

Dedication

To my lovely family

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

The present dissertation undertakes a study of the notions of loss, grief and mourning in Assia Djébar's *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and *Algerian White* (1995). The study's major goal consists into exploring how Djébar deals with her mourning work as a reaction to traumatic losses inducing her personal life as well as Algerian modern history. To reach this end, I had recourse to Freud's concepts of *Mourning and Melancholia*, Alan Wolfelt's "the Journey through Grief", and Bonanno's *the Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells us about Life*. The analysis of the novels under study revealed Djébar's incapacity to mourn in *Algerian White*, because of the circumstances in which it was written. *Fantasia*, on the other hand, shows Djébar's ability to cope with previous trauma, be it Algerian colonial past or personal agonies. The reason which explains Djébar's different attitudes towards traumatic losses is to be found in the distance that separated her from the sites of trauma. Indeed, if she succeeded to take aesthetic and emotional distance from the trauma of colonization in *Fantasia*, she lacked that very distance in *Algerian White*, written as an urgent response to the civil strife in the country.

Key Words: Assia Djébar, *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*, *Algerian White*, Grief, Traumatic Loss, Mourning Process

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I-Introduction

There are distinctive categories of losses individuals are meant to experience throughout the journey of their lives. Some are particularly traumatic when compared to others, and this involves losses engendered by the death of relatives, friends and every person holding a significant role in humans' life story. Because this type constitutes a heavy and inconsolable loss to bear, especially if it is of a sudden nature, no man is sufficiently prepared to cope with nor to overcome such traumatic events, since mourning those lost loved ones remains a tough experience which requires strength, courage and time to heal.

Algerian history is extremely marked by a traumatic bloody past, in which death continues to haunt men's memory. The French colonization which lasted more than a whole century, the Algerian War of Liberation and the Black Decade condemn this land as well as its people to struggle for a possible peaceful future. As this demands to make peace with yesterday's wounds, involving both the recent violence Algeria has been victim of, and the tragic history of a more remote past.

Among the numerous writers who have devoted their professional career to make Algeria's voice audible in the world, Assia Djébar is a fervent proponent of the cause, a recognized and reputed North African, francophone author whose works are imbued with themes of loss, grief and mourning. The present paper explores those distinctive concepts through two of her literary works namely, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), and *Algerian White* (1995).

The research primary task is to inspect how loss, grief and mourning process in the two distinct novels, considering the different periods in which they were conceived. It is my intention to demonstrate the nature of the mourning Djébar adopts in both narratives, and explain the nonoccurrence of this process under certain dramatic circumstances. And last but not least, shed light upon Djébar's ultimate reconciliation with the past of her personal story

and motherland's as well, through a reinvestigation of Algeria's history and a rendering of its civilians' muffled voice.

1. Review of the Literature

Assia Djébar's works, *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and *Algerian White* (1995), have been subject to a bulk of criticism. *Fantasia* has attracted considerable interest as it immerses the reader in the traumatic history of the Algerian colonial period that is particularly characterized by violent losses, painful memories and shocking narratives. The conspicuous attention Djébar manifested towards silence which she elaborated in an exclusive aesthetic style reveals the importance testimonies play to enable a possible healing process. In fact, the translation of the protagonists' howls and the restoration of their feminine "stifled" voices, all expressed in the language of the previous coloniser, unveils Djébar's enterprise to recover through the process of writing a "collective and shared memory".¹

Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade has been over studied and reviewed extensively after its first publication (1985), and much criticism is conducted from a feminist perspective. For example, in "Can I claim to revive these stifled voices: Writing, Researching and Performing Postcolonial Womanhood in Assia Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison*", Hannah Kershaw depicts Djébar's *Fantasia* as a work that traces the violent colonial conquest of Algeria and the natives' resistance to the enemy as well. But most importantly, she opposes male-centered historiography through her claim for the feminine 'contribution to the Algerian War of Liberation'.²

1 Najla Achek, "Re-/Righting Her/Story: Renegotiating Gender and Identity in Maghrebian Woman Writing" (University of Manouba, 2017)

2 Christian Zeitz, "Contemporary Muslim Women's Voice." 65 (University of Cologne, 2017): 5.
<http://genderforum.org/1146-2>

According to Jane Hiddleston, *Fantasia* is Djébar's endeavour to create a collective biography of Algerian female figures, by having recourse to historical documents of the French seizure of Algiers (1830) which she accompanied with historical flashbacks of the Revolutionary war (1954-1962).³ Hiddleston explains that Djébar's narrative revisits the story of Algerian women's conflict towards self-assertion, a Self they struggled to impose and affirm in a male-dominated society. Furthermore, Djébar's work shows a strong determination to reveal the position women held in history and their compelling commitment in the process of liberating their native land. Djébar, indeed, attributes women a voice to finally liberate them from a profound amnesia. Hiddleston views Djébar's *Fantasia* as a corrected version of the historical past through which she sheds light upon Algeria's previous colonial chapter as well as the post-colonial period. Djébar recounts episodes of the past with the pursuit of restoring Algerian women's dignity, and particularly their right to historical recognition.⁴

According to Ferma Lekesizalin, Djébar's narrative is classified within "the traditions of postcolonial autobiography" and feminine literature by numerous studies which manifested notable attention towards North African women writers. *Fantasia* is also an "empowering novel" which opposes drastically despotic and fixating Western patriarchal discourses.⁵ Djébar's work tussles with the colonial past and highlights the position Algerian women hold towards Colonialism and independence.⁶

David Waterman portrays *Fantasia* as a political novel through which Djébar addresses the topic of "borders violation"; She creates a novel in which the female body is inextricably attached to the Algerian territory. Both the country and the body function as being one. Algeria as well as women's body constitute the basic site of borders transgressed/ revealed and

3 Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: University Press, 2006), 68.

4 Ibid, 68.

5 Ferma Lekesizalin. "Defiant History and Agency in Assia Djébar's *Fantasia*: an Algerian Cavalcade," *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2017): 200.

6 Ibid

intricately linked to war, sexuality, history and writing as well. Djébar personifies Algeria with brutal and sexual stereotypes.⁷ In *Fantasia*, Djébar exhorts the readers to regard the woman's body both as an individual and as a collective figure, a body which goes back to a "double past". This past refers to a historical space that the individual as well as the collective body occupy but in which the female body also exists, in -between war and peace time.⁸

As far as *Algerian White* is concerned, it has been subject to much criticism as well. Hiddleston suggests that inversely with *Loin de Médine*, (1991) in which Djébar engages with the early days of Islam to denounce radical Islamists's distortion of the past, Djébar's next narratives center steadily on the present time. Djébar enunciates a strong counteraction to the raising forms of oppression involving gender, linguistic and cultural persecution. The Radical Islamists' appropriation of Algerian identity not only threatens the country but also obstructs it. Thereby, Algeria is figured as disintegrated, devastated, and irreversibly lost.⁹

Schneider Annedith, in "Mourning in a Minority Language: Assia Djébar's *Algerian White*", claims that the author's work is an attempt to find possible explanations to the violence that struck her country, and proposes to associate her personal traumatic experience to the horrific occurrences Algerian citizens witnessed. Schneider refers to *Algerian White* as a commemorative process of the Algerian intelligentsia assassinated during the bloody decade of 1990s. Djébar "links the murders of the 1990s to purges within the Algerian forces during the Independence".¹⁰ In *Algerian White*, Djébar incriminates both the oppressive Algerian government and the Islamists' erasure of the Francophone intellectuals.

7Waterman, David. "Body/Text/History: Violation of Borders in Assia Djébar's *Fantasia*," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 22. no. 2(1998): 5, 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1445>

8 Ibid, 5, 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1445>

9 Hiddleston, Assia Djébar: *out of Algeria*, 121.

10Schneider Annedith, "Mourning in a minority language: Assia Djébar's *Algerian White*", *Journal for the Study of Religion* 19, no. 2(2006):45-46.

Djebar expresses a notable unease towards her “displacement” of being an Algerian author writing in the language of the invader. As she portrays the Algerian historical crisis in which the memory of Algeria’s lost intellectuals and martyrs is mutilated and erased from popular history. Djebar’s disapproval is that the violence inflicted by Islamist insurgents on their co-citizens recalls barbarities of the former colonizer.¹¹

2. Issue and Working Hypotheses

The above review shows that, though critics have explored various aspects of the historical trauma in Djebar’s fiction, they have barely touched upon how this subject renews itself each time in her fiction. Djebar’s works render the heavy consequences of Colonial Violence on both her people and her personal healing process. This study raises the issue of the importance of a mourning process through a recognition of past traumatic events, and the inability to heal these traumas without elucidating the reasons that condemn yesterday’s violence perpetuates itself in the present.

Colonial history looms large in Djebar’s mind. In her early fiction, the violence of colonization is everywhere present, and it was until *Fantasia* that she succeeds to achieve peace with this long period of modern Algerian history. However, no sooner does she succeed to mourn that period that Algerian history turns tragic, when the country sinks into a bloody internal conflict claiming the lives of thousands of people, among them intellectuals and artists who were Djebar’s close relatives and friends.

Jane Hiddleston is certainly right when she claims that leaving Algeria, in the early 1990’s, was a traumatic experience to Djebar. Yet, the critic does not acknowledge how Assia Djebar’s life story was traumatizing in its entirety. In fact, it was a succession of tragedies,

11 Chuang Tzu-Shiow, ‘I See Myself Elsewhere: The Works of Marie Cardinal and Assia Djebar’ (National Chi Nan University, Taiwan, 2015)

beginning with the trauma of acculturation, followed by the first exile in France then the Algerian War of Independence. Djébar's youth had a profound impact on the next chapters of her life. The publication of *Fantasia*, as argued in this dissertation, was meant to heal those wounds of the past through strategies of mourning. Nonetheless, if Djébar finds a way to mourn the colonial past, she could not cope with her second trauma, that of the Civil War of the 1990's. This is why *Algerian White* is best read as an expression of a deep grief which does not find resolution. What makes this particular novel more tragic is that it awakens past memories, urging Djébar to evoke again figures of the past, such as Mouloud Feraoun, Frantz Fanon, Albert Camus...

