciously depicts what happens in his society and gives free course to all what was repressed by the people. Thus, all what was forbidden by religious values and morality and repressed by the people is given free course by the author. As a result, women of the Twenties, contrary to Victorian ones, are portrayed as free and were allowed all kinds of transgressions. For instance, Daisy has an extramarital relationship with Gatsby, Jordan Baker is an independent woman and a lesbian, Myrtle Wilson has a love affair with a married man from the upper class.

Fitzgerald in his novel portrays the characters as caring for nothing but their wellbeing and the fulfillment of their goals and desires, transgressing thus all the rules of society and morality to reach their purposes. With the novel’s opening, we are introduced to the Buchanans and informed about their social position and the fact that they live in East Egg. Later on, we learn that the wealthy Tom Buchanan has some woman in New York, and that she dared to call him home at the time of dinner, the fact that pushed Jordan Baker to say: ‘She might have the decency not to telephone him at dinner time.’<sup>4</sup> From Jordan’s comment, we understand that Myrtle Wilson’s behavior is not acceptable and indecent.

With the novel’s progression, we learn more about the character of Myrtle Wilson; she is in fact, the wife of a poor garage owner named George Wilson, and she escapes the Valley of Ashes to become the mistress of a bourgeois man in order to fulfill her desire of wealth and



power. Myrtle is described by Fitzgerald as determined to force herself to the milieu of rich people even by selling her soul to devil and being involved in an immoral relation.

Another of Fitzgerald's characters that transgresses the rules is Jordan Baker; in fact, the latter unlike the other female characters is an independent and a self-made woman. Indeed, Jordan through her golf playing achieved her goals of independence and self-control; she is among the new working women who characterized 1920s America. In addition, she is the unique female character who is not associated with men. Though at first Jordan was rumored to be involved in a love affair with the narrator Nick Carraway, she is at last revealed to be completely out of it; she is not attracted by men but rather by women. Jordan transgresses one of the sacred values of her time and chooses to have a new love experience with people of the same sex.

Myrtle Wilson and Jordan Baker are not the sole characters that are associated to transgression. In fact, Daisy Buchanan is also involved in transgression; Daisy Buchanan in her turn transgresses some rules and values. First of all, Daisy Buchanan transgresses her own principles by abandoning her lover Jay Gatz and marrying the wealthy Tom Buchanan. In addition, when she met again Jay Gatsby, she falls in love with his money and the extravagances which surrounded him, and is involved in an extramarital love affair with him.

Indeed, *The Great Gatsby* is a novel full of other transgressions. For instance, though the period during which the novel was written was characterized by prohibition, the novel is full of liquor and heavy drinkers, and women also took part in this drinking. Francis Scott Fitzgerald depicts the new spirit of America of the Roaring Twenties which was characterized by the emergence of new women who were the opposite of traditional Victorian ones in all their aspects, including, clothing, manners, and behavior.

During the Roaring Twenties, American people were so stifled by the excessive morality of their country that was repressing all their desires and wishes which were

considered as immoral. Francis Scott Fitzgerald in his novel then, gives free course to all what was repressed by the American people. This is the reason why *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is a novel full of excesses; in drinking, dancing, money, love, and immorality, and can be read as a truly socially symbolic act.

Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* comes out with the fact that, ‘the literary structure, far from being completely realized on any one of its levels tilts powerfully into the inside or **impensé** or **non-dit**, in short, into the very political unconscious of the text...’<sup>5</sup> Therefore, literary texts are endowed with a political unconscious proper to the society to which the literary text belongs, and it becomes a mirror of what the people of a given society endured during a given period of their history. The political unconscious of literary texts gives us a glimpse about the politics of a given society during a specific period.

Consequently, Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) represents the political unconscious of America of the Roaring Twenties, since it depicts the life of the different social classes of that time, and puts emphasis on their struggle to maintain or better their social position. In addition, the author tackles themes which were critical during the 1920s America, such as women’s position and role in society.

Therefore and following Fredric Jameson’s argument, in order to know about history and the past or a given period of time, the reader must make use of literary texts and read them as socially symbolic acts. For him, this is the only available method to investigate history and it cannot be approached otherwise.

history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.<sup>6</sup>

### **b-*La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) as a Socially Symbolic Act**

In his novel *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), Amin Zaoui depicts the Algerian society of the Black Decade (1988-2000), and puts emphasis on the role and status of women during such a critical period. In fact, this period was characterized by a clash between the conservative and the progressive segments of the Algerian society, though it must be noted here that this is not a clear cut division and that not all conservatives and progressives took part in the conflict. This clash turned around the shift of the Algerian society from a conservative to a progressive nation. The author portrays this conflict between the radical conservatives who were calling for a society governed by Islamic principles and practices, and the progressives who were aspiring for a society governed by democracy and free will.

