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A Feminist Reading of Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)

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Abstract

This research is a comparative study that explores the issues of female subjectivity, intersectionality, and female resistance in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Relying on Safia Mirza's conceptualizations for defining intersectionality and female resistance, and drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, Black feminist thought, and theories of trauma and memory, this work examines how both authors present the complex experiences of women under the intersecting pressures of gender, race, and historical oppression. Through close readings of the two literary works by employing an exacting comparative framework, the basic findings of our work is that both *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and *Beloved* critically reframe official historical narratives to powerfully assert women's agency and reclaim their silenced voices in the face of historical trauma and ongoing oppression. Ultimately, this study underscores the enduring power of literature as a site of resistance and remembrance, illuminating how marginalized voices confront erasure by transforming suffering into collective empowerment.

Keywords: Djebar, Morrison, Intersectionality, Female Resistance, Agency, Black Feminist Thought.

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Introduction

Comparative literature offers a crucial lens through which to examine how historical and cultural forces shape literary responses to oppression, specifically by situating this study within the intersection of Postcolonial Feminist Theory and Black Feminist Thought. The relevance of this study lies in its capacity to bridge geographically and culturally distinct literary histories Francophone Maghrebi literature and Anglophone American literature through shared thematic concerns over identity, language, and historical memory. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic dominance, this study explores the issues of female subjectivity, intersectionality, and female resistance in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). By analysing how Djebar and Morrison reconstruct the "silenced" female past, the research underscores the necessity of a comparative feminist analysis to challenge the historically male-dominated literary canon and reclaim the fragmented identities of women within the shadows of colonialism and slavery.

Despite the acknowledged importance of feminist and postcolonial studies, a focused comparison of how these specific literary texts reconstruct marginalized female subjectivity in the face of intersectional historical trauma remains under-explored. This research therefore presents a detailed comparative study of Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), exploring how each novel uses innovative narrative techniques to represent the psychological and intergenerational scars left by colonial war and slavery, respectively.

The paper will examine how both authors leverage female subjectivity to reclaim identities suppressed by historical records. *L'Amour, La Fantasia* directly engages with the silencing of Algerian women in colonial accounts, while *Beloved* delves into the horrific familial destruction caused by the institution of slavery, illustrating how distinct historical oppressions produce similar literary imperatives for resistance.

The analytical approach of this study is grounded in a rigorous application of Intersectionality and the concept of Female Resistance. Intersectionality is vital for assessing how the oppression of women in both texts operates through the complex overlap of gender, race, and colonial or historical status. By employing these critical tools in a comparative manner, this research seeks to demonstrate a transnational feminist methodology for studying literary responses to systemic violence.

Ultimately, this work demonstrates the shared commitment of both authors to transforming women's personal experiences into a narrative of collective resistance and empowerment, showing how literature functions as a critical site for the assertion of female agency and historical presence against systemic oppression.

a/The Review of The Literature:

The existing scholarship on Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is organized into three distinct, interconnected analytical sections, which establish the essential theoretical and methodological foundation for this comparative feminist research.

The first critical conversation centres on Narrative and Linguistic Resistance Against Hegemonic Discourse, addressing how both authors use storytelling as a means of resistance against the silencing of women's experiences by challenging dominant historical and linguistic power structures. Scholars like Mildred Mortimer argue that Djebar's narrative strategy, which blends autobiography, history, and oral testimonies, functions to create an alternative, feminist historiography[1]. Mortimer emphasizes that Djebar's subversive choice to write in the French

[1] Mildred Mortimer, *Assia Djebar*, 34.

language a colonial legacy is transformed into an instrument for intellectual and political defiance. Clarisse Zimra reinforces this by identifying Djebar's fragmented, polyvocal style as a conscious anti-colonial method, which actively disrupts linear Western historiography[2].