3. Methodological Outline

The present dissertation consists of three major chapters. Chapter one is dedicated to the theoretical part of the research paper, so as to explain what grief, mourning and loss represent as psychological concepts and facilitate the exploration of pain and grief in Djébar's fiction. It comprises three subchapters: Traumatic Losses, the Immediate Response to Traumatic Loss, and Coping with Traumatic Loss. Chapter two investigates the manifestation of these theoretical concepts in *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*. Three sections are included, namely Colonial Violence, Traumatic Losses and Djébar's Mourning Process in *Fantasia*. Chapter Three reveals the analysis of loss and grief in *Algerian white* and the unconceivable mourning Assia Djébar demonstrates in her work. The Black Decade is a prominent period to understand the difficulty of mourning in *Algerian White*, it is thus introduced in the last chapter. The research findings demonstrate that Djébar's mourning process in *Fantasia* could not be the one she undertakes in *Algerian White* considering the circumstances through which both novels came into being.

II-Method and Materials

1. Methods

Chapter 1: Loss, Grief and Mourning

"Almost every person in the world, at one time or another, experiences events that can be considered major losses."¹²

Freud's theory of *Mourning and Melancholia*, 1917, Alan D. Wolfelt's Six Needs of Mourning and George Bonanno's "Natural resilience" are the theories this paper relies on to examine Assia Djebar's mourning in her two literary works, *Fantasia* and *Algerian White*. However, a clarification of what loss, grief and mourning constitute as key interrelated concepts, before dealing with the theoretical part, is a requisite for the novels' study. The first phase consists in providing a set of explanations of "loss" and identifying its various categories. The second step deals with "grief" as a response to any traumatic loss, the stages the bereaved experiences when grieving, and Bonanno's counter intuitive reactions to loss. The third part explores the concept of "mourning" as defined by Freud and its six reconciliation needs as elaborated by D. Wolfelt.

1.1 Traumatic Loss

One of the definitions proposed to the term loss is: "an act of losing possession, an instance of losing. A person, thing, an amount that is lost".¹³ In other words, loss may be considered as a "separation" (physical or emotional), a person's death (siblings, husband, friend), or the fact of no longer possessing something.¹⁴ Some cultures tend to view loss in a

12 Grief, Loss and Bereavement. "Consequences of Grief, Coping with Loss, Differences in Grieving, Adaptation or Resolution." <https://family.jrank.org/page:754:grief-loss-bereavement>

13 Loss, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/loss>

14 Loss, <https://dictionary.Cambridge.org>

"dichotomous way", in the sense that individuals are either recognized as lost, thus dead, or alive if they still belong in the world of the living.¹⁵

Death is particularly the event mostly associated to the idea of loss. Yet, there are considerable categories of losses. Some of which are more psychological including shifts in self-esteem, or world view caused by "harassment", "victimization", or natural disaster(s). Whereas tangible losses are either personal (domestic violence, physical or mental abuse), interpersonal (a separation caused by death), symbolic (racial discrimination, loss of a social position and the like), or material (loss of one's country, job, home).¹⁶

The loss of a loved person is a rough and strenuous experience to overcome, especially, if the separation happens through death. This type of loss remains one of the most difficult to accept as it induces another category recognized as secondary loss. Dr. Jill La Morie in "Recognizing and Grieving Secondary Losses" attributes the "Ripple Effect" to death; she explains the disturbing impact death exerts on our lives: "The one single event of a pebble falling in the water affects all that is around it with multiple, vast, extending ripples. Death has that Ripple effect as well, setting off a disturbance that moves across time and space"¹⁷. Accordingly, death is compared to a stone, once thrown in the water provokes sudden turbulence reflected by ripples. Similarly, when the death of a loved one, friend, or family member occurs it gives birth to a multitude of subsequent losses known as secondary losses.¹⁸

La Morie insists on the importance of the recognition of the secondary losses as a prominent phase for a healthy grieving process.¹⁹ In her view, the secondary losses an individual may experience after a cherished person dies include the following:²⁰

15 Grief, Loss and Bereavement. "Consequences of Grief, Coping with Loss, Differences in Grieving, Adaptation or Resolution." <https://family.jrank.org/page:754:grief-loss-bereavement>

16 Ibid.

17 Jill La Morie, "Recognizing and Grieving Secondary Losses". <https://taps.org/article/19-1>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

Loss of identity: it refers to a position previously held in a friendly, professional, or familial relationship. **Loss of memories:** sometimes the bereaved is unable to bring back memories he once had with the deceased. **Loss of concentration:** pain and sadness place the bereaved in a constant preoccupation and this reduces the ability to focus and function, especially if it is the result of traumatic events. A significant loss of emotional and physical energy is often observable. **Loss of health:** when a person grieves, a number of health problems appear as the consequences of emotional shock, pain, and anxiety. A great category of people report they suffer from insomnia, headaches, depression and the like. **Loss of security:** this refers to the feeling of unsafety and vulnerability resulting from fear and uncertainty of the future. **Loss of trust:** death alters our perception of the world and makes us question ourselves and those around us. Thereby, we end up losing faith in love, in humanity and in the person we are. **Loss of support system:** this merely refers to those on whom the bereaved can rely on. It could be family, friend or community support. **Loss of significant relationship:** it is the fact of losing a person of significant role in a man's life. **Loss of future prospects:** death marks the end of all future plans, projects, goals, dreams and hopes envisaged with the deceased. And the **Loss of patience:** the difficulty of handling daily stress and the incapacity to recover creates a feeling of impatience. It is also accompanied with feelings of failure and deficiency; due to the time the grief process takes.

To recapitulate losses can be categorized into the following distinct type as mentioned by Michael Cohn: **Relationship losses:** these are losses resulting from the end of a relationship either marital or not, including divorce, friendship breakups and separation after a person's death or departure. **Traumatic losses:** several losses could fit in this category involving cataclysmic losses, which wars, natural disasters or death bring out. These catastrophic losses often lead to important trauma, setting off post traumatic disorder which necessitates medical support. **Physical losses:** it concerns losses which result from serious illness, body dysfunction,

or aging. Important changes arise in people's life such as their physical appearance, loss of weight, and /or impotence. **Immigration:** this type induces losses of status, languages, cultural identities, self-confidence, or financial security.²¹

1.2. The Immediate Response to Traumatic Losses: Grief

The term grief refers to the “usual response” when losing someone or something of “particular value”. Grief does not always involve an emotional reaction to loss; it may encompass psychological and physical dimensions. Western cultures consider grief as a “psychological phenomenon,” broadly as a “cognitive challenge” and an emotional response to any loss. Nevertheless, in some parts of the world it is viewed as a “somatization” in which people have learned to respond to their losses through the body to relieve pain.²² As a natural reaction to loss, grief represents the feelings of distress that accompanies the loss of a loved person/ Object. It is unique as every human being grieves in response to personal life experiences, distinct circumstances, and losses as well.²³

Grieving remains a real challenge that requires emotional and physical strength. In fact, grief work has been largely regarded as a complex process. Some models have been proposed to ascertain the extent to which individuals adapt to the loss. George Bonanno in *The other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us about Life after a Loss*, considers “natural resilience” as a major element of grief and trauma reactions. He is the first to have recourse “to pre-loss data”. He draws four trajectories of grief, namely resilience, recovery, chronic dysfunction and delayed Grief/ Trauma. Bonanno explains absence of grief or trauma symptoms as a healthy reaction. Laughter, celebration just like sadness belong to the different

21 Michel Cohn, "Losses in Translation" <https://www.lossesintranslation.com>

22 Grief, Loss and Bereavement. “Consequences of Grief, Coping with Loss, Differences in Grieving, Adaptation or Resolution.” <https://family.jrank.org/page:754:grief-loss-bereavement>

23 Ibid.

forms grief response can have. “Coping Ugly”, is a term introduced to demonstrate that some forms of coping may appear counter intuitive. Bonanno’s work indicates that resilience is human thus, does not require any specific program. Bonanno’s four grief trajectories are:²⁴

Resilience: the capacity to overcome a traumatic event involving death, tragic situations or, any resembling circumstance. **Recovery:** the period following the shock (at least several months), in which depression and traumatic disorder arise. Then, a return to a normal life. **Chronic dysfunction:** a long period marked with distress and incapacity to function. It may exceed several years. **Delayed grief or trauma:** sometimes grief or trauma symptoms may appear months later, and this still remains a real mystery. Nonetheless, delayed trauma is rather viewed as an original strategy.

The stages of grief are not always experienced in the same way or processed in a similar order. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are the most common phases. Nonetheless, they could be approached in several ways. Because people respond differently to distinct forms of losses, grief remains particular for every person. It could be possible to commence coping with loss in the bargaining phase, then shift to anger or denial next. You may also be stuck in one of the five stages for a long period but pass over others utterly.

Denial, the first phase of the Five Stages Grief theory represents human refusal of any trying situation. Because grief is an overwhelming emotion, it may happen that the person living the shock rejects the reality, pretending the loss never happened. However, this may help gradually assimilate the shock and begin to recognize it. Denial is a common defense mechanism that enables to endure the pain and relieve anxiety.

As you enter a new phase, feelings and emotions previously rejected or simply denied appear. **Anger**’s trajectory is, then redirected at other individuals. It could present a lost old

²⁴ George Bonanno, *The Other Side of Sadness, What the New Science of bereavement Tells about Life after Loss* (New York: basic Books: 2009): 231. https://www.academia.edu/1867715/Book_Review_Bonanno

friend or relative, and sometimes anger is deflected into inanimate bodies. While reason knows the object of the anger is not to be blamed, the emotions one may feel are so intensified to be capable of recognizing the situation. Nevertheless, anger is not always discernible since it may disguise in feelings such as “bitterness or resentment”. As it is worth mentioning that not everyone experiences this singular stage of the grieving process. **Bargaining** is characterized by vulnerability, regret, and despair. These feelings often lead individuals to find strategies that could help regain control over the outcome of a particular stressful event. During this period of self-reproach questions like “what if”, “if only” emerge. During this step, the bereaved seeks recovery from both grief and pain. Bargaining is perceived as a defensive line whose task involves a protection from intensive emotions of despair, confusion or dejection. **Depression** constitutes the “quite” stage of the process while anger and bargaining are rather active phases. The mourner is supposed to start his/ her healing process and embrace the past. Nevertheless, some choose to isolate themselves during the course of this phase. Feelings of confusion, distress and sadness arise thus make this process exclusively tough. Mourners may feel they will never accomplish their mourning work. **Acceptance:** At this level, the bereaved finally accepts his/or her loss and observes some progress. Emotions such as sadness can be still present and depression may be part of the picture. Nevertheless, it becomes easier to be more positive towards the future and move forward. When the bereaved reaches this particular phase and somehow succeeds to accept the death of the departed individual, gradually the process of assimilation of the previous object/person begins to operate and centers on the person’s life as a whole. Conversations comprising the deceased turn to be less traumatic. The bereaved may begin to talk more about the departed with whom fond memories were once shared.