Therefore, Amin Zaoui renders through fiction the suffering of women during that period, and demonstrates how they were oppressed by the current political system and men's authority. Albeit the women of *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) were under the authority of both religion and man, not all of them were submissive. Many of them chose secrecy to rebel or act against the norms. As a result, they transgressed the rules of their society to fulfill their desire; be it sexual or material.

As Fredric Jameson puts it in *The Political Unconscious* (1981),

It is as though "genuine" desire needed repression in order for us to come to consciousness of it as such: but then in that case desire must always be transgressive, must always have a repressive norm or law through which to burst and against which to define itself. Yet it is a commonplace that transgressions, presupposing the laws or norms or taboos against which they function, thereby end up precisely reconfirming such laws.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, according to Jameson, desire always needs repression in order for people to become conscious of its existence within them. For him, desire must also be transgressive and be repressed in order to explode and express itself. For Jameson, transgressions confirm the norms and the taboos against which they function, ending by a reconfirmation of the laws.

In fact, during the Black Decade, Algerian people suffered a lot from the tyranny of the two warring systems. Because of the terror imposed by the insurgents, the freedom of people was reduced to the mere practice of a false religion. Consequently, people were oppressed and their desires repressed, so they transgressed all the rules and the norms of morality and behavior. As a result, Amin Zaoui in his novel gives free course to the desires and all what was repressed by the whole society; laying bare in his novel the political unconscious of Algeria.

The first thing to be noticed in Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* is the way women are depicted. The majority of women are emancipated and aware of their rights, in addition to a will to transgress the rules in order to reach their purposes. Indeed, the first woman who appears in the novel is Sultana, and she is depicted in a love scene with her cousin Ailane. In addition to the violation of one of the sacred rules of their religion, morality and behavior by having a bodily relation without being married, the young couple was aware of the fact that they were transgressing the norms of morality.

The character of Sultana is portrayed by Amin Zaoui as ready to do everything in order to fulfill her needs and feel satisfied with her deeds. We have seen her in the novel acting contrary to what was dictated by religious principles just to earn some money and get some commodities. As her name suggests sultana which means queen, thinks that she must have everything and wants to feel like a queen. But, in order to reach her wish of living like a queen she is obliged to act contrary to her principles and transgress all the norms established by her society. Therefore, she is involved in immoral relations with the men of her village, who abuse her sexually and even torture her spirit.

Thus, Amin Zaoui endows the character of Sultana with all the powers of which the Algerian women were deprived of during the Black Decade. It is as if all what was repressed by the women of that period was given free course by the author, and as a result, was

transgressed by women in *La chambre de la vierge impure*. Therefore, in spite of her misconduct, the reader cannot blame Sultana for her deeds and transgressions because she was the victim of her social position, in addition to her society's oppression.

Sultana is not the only female character who transgresses the rules. Laya, who comes from a completely different background, also transgresses rules and norms. Indeed, Laya is a Spanish Jewish woman who converted to Islam and settled in Algeria during the Black Decade, she joined the maquis which was the base camp of people who were fighting against the government at that time. Laya then is among the emancipated women of that period, and also among the rare women to join the insurgents willingly at that time.

At first, only few things are said about the life of Laya, but afterwards, she reveals to Ailane who she was and told him about her work as a secretary in a mortuary, her marriage with a Tunisian businessman, and also informed him about the existence of her son Boabdil. Here again, we notice Amin Zaoui's use of magic realism to invoke a historical figure. Boabdil is in fact, the last Muslim king of Granada, here again; Zaoui does not mention this historical figure by chance, but to invoke the roots of Islam in Spain and to link Algeria to Andalusia.

From the above retrospective about the life of Laya, we learn that she has always been an independent woman before coming to Algeria. Once in the maquis Laya changed all her practices, she has become a terrorist though she was not convinced by what she was doing; she was also engaged in learning and reading Coran. Laya, like the men of the maquis, is also implicated in unusual practices which were tolerated there, such as smoking haschich. In addition, Laya is depicted by Zaoui as mysterious, 'cette femme, avec sa petite taille, est capable de cacher toute la forêt.'<sup>8</sup> Though Laya is described as small, she can hide the whole forest under her small body, the author here makes reference to the strength which can be gained by women once emancipated and associated to politics and government affairs.