This study aims to establish a clear analytical parallel in the Anglophone scholarship, where Mae G. Henderson argues that Morrison's use of multiple narrative voices resists singular, authoritative interpretations of slavery, thereby helping Black women reclaim control of their own stories and narrative authority[3]. The comparison is crucial: while Djebar appropriates the colonizer's language, Morrison works within a system that has historically denied Black women personhood. Critically, however, Françoise Lionet and Leila Sebar introduce a key tension by questioning if Djebar's choice to write in French and her elite background might inadvertently create a cultural disconnect from the Arabic or Berber speaking subaltern woman she aims to represent[4]. This critique is essential for exploring how the strategy of linguistic resistance might paradoxically relate to the silence and accessibility for oppressed women, confirming that textual form is a primary site of political action that demands intersectional scrutiny.

The second critical conversation focuses on Trauma, Memory, and the Spectral Manifestation of the Past, directly connecting the scholarly ideas about the emotional and psychological impact of history's violence with how silence and memory are shown in the novels. Research on *Beloved* offers essential concepts for operationalizing trauma, with Valerie Smith arguing that the novel's broken, non-linear structure is a literary reflection of the psychological fragmentation caused by slavery, linking narrative form directly to the characters'

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[2] Clarisse Zimra, "*Writing Woman,"* 134.
[3] Mae G. Henderson, "*Dialogic and Polyphonic Elements,"* 192-205.
[4] Françoise LIONNET and Leila SEBBAR, "*Translating Cultural Identity*," 325.

enduring suffering[5]. Deborah E. McDowell expands this by analysing the ghost figure, which symbolizes the persistent force of repressed histories and demands that the unresolved trauma of slavery be acknowledged in the present[6].

Both authors use narrative discontinuity and spectral presences to embody th**e** unresolved deep emotional injuries from history. While Morrison uses the literal "ghost" of Beloved, Djebar employs the spectral silenced voices found within the colonial archive. In both cases**,** silence is operationalized not as an absence or lack of voice, but as a forceful, haunting presence a necessary literary technology for women to confront pain that cannot be articulated through conventional means**.** Marianne Hirsch's concept of "post-memory" is instrumental here, providing the framework to analyse how this emotional legacy is transmitted and confronted across generations in both novels, confirming that the trauma of the past is an active agent in the present[7]. This literature dictates that the study must examine how the authors use these narrative and symbolic techniques to represent the lasting, complex psychological consequences of historical violence.

The third critical conversation examines Maternal Subjectivity and the Intersectional Fight for Agency, looking at the special role of female relationships, especially motherhood**,** in fighting oppression and claiming agency (self-power) within an intersectional critique. Marianne Hirsch's focus on the maternal experience in *Beloved* frames motherhood as a

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[5] Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority*.

[6] Deborah E. McDowell, "Boundaries,".

[7] Marianne Hirsch, "*Maternity and Re-memory,"* 92–110.

complex space for confronting historical violence and recovering memory. This is a crucial site where the legal, physical, and psychological violence of slavery intersect with gender. Mae G. Henderson's work ensures that this view of motherhood includes a necessary recognition of the plurality of African American female experiences. Applying this complex lens to Djebar reveals new forms of agency. Djebar's women are often shown fighting to protect their communities during the French conquest, directly linking maternal actions to collective resistance and national survival.

This analysis therefore highlights how maternal actions operate differently under colonial patriarchy (Djebar) versus racialized chattel slavery (Morrison), yet both represent an ultimate refusal of the hegemonic power to control female bodies and lineage. By using the critical ideas about systemic oppression whether the patriarchal and colonial pressures Zimra mentions or the racial and patriarchal pressures identified by Henderson **y**our research can explore how maternal actions act as a unique form of agency and survival mechanism against multiple, intersecting forms of injustice. This grouping confirms the novels must be read through an intersectional lens to fully understand how women turn personal trauma into powerful, collective acts of resistance.

b/The Issue and Working Hypothesis:

Both *L'Amour*, *La Fantasia* and *Beloved* have been the subject of critical analysis for their experimental forms and feminist approaches to intersectional oppression. The scholarship reviewed here shows how each author engages with language, memory, and identity in ways that challenge official narratives and amplify silenced voices. This review situates the present study within the broader field of transnational feminist and postcolonial literary criticism. By drawing upon existing scholarship, it underscores the significance of exploring cross-cultural

resonances in women's writing about historical violence, and the ways in which feminist authors intervene in the writing of history itself.