1.3. Coping with Traumatic Loss: Mourning

To theorize the concepts of loss, grief and mourning, it is suitable to use the psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud's theory and his discussion of the concept of mourning in "*Mourning and Melancholia*" (1917).²⁵ According to Freud's conception of mourning, it is the normal response to the loss of a loved individual or any abstraction that may take its place (Liberty or fatherland are some examples), and so is Melancholia. However, it is rather viewed as the pathological state of depression.²⁶ Profound pain, as well as decline in the ability to love, lack of interest in the external world, and feelings of self-reproach appear in Melancholia. Common traits are shared with grief but the significant distinction remains in a considerable "fall in self-esteem", that grief does not present.²⁷ Mourning features are the same, in the sense that absence of interest in the outside world, and decreased capacity to love are also observable. Yet, in melancholia the loss is unconscious while in mourning it is not the case.²⁸

According to Freud both mourning and depression entail a forced separation from the object of loss. An involuntary withdrawal is experienced by the mourner as a distressing process through which the ego rejects the idea of loss and wrestles to find a "substitute object". Nonetheless, in depression this object is not found in the external world and drives the ego to refuse the fact that the object-loved is irrevocably lost, and consequently invent its own "libidinal energy". Abrogation of interest in the outside world initiates with a decline in reflection.²⁹

Freud depicts mourning as a process that enables recovery. Nevertheless, the mourner should permit him/ herself to experience change, a substitution of the lost object/ individual

25 Sigmund Freud, "*Mourning and Melancholia*," Sigmund Freud's Collected Papers. IV, 152- 170, 153.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 155.

29 Haris Carhart, et al, " Mourning and Melancholia revisited: correspondences between principles of Freudian metapsychology and empirical findings in neuropsychiatry, "Annals of General Psychiatry (2008): 7-23.

could be encountered in the external world. The feelings of pain are released, once the individual finally turns the grief into a positive, past experience either by replacing the previous loss or simply moving on. In mourning, the pain of the loss is felt in an external way, while in melancholia it is internalized. In mourning, the world turns poor and bleak while in melancholia it is the ego which ends lost.³⁰ While grief is the emotional reaction to any important loss, mourning reveals the process one undertakes to assimilate the “void” that is left. Grief represents the emotional reaction individuals have whenever a significant loss is encountered. But mourning is the process in which the bereaved engages to accept the death of the loss object/person. Mourning is merely the process of accommodation to continue to survive in a world where there is no more place to that special person/ object.³¹

Alan D. Wolfelt in “The Journey through Grief: the Six Needs of Mourning”, explores the concept of mourning in relation to the loss of a loved individual and highlights the impact death may have on human’s journey. A long road full of pain since death irreversibly alters the course of life. Wolfelt’s individual experiences of loss brought him to recognize the significance of a mourning process. Grief is different from mourning as it stands for internal reflections and emotions encountered once the death happens. Mourning, however, is the outburst of these profound feelings. Since recovery requires a mourning process D. Wolfelt draws six “yield signs” to which he alludes to as the “reconciliation needs of mourning”, needs the bereaved processes throughout the journey of grief.³²

Acknowledging the reality

Recognizing the loss constitutes the first step to envisage a possible healing process. The mourner’s recognition of the loss permits to move on and be able to process the other needs

30 Ibid, 8-23.

31 Mourning, <https://griefandmourning.com>

32 Alan D. Wolfelt, "The Journey through Grief: The Six Needs of Mourning," Center for Loss, 2016. <https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/journey-grief-six-needs-mourning>

of the mourning. Although, mourners are exhorted to face the loss, the recognition remains itself a trying experience. It is a crucial step towards survival. Since the death' recognition is the first step towards any recovery, mourners should accept the loss and understand confrontations of past memories including the death are necessary.

Embracing the pain of the loss

This need requires pain acceptance, a phase in which mourners could be able to trace painful events as well as escape them whenever anxious feelings make their appearance. Denial, anger, or grief seem rather natural emotions when compared to embracing hurt. Nonetheless, it is through this reconciliation with the loss that other needs of mourning are encountered.

Remembering the person who died

This need of mourning recalls the singularity of the mourner's attachment to his/ her departed one's memory. Memories once shared, pictures, souvenirs as well as objects witness the significance of this relationship and encourages the survivor to maintain emotional bonds. Thus, embracing the past permits new future prospects.

Developing a new self-identity

Death has a profound impact on the way individuals view themselves. Accordingly, emotional relationships determine the perception people have of their self-identity. After the loss of a special emotional bond, life may seem senseless as the previous social or individual role changes. Some move from being married to a "widow" or "widower", parents to a "bereaved person". Mourners are required to confront new positions in life and adopt new identities as well. Nevertheless, this particular tough experience helps develop a more assertive personality.

Searching for meaning

Throughout this process mourners question their philosophy of life, their religious faith and try to provide possible answers to their loss. As the death of a someone loved makes people

lose hope and feel powerless, it remains a complex experience in which the mourner constantly questions his/ her existence.

Receiving ongoing support from others

Family, friend, or professional support play a significant role in the mourning process, the more the healing process takes time the more a support system is required. Encouraging the bereaved to express his/ her grief rather than denying it provides mourners the strength to move on. But most importantly it helps regain faith in life.

Reconciling with grief

Reconciliation represents “the ability to fully acknowledge the reality”. Although feelings of loss, pain, and anxiety will not definitely disappear, mourners by this point are able to integrate the loss and get back to a normal life. “With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence.”

As a conclusion, mourning is viewed as a human response to the loss of a particular human being, a loss that is experienced in life and that is important to human psychological development. The process of mourning occurs in three different phases. Within the first phase, the bereaved person suffers from a loss. Sadness is daily present. It is expressed through crying or howling. Then, comes the reconstruction phase, in which the individual reinvests him/herself on the psychological level. He reinvests his environment without the lost person. Progressively, he or she accepts the idea of death, and sometimes gives it a sense. An internal presence replaces the loss after the mourning integration with the human psyche.

2. Materials

Throughout this section of the study Assia Djébar's biography as well as brief summaries of each narrative are introduced. This part aims at highlighting the author's personal story and some of the numerous events that marked the various episodes of her life as well. This could serve to have a better understanding of the influence of Djébar's life journey over her writings.

2.1. Assia Djébar's Biography

Djébar's life and career are marked by a panoply of journeys. She first began as a student, then novelist, filmmaker, or professor. From Algeria to Tunisia, Morocco, then France, to the United States. Djébar dies in France, to finally go back to the roots and be buried in Cherchell, Algeria, her motherland.

Djébar was born Fatima-Zohra Imalayen on 30 June 1936. She is raised in an Arabic-speaking family, in the small coastal town of Cherchell, near Algiers. At a very young age, she is introduced to both Arabic and French culture. She proved to be a genius and promising child whose father provided with a great support to continue her education. Her father taught the French language at Mouzaïaville, in the Mitidja region, in the same primary school his daughter attended. Later on, Djébar studied the Quran in Blida and was one of the only two girls. She then, pursued her secondary studies at Collège de Blida, this time as the only Muslim pupil. She finally left Algeria to continue her educational program in Paris. Djébar becomes the first Algerian woman to be accepted at one of France's most prestigious schools.³³

Assia Djébar is the pen name the author chose for the publication of her first novel, *La Soif* (1957), translated as "*The Thirst*". Many works followed including *Les Impatients* (1958), *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* (1962), that was the same period in which she returned to

³³Assia Djébar: <http://authorscalendar.info/djébar.htm>.

Algeria. After the Algerian Independence, Djébar was criticized for her use of the French language instead of her native one. She lived in Paris (1965-1974), and returned to Algeria again. She published *Les Allouettes Naïves* in 1967. In 1980, she remarried to the poet Malek Alloula with whom she remained in Paris.³⁴

Later works such as *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (1985; *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*), *Ombre Sultane* (1987; *A Sister to Scheherazade*), and *Vaste est la Prison* (1994; *So Vast the Prison*) addressed issues of inequality through autobiography, historical record, myth and fiction. In Assia Djébar semi-autobiographical *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, her personal story is revealed in a more explicit way by re-creating the lives of her departed friends. Djébar contrasts their death with the loss of previous Algerian intellectuals and sheds light on the state of violence which took hold of the country in the 1990s.³⁵

In 1995, Djébar travelled to the United States where she taught French literature at Louisiana State University. During these last years, both her voice and the bluntness with which she writes propelled her to a worldwide recognition. She was the winner of a Neustadt International Prize (University of Oklahoma, 1996), a Prix Marguerite Yourcenar (France, 1997), and a Peace Prize from the German Book Trade (2000). She was designated the first North African member of The French Academy in 2005.³⁶ Djébar dies in February 2015, in Paris at the age of 78. The multitude of works she realized throughout these past years serve as source of inspiration to a new generation of writers.³⁷

34 Assia Djébar, "Algerian writer and Filmmaker" <https://www.britannica.com>

35 Ibid.

36 Assia Djébar, Postcolonial Studies: <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu>

37 Ibid.

2.2 A Summary of the Novels

a. *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*

After a long absence of literary work, Assia Djébar marks her return to writing with the publication of *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, 1980 followed by *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*, in 1985. First released as *L'Amour La Fantasia*, it forms with *A Sister to Scheherazade* (1987), and *So Vast the Prison*, (1994) Djébar's Algerian autobiographical Quartet. *Fantasia*, from the Arabic "fantasia", a word signifying "ostentation", a North African celebration of Arab-Berber soldiers on their horseback with "loud cries" and "rifle shot"³⁸, intertwines three types of discourses, the narrative, the historical, and the autobiographical.