Laya, unlike most female characters, is not passive and submissive; she refused to be under the authority of a man though she lived in a patriarchal society. It is as if Laya is exhausted of being the captive of a man, therefore she refused his authority and chose instead to associate herself to women rather than men. Thus, Laya transgressed one of the sacred tenets of her new religion, for in Islam the relations between people of the same sex is a sin.

Another transgressive female character of Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) is Rokia. Indeed, she is the only woman in her village who dared to run away from home in order to fulfill her desire and free herself from the tyranny of her community. Contrary to Laya who escaped the love of men, Rokia ran away to follow the love of a man, 'Ma tante aimait Mustafa Atatürk.'<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Rokia ran away and abandoned her family in a pursuit of a historical figure of modern Turkey; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the symbol of freedom and secularism.

In fact, Rokia does not really run away to conquer the love of Mustafa Atatürk, but to escape the oppression of her society and her family. In addition, the dates mentioned in the novel; October 5<sup>th</sup> 1988 make reference to the beginning of turmoil in Algeria, and September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 referred to the terrorist attack on Twin Towers in the United States of America. So the author mentions this leading figure only to invoke the passage of the Turkish in Algeria and makes reference to the different cultures which influenced the Algerian society, and the advent of secularism in a Muslim country.

The only way for Rokia to be free and achieve her purpose was to escape the authority of her family and the rules of her society. Therefore, once in Turkey, Rokia was free to live from pimping and even own all the brothels there. When Rokia was in her village, she was obliged to respect the rule which said that women's place is at home and with her husband and children. But once abroad, Rokia transgressed all the rules; she was married to a German

painter, and she proposed to marry the Kurdish militant Abdullah Öcalan who was imprisoned by the Turkish authorities.

The character of Rokia is portrayed as emancipated and determined to free herself, striving to achieve her desires and fulfill her wishes regardless of the religious constraints which confiscated the liberties of people at that time. Therefore, Rokia is the victim of her own dreams and desires. In addition, she is always determined to associate herself to fields which were not accessible to women in her society; for example politics and business. Thus, Rokia wanted to achieve all what was forbidden to women in her society, but in another society freer and more tolerant.

Amin Zaoui in *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) writes about women, religion, and oppression. In fact, women were the center of this trio and were the barometer of the balance of power. Amin Zaoui portrays different kinds of women, but though Sultana, Laya, and Rokia are different from one another, they share one common point; their determination to free themselves from any authority, and to achieve their desires regardless of the price and consequences.

In addition, the portrayal of these different women and the excess of the freedom they require strike the reader, and prove how oppressed women of the Black Decade were. Amin Zaoui's novel is a socially symbolic act that offers the reader the opportunity to behold a snapshot of the political landscape of this period.

As a conclusion to this chapter, both Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Amin Zaoui lay bare the political unconscious of their respective societies; America of the Roaring Twenties and Algeria of the Black Decade in their novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) making of them socially symbolic acts. The novels are the two authors' reproduction of the ongoing debates in their societies during the said periods, rendering thus through fiction what happened during the different periods.

As Fredric Jameson states in *The Political Unconscious*,

History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them.<sup>10</sup>



## References

<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Penguin Books, 1925), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 34;

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 88.

## Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, we have attempted a comparative study of Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009), with an emphasis on the image of women in the two novels, relying on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious.: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* as methodology. This theory allowed us to delve into the political unconscious of the periods during which the two novels were set, and have access to the ideologies in presence at each period (America of the Roaring Twenties and Algeria of the Nineties).

Our study has shown that although *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) were written in different periods and different places, they have in common their ambiguous representation of women; the main female characters of both novels are lustful, materialist and ambitious. Besides, women in both novels transgress the rules in order to achieve a desire or to fulfill a wish, and the majority of them were victims of their social ranks or ambition.

In addition, this research also concluded that Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure* (2009) are both socially symbolic acts. Indeed, these two novels reproduce in fiction the ideological battlegrounds that their societies were during the periods in which the novels were set (the Roaring Twenties in America and the Nineties in Algeria). Following Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, both Fitzgerald and Zaoui unconsciously portray what happened in their societies. This confirms our hypothesis which states that close backgrounds may produce similar literary productions.

Indeed, this research has, we hope, opened a new path for the study of Algerian contemporary literature from a comparativist perspective.

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