The novel comprises three parts. Each section is subdivided into other chapters. The first section entitled "*The Capture of the City or Love-Letters*", alternates the narrator's childhood secret muses and the colonial past to which she also belongs. Djébar brings to life souvenirs from the past, recalling the emotional relationship she once had with her paternal figure, and the influence it could have on the next chapter of her narrative. Djébar resurrects the past and narrates the French Fleet arrival on June 1830, the Battle of Staoueli, and the Fort Emperor explosion on July 1830. These historical events mark the start of a tremendous Algerian collective trauma.

In the second part, "*The Cries of Fantasia*", the author restores individual as well as collective memory, again Djébar interweaves historical episodes of her native land, Algeria with previous chapters of her personal story/youth, including her bridal night. From a chapter to another, Djébar intertwines the collective past and the individual one so as to embark the reader on a remote past and unveil some of her secret muses. A story of a love letter whose content triggered the father's fury is remembered. Violent scenes of the previous war are

38 Assia Djébar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. Blair, Dorothy (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989)

brought back to life through official accounts of French soldiers. And through General Pélissier's testimony, Djébar recalls the tragic "enfumade" of Ouled Riah, A horrific scene, a singular act of barbarity of a Berber tribe burnt alive in their caves.

The novel's final part, "*Voices from the Past*" traces the memory of Assia Djébar's ancestral mothers whose involvement in the process of Algeria's liberation is unveiled through the language of their executioner. Djébar accords her Algerian sisters and mothers her own voice to liberate them from a long, past traumatizing experience of the colonial rule, which has never stopped to haunt the collective memory. Oral testimonies are provided so as to reveal both the colonial and patriarchal oppression women endured. Some painful memories of her youth are recalled, including her exclusion from the Feminine Algerian traditions, being a native, Muslim girl who unlike her cousins is neither veiled nor cloistered.

b. Algerian White

Algerian White, (1993; *Le Blanc de L'Algérie*) a work Assia Djébar dedicated to the memory of three of her beloved ones, three exceptional men whose loss altered Djébar's existence for ever: Mahfoud Boucebcî, M'Hamed Boukhobza and Abdelkader Alloula, respectively, a sociologist, a psychiatrist, and a notorious dramatist savagely executed nearly during the same period, in 1993. Through her commemorative writing Djébar bears witness to the massacres, horror, tremendous violence, and the traumatic experience her compatriots were subjected to. A period recognized as the Civil War or the Algerian Tragedy, one of the most violent episodes of Algeria's history. Then, she embarks into a remote past this time to resurrect the memory of women and men writers, poets, thinkers, to whom Algeria owes its literature, intellectuals mainly francophone authors who disappeared since 1956.

Algerian White is divided into four sections, "*the Language of the Dead*", "*Three Days*", "*Death without End*", and "*Writing the White of Algeria*". The first section, begins with the author's strong desire as well as urgent duty to respond to the assassinations of close friends and provides the major reason for the realisation of the work. Each man is remembered in his singularity, in what he was as a father, brother, son, and friend, amongst his family and tribe. And what he represented to the author in particular. Painful as well as more joyful instants are recounted as a homage Assia Djébar pays, so as their memory resist the "dust of oblivion"

The second section of the novel narrates the last details of each men's execution, "two in June'93, the third in March'94," "*Three Algerian Days*" the author accompanies with shocking testimonies of the horror their families witnessed. The first is devoted to M'Hamed, the last hours the man observed before his executioners decide to take action. The second day traces Boucebcî's death, narrating every moment he went through then, the insurgents' assault, again bringing back to life dreadful and violent scenes. The last day, recounts AbdelKader

Alloula's murder in 1994, his funerals, and Djébar's final farewell. Three friends whose scathing fate opens past agonies.

The third section resuscitates figures of the past including Mouloud Feraoun, Malek Haddad, Albert Camus, the two Amrouche Brothers, Taous and Jean, Frantz Fanon, Anna Greki, nineteen in a whole. All assassinated or snatched brutally from life, a death to which Djébar alludes to as "unfinished death". Throughout this section, the author continues her reflective process on Algerian intellectuals' tragic fate.

The final section, "*Writing the White of Algeria*" constitutes Djébar's interrogations about the spirit of hatred that turned Algeria's fate into the current bloody internal conflict which condemned her homeland to struggle for decent funerals. Reflections about the "white death" and "the other kind "of death, a violent death which resists completion continue to emerge throughout her evocation of the past.

Geoff Wisner, in *Words Without Borders*, portrays Assia Djébar's memoir *Algerian White* "as more subtle, more artful, and finally more moving." As it was written as a homage Djébar directed to three friends she tragically lost. Three Algerian intellectuals executed in the "space of less than one year, and the stories of each of their deaths are at the emotional heart of the book".³⁹

39 Wisner Geoff, "Algerian White," *Words Without Borders*,
<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/algerian-white>

III-Results

The analysis of Djébar's *Fantasia* and "*Algerian White*" reveals that both works are concerned with loss, grief, and mourning, though strategies the author adopts to achieve her mourning process remain exclusively not the same. The main reason is certainly the period of time each novel is produced. Both deal with traumatic losses that proved to have irreversible consequences on the writer's state of mind as well as Algeria possible peaceful future. Mourning is incomplete in *Algerian White* since Djébar is urged by a duty of memory while seeking to bring possible answers to those violent losses. In *Fantasia*, mourning is possible regarding the adequate time the author had to heal her wounds.

Algerian White, shows the author's categorical refusal of the present reality. The thousand assassinations and the extreme violence Algeria witnesses condemn Djébar and her fellows to an ongoing process of mourning. Assia Djébar's most recent losses open old wounds, and her emotional state is a reflection of the huge and profound shock she goes through. Thus, mourning is obviously impossible in such devastating events. Hence, Djébar's recourse to some strategies to heal and relieve her pain. Nevertheless, denial, anger and depression characterize the novel, and acceptance is not encountered throughout the text.

Paradoxically, in *Fantasia*, Assia Djébar through her re-investigation of the historical past and the tribute she pays to Algerian women, who fought for independence, succeeds to cope with previous tragedies including her personal life and the Algerian colonial past. The voice she attributes to Algerian women which free them from a long muteness also aids to fill the blanks French Colonial official accounts have left. Djébar's revision of the past not only enables her to atone with the past, but also heal her greatest traumas as well as the Algerian dramatic history.

This dissertation reveals the significance of a mourning process to come to an end with the past trauma. It is quite evident that the historical epoch of *Fantasia* is different when

compared to *Algerian White*'s, yet the basic element that joins the two novels is that both address issues of loss, grief and mourning. This study needs to be contextualized according to the period of time, also to the individuality of the process of mourning in which Djébar is engaged, and through which no mourning could be accomplished without acceptance and more importantly without a recognition of the loss. Chapter Two discusses how the author processes grief in *Fantasia*, her choice of resilience over hatred so that she could ultimately heal. Chapter Three unveils Djébar's immediate reaction (the immediacy to respond through literature of emergency) to the loss of her beloved friends presented in the *Algerian White*, the personal grief she lives without them, her mourning, and the inconceivability to process it in the novel.

IV- Discussion

Chapter 2

Loss and Mourning in *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985)

This second chapter of the present research paper is devoted to the exploration of grief, loss and mourning, three psychological concepts in Djébar's autobiographical/historical narrative *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, first published in 1985 as *L'Amour, la Fantasia*, then translated into English, in 1989. Djébar's work recounts the French invasion of 1830, and the Algerian Revolution with women's contribution to the war. The author retrieves personal past memories involving her youth, and life experiences which forged her character. A youth to which she refers to as particularly marked with the violence of colonialism, rooted in Algeria's memory.

Colonial violence is a major theme in Djébar's works in general and in *Fantasia* in particular, something that has certainly to do with the healing process she tries to elaborate for an ultimate recovery from a long and heavy trauma, that of Algeria's history and her youth as well. It is important to bring details about the period of time in which the novel was written, to enable an understanding of the mourning process Assia Djébar operates and through which she succeeds to heal her trauma of the colonial past and her personal scars.

This is why the present chapter provides some historical facts of Djébar's selected work. It reveals the French colonization of Algeria, the Revolutionary War of the 1954, and the postcolonial Algerian society of the 1960s. As the issue of the novel discussed here deals with death, colonial violence, loss, grief and mourning, the time spent after the loss is vital to understand the process of mourning. The immediacy, individuality, and collectivity of this process, also, play a significant role to understand the novel.

2.1. Background

Before the French seizure of the city of Algiers on July 1830, Algeria had been for more than three centuries a Western state of the Ottoman Empire (1517-1830). The Regency of Algiers were the official representative of the Ottoman Sovereign. However, on April, 1827 an incident inducing Algeria's Governor Hussein Dey and a French consul erupted. The Dey manifested his fury after a debt the French King Charles X never paid thus, threw his fly whisk onto the consul's face.⁴⁰ This historical incident made the perfect pretext the French King created to send his fleet and attack Algeria 's coasts, beginning with the capture of Algiers on July 5, 1830, and the Dey's capture as well. In spite of the violent resistance the native demonstrated, the French invasion put an end to the Ottoman rule in Algerian territories.

The French invasion of Algiers in 1830 marks the beginning of a long and painful episode in Algeria's history. European settlers were granted indigenous' lands dispossessing Algerian natives from their ancestors' properties.⁴¹The French colonial occupation represents 132 years of oppression, tyranny, persecution reducing Algerian's identity to oblivion. Whole tribes were exterminated, women raped and their native land desolated.

The Algerian struggle for independence began with the religious and military chief "Emir AbdelKader El Djezairi", who steadily opposed French colonialism (1832-1847) until he was forced into exile.⁴² Later on, the Algerian National Liberation Front, through eight years of guerilla warfare and maquis fighting, forced the French enemy to ultimately surrender. Although Algeria was a French territory its inhabitants had never been recognized as whole citizens. From the start of the colonial rule Algeria constituted a major interest. It was not only

⁴⁰ Erik De Lange, "The Congress System and the French Invasion of Algiers, 1827-1830." *The Historical Journal*, Cambridge University Press (2021):1-23. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/historical-journal/article/congress-system-and-the-french-invasion-of-algiers->

⁴¹ Muhammet Ali Guler, "Algeria's Struggle against colonialism," *Daily Sabah*, 2020. <https://www.google.com/amp/S/www.dailysabah.com>

⁴² Paige Gulley, "French Land, Algerian People: Nineteenth-Century French Discourse on Algeria and Its Consequences." *Voces Novae: Chapman University, Historical Review* 10, no. 1(2018): 5.

a colony among others but “part of France across the Mediterranean”. However, a considerable discrimination was established through Orientalist Discourses that conducted French settlers to believe indigenous people could not be their equals. Indeed, natives were undervalued and perceived as inferior. They were not valued as Algerian land was.⁴³

The Algerian Revolutionary war, also recognized as the Algerian war of Independence, opposed the French to Algerians from 1954 to 1962 and concluded 132 years of colonial persecution. The Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), an Algerian military organization conducted a fierce combat against the French armies to ultimately brought Algeria its independence on July, 1962. However, the conflict resumed between the provisional government and “generals’ staff” of the military troops. A period referred to as a “civil war”.⁴⁴ The provisional government had finally surrendered and Ahmed Ben Bella was elected at the head of the new Algerian state. Ferhat Abbas was named the National Assembly’s president on September, 1962. Ben Bella, through a referendum, attributed the FLN and the executive the ultimate power. The National Assembly was ignored and Ben Bella’s election was considerably disapproved by important figures from the war of Independence.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁴ Jonah Schulhofer-Whol, “Civil War in Algeria, 1992-Present,”(Leiden University, 2007), 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

2.2. Colonial Violence in *Fantasia*

It is not purely coincidental that Djébar points out to colonial violence in *Fantasia*, a violence to which she manifests a firm stance. Not only does she condemn it fiercely but also discredit it with her determination to denounce the barbaric deeds the Algerian people were subjected to. This psychological and physical violence has never stopped from haunting Algeria's memory. A historical truth she judges important to re-investigate so as to explain yesterday's wounds. A particularly traumatic history from which any healing process could be conceivable only if the authenticity of this past is revived, and thus accept it to envisage a recovery from a heavy trauma.

Djébar's rewriting of the past is the strategy she chooses to incriminate the former colonial presence in Algeria. Her recourse to the French army's official documents and soldiers' personal diaries serve as material proofs that bear witness to the intensity of a bloody war colonialism disguised under a civilizing mission. A hundred and thirty years of all sorts of physical and mental abuses, cultural and ethnic cleansing, and apartheid.

Among the colonial violence the author plainly underlines throughout the narrative is the human losses which France engendered since its landing in Algeria's coasts. Whole tribes were burnt. Humans were tortured, humiliated, and raped as well. Algerians were ousted from their respective ancestral history, erased from their millenary cultural and historical existence and doomed to incarnate the characters of a tragedy to which they had never consented to belong. Djébar's choice to recount those human crimes, through French narratives, is a deliberate act of writing. These testimonies stand as the actual proof of the former genocide France committed on the indigenous, who had no other alternative than that of holding arms, responding with violence to regain their lands, rights, their human dignity and history as well. A heavy responsibility and a stark reality of a past French authorities had refused to recognize,

and that consequently led many Algerian writers including Djébar to struggle to impose it as a historical fact.

Assia Djébar's youth made her life story particularly a sad narrative in the sense that she was introduced to the western world naively as a little girl by the paternal figure whose career was inextricably linked to the French civilization. It was indeed Djébar's father who initiated her to the Western education, being himself a teacher of French. The reason she opens the novel bringing out the strong image of a little girl holding her father's hand, on her way to what she describes as being her "First Day at School", is to show she never had to choose but rather follow her father's path.⁴⁶ A father himself Algerian and Muslim and whose traditions did not prevent him from granting his daughter that liberty. However, it was a handicap from which Djébar suffered as an Algerian woman/ girl who unlike her fellows had liberties that condemned her to remain an alien to her own matriarchal heritage. Djébar explains the unease she endured as a native girl driven by the fear of adopting occidental women's behaviors, an Arab-Berber woman on whom the weight of societal traditions weighs heavy.

Another violence Djébar underlines clearly in her work is the violence women endured during that war of Liberation, including the segregation their own brothers exerted on them, a paradox to which Djébar accords a significant role. She denounces indeed the patriarchal conservative society that inflicted on indigenous women the haunting to dishonor their families, although being victims' themselves. Raped, tortured, and cloistered, Algerian women were rather viewed as a burden men had to hold and mainly control. They were not granted the same rights nor permitted to share the same spaces men had, yet they contributed massively to vanquish the enemy. They fought beside their brothers and fathers; held arms, hid the Fellagas, fed them and put their own lives in danger to reevaluate their human rights. Women's incredible courage to stand with their brothers in the process of wresting independence is the trophy Djébar

⁴⁶ Assia Djébar, (1993). *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1993), 3.

exhibits. It is her particular way to render them a dignity which men had once stolen, and denounce the physical violence as well as the psychological trauma women endured for one hundred and thirty years of colonial rule.

Then, there is the violence to which Djébar ascribes the major responsibility of all traumas her motherland knew, and that herself recalls with pain. The violence that calls for other forms of violence which wars provoke, and that continues to perpetuate itself beyond the present. A trauma Djébar attempts to heal by considering the necessity to recognize it as the ultimate phase to undertake an approach of recovery. Thus, rewriting the past or more appropriately Algeria's history is more than primordial to understand yesterday's traumas. And most of all, accept that no peaceful future is possible without understanding the origins of yesterday's wounds.

Djébar's condemnation of colonial violence is explicitly expressed through her reconstitution of scenes implying ethnic cleansing, racial discrimination, and a multitude of crimes against humanity. Images genuinely chosen, traumatizing narratives that recount the bloody battles and the indigenous' massacres; Algerian women's rapes and the violation of all their human rights. The French army starved, enslaved, expropriated the natives, and exterminated whole tribes whose lives were reduced to the state of beasts. A particularly heavy trauma that inevitably led to huge psychological sequelae. A violence to which she has also served as a victim torn and forced to choose between her own identity and the Western civilization's.

It is important to note that the psychological violence, the contemporary Algerian novelist, Assia Djébar denounces throughout her work is heavier compared to all sorts of severe corporal punishment Algerians could have known. This psychological trauma had tremendous repercussions on both the war generation and the post-war one. A spiral of hatred and violence

the elders transmitted to their descendants, sometimes unconsciously, and that will give birth to what I will discuss in the third chapter as The Black Decade.

2.3. Traumatic Losses

Loss is a recurrent theme in Djébar's fiction, reflected in a number of events recounting the Algerian traumatic history. The author, indeed, chooses to make a voyage back in time, to retrace the history of Algeria under the French domination, 1830-62, as well as the story of the little girl she used to be. A number of significant losses appear in Djébar's narrative, involving human losses, cultural identity, the native language, and freedom as well. Nonetheless, Djébar, throughout her work, attempts to reconcile with the past of her native land bringing historical events to light, to condemn French colonialism. She also accords women the power to recount history through their feminine voice, having been for so long stifled. Djébar's reinvestigation of the past is also a way to cope with old wounds.

One of the significant losses Assia Djébar evokes in *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, (1985), is the human losses. After the capture of the city of Algiers, in 1830, the French army starts to slaughter the Algerian population, and reduce anything that could threaten the French presence to oblivion. The invader decides to burn, and annihilate the natives. Djébar depicts the indigenous people as proud to die for their ancestral land: " In the case of certain tribes from the interior, whole families had come along: women, children, old men. As fighting was a matter of sacrificing themselves as a unit, all together, without attack! "⁴⁷. She pursues her narrative, recounting horrific scenes of Algerian women involved in bloody battles, women who refuse to surrender to the enemy. They fight until the last breath, even when that demands the sacrifice of their children,

47 Djébar, *Fantasia*, 18.

*Thus these two Algerian women, the one in whom rigor mortis was already setting in, still holding in her bloody hands the heart of a dead Frenchman; the second, in a fit of desperate courage, splitting open the brain of her child, like a pomegranate in spring, before dying with her mind at peace, these two heroines enter recent history.*⁴⁸

The French domination in Algeria lasts more than a century, dispossessing Algerian women and men from their lands, properties, and cultural identities as well. In this regard, Anniek Engelenburg mentions Frantz Fanon's perception of colonialism and its tendency to pervert, "distort", and consign the history of the oppressed people to oblivion.⁴⁹ A tremendous trauma which gives birth to a multitude of losses including identity. Accordingly, not only do they find themselves deprived from their native land, but also from cultural humility which represents a huge loss. Algerian civilians are subject to human barbarity, torture, and distinct forms of abuse. Djébar vocalizes women's suffering to denounce the colonial oppression as well as men's tyranny,

*Then the soldiers had a skirmish with the partisans on the road through the nearby forest. They raided us the same day. They were looking for 'proof' and they found it: we were in fact looking after some of the brother's clothes, and even storing some ammunition. They took my mother and my brother's wife.*⁵⁰

Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade ascribes oppressed female figures a strength that delivers from a long and heavy burden which the traditional conventions and men imposed to oppress the other sex. Indeed, through her revisited version of the colonial past, Djébar resuscitates the memory of Algeria's persecuted women. But above all, as a native, Algerian writer, she assigns herself the task to stand for the powerless and repressed women as well as bear witness to their trauma. In the section entitled "The third movement", Djébar, through widows' voice narrates: "Our men hid food for them and worked for them at night. The French also put in their appearance again! As soon as we young women saw the French coming we never stayed inside."⁵¹

48 Ibid, 18.

49 Anniek Van Engelenburg. (2009). "Djébar and the Postcolonial intellectual," (2009), 6.

50 Djébar, *Fantasia*, 117

51 Ibid, 206.

Moreover, the narrator, through the voice of another woman, another victim of the war atrocities, denounces rape, a barbarian act to which Algerian women were frequently exposed to. A shepherd-girl of thirteen years old “submitted” to France, despite the vain attempt to hide from the French soldiers who passed close the river. Despite her efforts, they found her and committed the unpardonable. After the incident, she washed, tidied herself up, braided her hair, and tied the scarlet ribbon. One or two hours later, she goes back to the village to face the ultimate question: "has there been damage". “Rape” is not pronounced as a sign of respect, “Rape will not be mentioned, will be swallowed.”⁵² A word which remains buried until the “next alarm”. Another strategy used to do justice to the victims of the Algerian traumatic history.

Loss of identity constitutes the other significant loss in the author’s narrative. As a French educated girl, Djébar is faced with the dilemma of having to choose between the French education and her matriarchal heritage which condemns her to endure a confusing identity. Hiddleston asserts “the French language also assigned her with modes of expression usually not permitted to (Algerian) women.”⁵³ The author’s integrity is not clearly discernible because of this “complex identity”. A complex which conducts her to constantly doubt her cultural integration. She remembers to be the first girl in her family to have been offered “French dolls, the one who had permanently escaped cloistering and never had to protest as being forced to wear the shroud-veil, or else yield meekly like any of my cousins”.⁵⁴

Loss of cultural traditions also appears in *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*, since Djébar is introduced to the European culture at a precocious age. The French education provides her with a cultural openness her relatives do not have. As a young Algerian, Muslim girl she is capable to invest the outside space without being “veiled”. She claims she had passed the age of puberty without being “buried” in the harem like her “cousins”. She spoke and studied French

52 *Ibid*, 202.

53 Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria*, 69.

54 Djébar, *Fantasia*, 213.

and her body during this “formative period became westernized.”⁵⁵ But, the feeling of an Arab-Berber girl’s shame shows through her haunting to offend the father’s dignity; how could she explain to him that it’s “compulsory” for her “to wear shorts”? That is to say, she has to expose her legs! A heavy burden she hides, a secret she is not even allowed to confide in any of her “school mates”, a panic “compounded by an Arab woman’s shame”.⁵⁶

However, even though Djébar’s education is less strict when compared to her illiterate cousins, she is also subject to a certain number of prohibitions the Algerian patriarchal society imposed on women. As a native, Muslim girl, she is not allowed to write nor receive love letters. Thus, when she receives for the first time a mysterious letter, she is confronted to the father’s anger who immediately destroys it. Since his traditional, conservative culture views such affairs as taboo issues and by the way not tolerated. “He writes very formally suggesting that we exchange friendly letters. In my father’s eyes, such a request is not merely completely indecent, but this invitation is a tantamount to setting the stage for rape.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, throughout *Fantasia*, Assia Djébar evokes her mother tongue as the language of oral heritage, “all rags and tatters” which is an allusion to her intricate identity of Arab and Berber ancestry, and her French education as well. To write in her own voice constitutes a linguistic struggle for Djébar, an Algerian woman who expresses her sorrow, or deepest musings in the language of the oppressor. Arabic is her mother tongue, however, she views French both her father tongue and her “stepmother tongue”.⁵⁸ Djébar depicts the conflict of these two languages as follow: “The French tongue, with its body and voice, has established a proud presidio within me, while the mother-tongue, all oral traditions, all rags and tatters, resists and attacks between two breathing spaces.”⁵⁹

55 *Ibid*, 127.

56 *Ibid*, 179.

57 *Ibid*, 4.

58 Djébar, *Fantasia*, 214.

59 *Ibid*, 215.

Although the liberating influence the French language/culture exerts on Djébar's life, it distances her from of her childhood, her past memories and historical roots, involving her mother tongue. In expressing both her pain and anxiety Djébar confesses, "Burdened" by her "inherited taboos" she realizes she has no souvenir of "Arabic love-songs" because she was repudiated from this passionate speech which she substituted with the language of the outsider.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, in *Fantasia* Djébar insinuates that the French language has a connotation of culpability. As Schneider Annedith conveys in "Mourning in a Minority Language" much of Djébar's reflections on language are set "in a vocabulary of guilt". The term "Step-mother" implies that there is a desertion from the father, who may have probably replaced his wife by another woman with a new "tongue", an emotional as well as linguistic bond that is daily renewed. And through the learning of this language Djébar becomes complicit of such treason.⁶¹

60 Ibid, 214.

61 Schneider, "Mourning in a Minority Language: Assia Djébar's Algerian White", 44.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24764080>

2.4. Mourning in *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*

Djebar 's mourning process is undertaken in *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*, through a reinvestigation of the past. The author, indeed, chooses to revisit the traumatic history of Algeria including the French colonial occupation, using official records of the French colonial conquest of Algeria. Djebar rewrites historical events as her particular way to give Algeria a voice to denounce all the atrocities it witnessed during the colonial period. The author attempts to provide a meaning to all the tragic losses her mother land knew. She resurrects the breaches as well as the missed details that the official historical documents had voluntarily withdrawn. She recalls the first martyrs of the war through a French soldier, Pélissier whose report is very realistic,

*Pélissier suddenly resurrects, before my eyes, those Ouled Riah who died in their caves on the night of 19 to 20 June 1845. [...] Because of his remorse, Pélissier keeps this corpse from drying in the sun, and these Islamic dead, deprived of the ritual ceremonies, are preserved from oblivion by the words of his routine report. A century of silence has frozen them.*⁶²

Djebar, through the voice of Algerian women, reconciles with the past of her females ancestors. In fact, *Fantasia* can be viewed as a strategy the author adopts to reveal the struggle of these women and their involvement in the Independence War. The act of writing *Fantasia* is Djebar's particular engagement to cope with both collective and personal "aphasia". Djebar frees women from the muteness in which they have been trapped, and seems enthusiastic to stand for the oppressed voices. She also insists on how her personal story is connected with those of the rural women: "Can I, twenty years later, claim to revive these stifled voices? And speak for them? Shall I not at best find dried –up streams? What ghosts will be conjured up when in this absence of expressions of love, I see the reflection of my own barrenness, my own aphasia."⁶³

62 Djebar, *Fantasia*, 75.

63 Ibid, 202.

Assia Djébar 's childhood memories are full of love as well as pain. She knows a contradictory childhood life as too soon introduced to the French culture which made her definitely disparate from both Algerian and French little girls. When she reaches her puberty, she is not forced to be shrouded in the traditional veil, nor obliged to leave school. However, being a Muslim girl means no love letters, nor passionate relations, no freedom, and this is clearly expressed in the following passage: "Memory purges and purifies the sounds of childhood; we are cocooned by childhood until the discovery of sensuality, which washes over us and gradually bedazzles".⁶⁴

Thereby, Assia Djébar attempts to make peace with her past, as she brings to memory joyful times she once shared with her parents, family, and friends as well. Such cheerful childhood memories convey a deep message: despite all the wounds, the losses the author knew, she is still able to remember positive things about the previous chapter of her life, as well as the past of her mother land. Djébar recalls a very strong image, a memory full of tenderness of a father holding his little girl's hand, going for the first time to school during an autumn morning. "A tall creet figure in a fez and a European suit, a teacher at the French primary school", and the child she once was, "a little Arab girl in a village, in the Algerian Sahel".⁶⁵

Djébar's traumatic experience transmutes into an act of resilience. The particular choice of valuing the positive aspect of her individual story and that of her motherland's history, Algeria, proves the genius aptitude to overcome and thus reconcile with previous traumas. Despite all the losses, wounds, and the upheavals that made the healing process a long and complex journey, she ultimately brings out positive memories bearing witness to the greatness of Algeria's historical past as well as the uniqueness of her spiritual journey.

64 Ibid, 4.

65 Ibid, 3.

Conclusion

Bonanno indicates that pain may be considered “the prototypical emotion of bereavement”. However, other distinct strategies could be encountered after a significant loss. Counter-intuitive emotions including positive experiences and memories may also be part of the grief process.⁶⁶ Djebar’s rewriting of the past, her restoration of the historical truths and women’s voice as well, constitute a healing process through which she demonstrates the significance of making sense of past traumas, and pain as a prominent phase to cope with what could appear on the surface as unhealable. She chooses to reopen past agonies, among these her personal story, and gives her fond memories the possibility to emerge. A strategy she elaborates to make peace with her past on the one hand, and Algeria’s history on the other.

⁶⁶ George A, Bonanno, Goorin, L, Coifman, G, "Sadness and Grief," (Columbia University, 2008), 12.

Chapter 3

Loss, Grief and the Impossible Mourning in *Algerian White*

This chapter is an analysis of loss, grief and the impossibility of mourning in Djébar's *Algerian White*, first published in 1995, in the heart of the Algerian Black Decade, mostly known as the Algerian Tragedy. This period represents the emergence of radical Islam and political conflict in Algeria. It marked one of the most traumatic episodes in the Algerian post-independence history. A tough time in which intellectuals, doctors, teachers, journalists and artists constituted primary targets. It is worth pointing out that the trauma Djébar witnesses in 1993, is of a sudden nature, and a shock she struggles to process regarding the circumstances in which her loved ones were slaughtered.

Djébar is engaged, in her novel, in what appears to be a response to the horror and extreme violence her colleagues and friends witnessed. A death she refutes from the opening of her work, and through which she will continue to manifest a strong denial to their loss. And thus, her recourse to strategies of grief which may help to retrieve and reduce the intensity of the trauma that altered the course of her life, and that of the whole country as well.

Djébar grieves through the literature of emergency and her novel serves as a strategy to condemn and denounce the horror Algerian citizens had gone through. She opposes the perpetuation of the spirit of hatred that haunts her country and chooses to find answers to that violence instead, while paying tribute to those women and men who sacrificed their lives defending liberty, free thoughts, and Algeria's cultural and linguistic diversity. She writes to keep their memory alive, and, most of all, assuage her grief through the conviction that they did not vanish in vain. Moreover, Djébar's mourning process in *Algerian white* is different from the one she processes in *Fantasia*, in the sense that the reaction to grief cannot be the same regarding the context in which the author undertakes the writing of her text. Thus, understanding the circumstances that complicate Djébar's grief will facilitate the

comprehension of the complexity of her mourning process. Hence, the necessity to shed light on what the Black Decade was as a tragedy that struck the Algerian society of the 1990s.

3.1. *Algerian White* and the Black Decade

Assia Djebar was directly exposed to the violence of the 1990s when three men who held a significant role in the author's existence were assassinated: Mahfoud Boucebc, a psychiatrist stabbed in the chest, near his medical clinic; M'Hamed Boukhobza, a sociologist murdered while his daughter attends to his torture; and Abdelkader Alloula, a notorious dramatist shot twice, on his way to deliver a lecture. Throughout the novel, Djebar responds to the urgent need to witness the Algerian Tragedy of the 90's, and to the deep and strong desire to pay tribute to three friends she had tragically lost. This violent loss awakens the memory of Algerian intellectuals who tragically disappeared, either by natural or violent death.

In the 1990's, Algeria was the stage of a bloody war in which the Islamist's Salvation Front (FIS) raged their violence against Algerian civilians, women and men, who were slaughtered in the name of a Radical Religion. The insurgents' doctrine was to silence authoritarian ideologies which Algerian journalists, teachers, and artists, particularly francophone intellectuals defended and which seemed to represent a linguistic, ideological, and cultural threat.⁶⁷ The Algerian Tragedy began with the execution of President Mohamed Boudiaf, in 1992, whose assault was broadcast live on TV. Some historians refer to this particular period as "ethnic, religious, identity strife".⁶⁸ However the conflict opposed particularly the Islamist insurgents and the FLN regime. This violent decade involved roughly 150,000 civilians assassinated, and the exile of almost 40,000 Algerians.⁶⁹ *Algerian White* comprises a period

67 Chuang, "I See Myself Elsewhere", 24

68 Schulhofer-Whol, Jonah, "Civil War in Algeria, 1992-Present", (Leiden University, 2007), 105.

69 Ibid.

between 1954 and the civil war of the 1990's. Important episodes of Algeria's history such as colonialism, the war of independence are also counted.

Anissa Daoudi's "Untranslatability of Algeria in the Black Decade" evokes Algeria as a country that has gone "through violence of all sorts under the French colonial system, where women were sexually abused by the colonizer. However, in the 1990s, the perpetrator was not the French, but the Algerian 'brother'."⁷⁰ Daoudi furthers her reflection on the issue explaining that the "so-called brother" "raped", massacred civilians under an ideology which grants them the right to rape, torture and take lives.⁷¹ She also refers to "Intellectual Cleansing", a doctrine claimed by the "Terrorists" and that consists in assassinating whoever would dare to oppose their Radical Islam. Poets, journalists, writers, and philosophers were considered "infidels" who had to die. Among those are Tahar Djaout, Abdelkader Alloula, Lounes Matoub, and Youcef Sebti who raised their pen / voice to refute religious ideologies and paid the heavy price of their lives. Women Intellectuals were not spared.⁷² Algerian intellectuals knew a tragic end, as they all succumbed to the Islamists' "swords". They were slaughtered and savagely executed although the immense courage with which they stood up to their executioners.

The Black Decade constitutes the tragedy that perpetuates a culture of violence Algeria had already witnessed years before, under the colonial rule. However, this time, it resurrects itself in a civil war. A civil conflict that altered the Algerian society forever, and which urged thousands of Algerians to flee their country for exile, in the pursuit of peace, hope and a better future. Djebar belongs to those intellectuals who had to leave their ancestors' land, with a same and common dream, return home as soon as possible, under better circumstances.

⁷⁰ Anissa Daoudi, "Untranslatability of Algeria in 'the Black Decade,'" 1, no. 3, Chapter 2. (University of Birmingham, 2018), 64. <http://www.boundary2.org/2018/07/anissa-daoudi-untranslatability-of-algeria-in-the-black-decade-2/>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 65

3.2. Loss and Grief

The assassination of Djébar's friends and relatives marks the beginning of a huge change in the author's world. Assia Djébar is profoundly affected and afflicted by the death of these distinguished figures. The fact it is of a sudden nature and, most of all, an act of extreme violence creates a tremendous trauma. (The shock). She writes: "Is death unfinished because it is violent, because it comes without warning? The break, the fall might represent to some extent a double death, for suddenly there comes a dive into the pit."⁷³ This indicates the first phase of the grief process as it constitutes the bereaved's immediate reaction to the loss of her loved ones.

The friends' death represents the primary loss that leads to a series of other secondary losses in Djébar's life. A loss Dr. Jill La Morie alludes to as the "Ripple Effect". A significant trauma that gives birth to a number of other losses. Accordingly, Djébar is incapable of facing the reality and, by the way, accepting this significant loss. She confesses: "And why do I call them disappeared only to attenuate the dear which is rooted in a tenderness, a limpidity purely Arab? Have they really disappeared? No, I stubbornly refuse the evidence; I refuse right up to the end, to the very end of this ramble."⁷⁴

Djébar responds to a terrible pain she is not ready to admit, nor to believe and this constitutes the "denial phase", a particular trying experience through which the bereaved is obviously not able to recognize the truth. A mere reality represented by a heavy loss. And through her sorrow she writes: "I wanted, in this account to respond to an immediate demand of memory: the death of close friends."⁷⁵ She manifests her obstinate desire and a strong will to recall, in "each case", the day of the men's execution and their funerals as well. She puts the

73 Assia Djébar, *Algerian White* (New York, London, Sydney, Toronto: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 80

74 Djébar, *Algerian White*, 11

75 Ibid, 7

accent on the way they were praised, honoured and particularly loved, and what each of these mates symbolized among their tribes, family and friends.

Tammy Clewell asserts that Freud's work of mourning involves a state of excessive remembering, a process in which the bereaved is condemned to re-live past memories/ events in an exaggerated way.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the deceased is resuscitated and placed in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual loss with an illusionary presence. Similarly, the author is haunted by the ghosts of those men to whom she shows a profound affection. As she muses: "They speak to me often, these dear ones. That cher that I shall from now onwards be able to say to them in Arabic, in my Arabic [...] they never disappeared."⁷⁷

The author could change the space or even time, she is still possessed by the "disappeared" presence, she explains imagining herself conversing with their ghosts, "I am sleeping, or rather I can't sleep at my normal times: so, the friend has crossed the Atlantic, then floated over the whole of the American West."⁷⁸ Another phase that refers to the disturbing emotional as well as psychological state the author is going through, her pertinacity to refuse the friends' departure and her strategy to relieve that pain evoking their spirits as well.

Djebar experiences emotional disturbance and constant frustration, which are clearly visible in the following passage: "Shall I at last be able to weep? Not weep for you, you are still with me, you even mount the guard for me. I know that, no weep for you, no."⁷⁹ Djebar's musings with the dead, again represent a loss of lucidity and a strong need to attenuate a huge grief. Feelings of guilt and regret submerge the author's inner thoughts. This is what she reveals when she asserts that they "still live" for her, and throughout her remorse for never "having known" how to show them her affection; "I suffer from having at one instance caused Kader

76 Tammy Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss", cited in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. (Kent State University, Department of English, 2004)

77 Djebar, *Algerian White*. P11

78 Ibid, 14

79 Ibid, 15.

pain, with his inexhaustible goodness and patience!"⁸⁰ In this phase (of the grief process), recognized as the bargaining stage, feelings of self-reproach and vulnerability serve as a defensive line to prevent from suffering and anxiety.

According to Homi Bhabha remembering is not a "quiet act" of introspection nor retrospection but rather a "painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present." (90)⁸¹. In a similar way, Djébar attends to provide sense to the traumas Algeria witnesses. Thus, a number of past memories, she once shared with each of "the disappeared" are brought back, as a way of discharging a profound grief. She goes back to the past and relives joyful moments she had, as if it was a remedy to forget their loss. She writes: "Am I talking to you this now? I relive that parenthesis in Oran, now I use the familiar "tu" you, Kader, part of my family."⁸²

Thereby, the narrator's nights are disturbed as she holds strange and long late conversations with the dead often ending in insomnia, an important feature that characterizes depression, the mourning stage which according to Hanus is accompanied by feelings of pain and exhaustion. In one passage, Djébar converses with her lost friend Mahfoud: "Do you remember, Mahfoud, one evening, two evenings, three evenings: at least! The only man I could dance with, I who claimed, and still claim, only to dance on my own: I don't know how it happened, you became my first partner."⁸³ She pursues her conversation with her other "disappeared" friend M'Hamed, always unable to succumb to slumber,

It's with M'Hamed, as it happened, the very next day, that my conversation is the most tense; in the empyrean of the wise, the scholars, the blessed, M'Hamed occupies for me a special place. [...] M'Hamed, I can see it, radiates, separated from me by an impassable either; M'Hamed whom I can make out, to whom I imagine myself speaking.⁸⁴

80 Ibid, 222.

81 Shio-Tzu Chuang, "I See Myself Elsewhere": The Works of Marie Cardinal and Assia Djébar, (National Chi Nan University, Taiwan)

82 Djébar, *Algerian White*, 17.

83 Ibid, 27.

84 Ibid, 30.

Hiddleston explains that the white of the title stands for “the emptiness of a blank page”, the annihilation of “literary and intellectuals” opposition by a violent Islamist movement, and the blackout inflicted on “the generation of the 1990’s”. She also refers to the white of Algeria in Djébar’s writing as an emblem of death, the loss of “free-thinking” Algerians. Djébar in this regard writes that Thanks to those special beings, “lying here in this text and a few colleagues, vanished too soon, some of them still writing on their last day: poems, an article, a page of a novel that would remain unfinished, persistent”, she imagines resurrecting them.⁸⁵ She confesses while so many others speak of Algeria with fervor or “anger”, consoled by her “departed ones” she dreams of it.”⁸⁶

85 Djébar, *Algerian White*, 222.

86 Ibid, 223

3.3. The Impossible Mourning

Djebar's return to the horrific moments of the three men's execution, whom she considers more than simple friends, is her particular way to bring them justice, to make the world understand how innocent they were, how they have served as victims, sacrificed in the name of Radical Islamism. She depicts their assassination providing violent details that constitute shocking testimony. She recalls other tragic losses Algeria knew during that bloody time, involving Tahar Djaout's murder providing peculiar details about the day he was assassinated insisting on the violence of that barbarous act. She recounts the violent scene portraying the insurgents' behaviors, "The first one says in a detached voice that it will be the first time he will aim at a man! Everybody knows that he was the best shot. The second one says nothing. He's already had human targets. For him the essential thing is to hit each one."⁸⁷

The author continues her process of providing testimony, recalling a number of other writers, poets, journalists (who disappeared to a large extent in appalling circumstances). These figures include Albert Camus, Frantz Fanon, his spouse Josie Fanon, Taos Amrouche and her brother Jean Amrouche, Malek Haddad, Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Mammeri, Youcef Sebti, Anna Greki...the list is still long. She pays a particular tribute to those men and women whom she considers having left this world too soon. Tzu-Shiow Chuang in "I See Myself Elsewhere" conveys it is deeply "significant that Camus is placed as the leading figure amongst the nineteen intellectuals remembered, an act that proves Djebar's conviction that the inheritance of Algerian literature is "multicultural". According to her, through Camus's memory Djebar dreams of peace in her homeland, "Camus, vieil homme...L'Algérie en homme, en homme de paix, une dignité rétablie, est-ce pensable?"⁸⁸

⁸⁷Djebar, *Algerian White*. 195.

⁸⁸ Chuang, "I See Myself Elsewhere", 26.

Likewise, Schneider Annedith views Djébar's commemoration of the loss of Algeria's previous "writers, women and men as a pursuit of providing plausible explanations to the horror that shrouded Algeria onto darkness. The author, indeed, suggests to associate her personal traumatic experience to the current circumstances. Djébar's work is particularly compulsive in the sense that episodes of Algeria's historical past are connected with the recent violence.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the mourning work is incomplete in Djébar's *Algerian White* regarding the circumstances in which it was produced. Djébar experiences one of the most traumatic, violent and distressing episode of her entire life. Indeed, Kader, Mahfoud and M'Hamed disappear in very tragic occurrences, which require a certain time to both recognize and accept such heavy losses. In her work, Djébar denies their absence or in other words, she is not yet ready to admit the evidence that they no more belong to the world of the livings, nor to hers. It is important to take the sufficient time to grieve. Yet, due to the horror as well as the bloody theatre Algeria knows, Assia Djébar is engaged in an urgent duty of memory, and testimony of the atrocities and massacres committed on civilians whose only crime was to be innocents.

Djébar's exhorts her compatriots to continue to inspect the process of mourning, nonetheless, the process must remain, insufficient and resistant to resolution, "for the moment, the Algeria of sorrow without writing; for the moment, an Algeria of writing-in-blood, alas! How to withstand mourning for our friends, our colleagues, without first having sought to understand the why of yesterday's funerals, those of the Algerian utopia? ⁹⁰" This passage is clear evidence of the impossibility to process a possible mourning work.

In a country where the blood of innocents continues to be shed, in which the only act of breathing a wind of liberty represents a real danger to men's life, the author like thousands of Algerian people are concerned with heavy, traumatizing losses including friends, family

89 Scheider, "mourning in a Minority Language: Assia Djébar's *Algerian White*, abstract.
90 Djébar, *Algerian White*, 235.

members, neighbors, colleagues... Furthermore, Djébar finds herself doubly bereaved, since the recent losses open old wounds. Thereby, the author travels throughout the memories of the past, remembrances of a friend of her arise. Djébar recalls the poet and novelist Malek Haddad “As this friend died so suddenly, I didn’t take the plane from Paris to Algiers to be with his people to convince myself that he was gone: emerging from the sheets of love, barely twenty-four hours later swallowed in the white shroud [...] I didn’t go. I should have.”⁹¹ Regret seems to haunt the author consciousness. How could she integrate the loss, the death of the departed one without having made her last farewell?

The author goes back into the past to recall Frantz Fanon, an essayist and psychiatrist who dies at the age of thirty-six, from a leukemia. This time Djébar opts to narrate the man’s remaining days to live and the bad news he received through his spouse’s testimony, “Josie, was to tell me at length about those days of waiting and uncertainty in Tunis. The verdict seems worrying: leukemia has made its presence known.”⁹² Fanon is urgently directed to the United States for medical treatment.

Hiddleston considers horror, brutality, and “tyranny” as “cyclical phenomena” that condemn Algeria to be trapped in an “ongoing process” of mourning which refute any possible completion or resolution.⁹³ Throughout this process, Djébar returns to some particularly marking events, she evokes Mouloud Feraoun’s son recognizing his father’s remains: “At the end of the same day it’s the turn of Mouloud Feraoun’s son to go and identify his father [...] I saw him in the morgue. Twelve bullets, none in the face. He was good-looking, my father, but all frozen.”⁹⁴

91 Ibid, 84.

92 Ibid, 87.

93 Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria*, 130.

94 Djébar, *Algerian White*, 98.

The author also recalls Salah Ould Aoudia's son describing the moment he was asked to recognize his father's corpse. A particular traumatizing experience that the bereaved has to bear for the recognition of the loss, and a crucial step in the grief process to be capable of projecting any possible healing as well,

One of the attendants said to me: 'Quite right, they've brought us six unidentified bodies, and we don't know where to put them! 'My eyes have gotten used to the darkness of the place, and I can make out six bodies lined up, lying on the recently scrubbed floor, squeezed together, wearing dark suits, among which I recognize my father, then Feraoun. The man is disappointed by this identification of only two of the bodies. He asks me: 'Which flag do we put them under?''⁹⁵

Moreover, Djebbar writes referring to Fanon, Camus, Jean Amrouche and Feraoun to whom she attributes the name of «The four dead hopeful ones »as intellectuals who marked the Algerian literature but could not change their sad fate. In the comparison Djebbar makes of previous losses and recent traumas, Hiddleston explains that there is an allusion to the violent death, the demise that occurs all of a sudden inflecting a tremendous pain and provoking a huge hole. Djebbar reflects : " une telle mort glisse, comme une plie luisante, dans la rivière de notre mémoire. Tandis que celle qui survient avec fracas et dans le sang dégorgé, elle bouscule, elle viole notre durée, elle nous laisse pantelants. " ⁹⁶

Violent losses create an immense traumatic state through which it remains almost impossible to confront the reality as well as envisage a better future. The author narrates the poet Youssef Sebti's last hours, through the account of his friend Naima whose testimony remains particularly violent, "On this Monday the 27th of December, the weather was beautiful. Algiers was radiant with its finest colors [...] at eleven at night to your retreat. There were three of them and only one of you. They were armed and your only parry was your very frail gaze, your hands as light as olive branches." ⁹⁷ Djebbar resuscitates the woman's memory to point out the horror intensity.

95 Ibid. 97.

96Hiddleston, *Assia Djebbar: Out of Algeria*, 133.

97Djebbar, *Algerian White*, 212.

To enable a reconciliation to past traumas and especially to the most recent loss, the three mates' death, it is imperative that the author concede her grief to heal, be resilient to move forward, and bring sense of all that trauma to ultimately come to an end with her process of mourning. Yet, throughout the novel, Djébar experiences almost important elements of the stages of grief, anger, denial, bargaining respectively, without being able to reach the 'acceptance' phase. Thus, this proves she is not yet ready to cope with her grief nor to heal, since the ghosts of the present awaken past nightmares.

Finally, to accomplish her mourning work, the author has to reconcile with the wounds of the past as well as the recent traumatic losses she is subjected to. However, Assia Djébar cries the "disappeared", struggles with the void they have left, and most importantly questions both the growing spirit of hatred and the violence which plunge Algeria into chaos. Djébar responds to a profound grief, a major gap she tries to heal resuscitating the dead, and the past as well. Hiddleston explains that because of the bloody conflict and the critical political state of Algeria, interrogations involving "femininity and genealogy" are repealed by more urgent queries. The massacres and the heavy losses her compatriots are fighting to survive, and her personal tribulation of Islamist terrorism conducts her to interrogate most notably the present disintegration of her native land.⁹⁸

98 Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria*, 120.

V- Conclusion

After the analysis of Assia Djebar's two pieces of work namely *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), *Algerian White* (1995), through the exploration of the themes of loss, and grief in the author's two narratives, it is clear that the mourning works in which the author is engaged are of two different natures. To accomplish her mourning process and to move to a new chapter of the story of her life, Djebar has both to accept and reconcile with past wounds. These past memories include traumatic events that engage her personal life as well as traumatic losses that made Algeria a country victim of a tragic history.

To recapitulate, in *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*, Djebar is capable to cope with the past, be it her childhood or the historical past her native land knew. She brings official accounts of the previous conqueror into light and liberates her ancestral mothers from 'Aphasia'. She attempts to recount the past as her personal way to pay tribute to Liberation War martyrs, but also to denounce all the atrocities, horrors committed on innocents, women, children, or a whole nation. Nevertheless, the author recalls joyful instants, memories she once shared with those she loved. Her childhood is not only traumatizing images, it's also full of beautiful, positive, and happy moments which demonstrate the capacity of the Algerian, francophone novelist to accept and thus reconcile with previous agonies. However, in *Algerian White*, the mourning is not achieved as it is condemned to remain incomplete due to the appalling circumstances in which the literary work is realized. Djebar, indeed, is engaged in an urgent duty of memory. The author struggles with the loss of her beloved ones, how she could mourn them while she is not able to accept their death, their absence and most importantly, as a great number of Algerian civilians witnessed a tragic fate.

Finally, to answer the main target of the research and be able to say whether the author overcomes the losses that affected both her motherland as well as her personal story, the periods in which the novels are written must be taken into consideration. First, Djebar's *Fantasia* is

conceived many years after the traumatic losses she relates. The author has the required time to heal, explore the different grieving stages, and give those awful losses a meaning. She makes of pain and tears the actual proof of the greatness of the Algerian history. Her contribution to bring the bitterest truth into light provides her with the strength to cope with past nightmares. Djébar allies sadness with joyfulness, terror with courage, hope with fear as a beautiful act of resistance, a clear resistance to the previous colonial oppression, to male's tyranny over women, to the inexplicable violence committed on innocents. Besides, *Algerian White* comes to exist in very special circumstances. The Author responds to both the assassination of loved ones and the extreme violence Algerian civilians are exposed to. Consequently, Djébar is neither able to mourn the tragic loss of her cherished friends, nor the death of Algerian intellectuals and citizens. Since mourning could not be possible without coping, Assia Djébar's *Algerian White* is more a novel in which she denounces and prompts to understand the reasons that condemn her country to collapse.

To finish on a high note, I exhort the upcoming seniors to investigate the essence of mourning through books of their choice, so as to inspect the healing process' importance whether it be to physical, mental or spiritual well-being. Because Literature has served so far as a means of externalizing hidden emotions as well as feelings that may be consistently gnawing, it is enthralling to inspect how healing through the process of writing could be a genius strategy some authors adopt to cope with traumas of the past.

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