Our working hypothesis is that both authors, through their novels *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and *Beloved,* confront the systemic silencing and marginalization of women. They do so by foregrounding women's experiences, exposing the complexities of their identities, representing their struggles against oppressive societal structures. Both writers emphasize how the legacy of slavery in the United States or colonial domination in Algeria shapes women's lives, deeply influencing their memories, their silences, and their specific acts of resistance. Consequently, these novels do not portray women merely as victims; instead, they are depicted as active agents who reclaim their narratives in the face of erasure. Our central questions include: How do *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and *Beloved* depict the emotional and psychological effects of historical trauma on their female protagonist? In what ways do Djebar and Morrison use storytelling as a form of resistance against the suppression of women's voices? How does the portrayal of silence in both novels reflect the survival strategies of oppressed women, and what does this reveal about their agency?

We will draw on *Black British Feminism: A Reader* by Heidi Safia Mirza to shape the key ideas in our research, especially when exploring "Intersectionality", "The erasure of women's voices and history", "Female resistance and agency", we aim to analyse how these concepts manifest in the texts we are studying. Her work will help us critically examine the ways in which women navigate system of oppression while asserting their agency and reclaiming their voices in historical and literary narratives.

c/Methodological Outline:

In this study, we will use the IMRAD method to explore Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* starting with an introduction that situates both works within their historical and cultural contexts. We will then review some existing critical perspectives and interpretations.

The discussion will be divided into two main chapters: the first will explore the concept of intersectionality, the second will focus on forms of female resistance and agency. To conclude we will reflect on our findings and their broader significance, bringing together the key concepts explored throughout the research. Ultimately, this study seeks to highlights the importance of reclaiming women's voices in literature and history contributing to a deeper understanding of feminist storytelling.

II. Methods and Materials:

1/Method:

Our research will use the main ideas from the work of Heidi Safia Mirza, a key British sociologist who studies race, gender, and education. We will focus on her insights from Black British Feminism: A Reader[8] (1997) to get the main conceptual tools for analysing both novels. Mirza's work is vital because it explains the systemic silencing and exclusion of women from oppressed groups. She gives us three main concepts for our analysis:

[8] Mirza, *Black British Feminism, 11-12.*

a /Intersectionality:

Intersectionality is a framework that helps us understand how different parts of a person's identity like race, gender, class, and culture combine to affect their life. It shows that oppression is not experienced in separate pieces, but as connected, overlapping systems. This idea was created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in Black American Feminism, and Mirza uses and expands it for Black British Feminism. Mirza shows how women challenge dominant ideas, proving that identity is shaped by both social rules and daily experiences [9]. She highlights the space that new forms of feminism create:

> Postmodernity has opened up the possibility of new Feminism of difference. Such a Feminism now allows Black women the legitimation to do what we have been doing for a long time, in our own way; we have now been afforded an intellectual space to valorise our agency, redefine our place on the margins [10].

This framework is very important for our study. It allows us to compare the struggles of Assia Djebar's Algerian women with Toni Morrison's African American women. Both groups face unique pressures because their gender and their colonial/racial history intersect, and Mirza's theory helps us see those connections clearly [11].

b /The Erasure of Women's Voice and History:

The Erasure of Women's Voice and History is the systematic removal and false portrayal of women's contributions in official records, caused by systems that favour men and biased history books. Mirza, in her work, stresses that this problem is most severe for Black and racialized women. She calls for historians and scholars to "decolonize" knowledge by placing

[9] Mirza, *Black British Feminism.*
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid, 19.

the voices of oppressed people at the centre. This is exactly what both *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and *Beloved* try to do. Mirza also warns against too-simple ideas of identity:

> The political concepts of Blackness do not convey belonging and community, but instils a false sense of national identity that sets those with dark black skin colour apart, while silencing those who are lighter than black [12].

This idea guides our analysis of silence in the novels: the official colonial archives are silent about Algerian women, just as historical records are often silent about enslaved women. Mirza's work supports our goal of recovering these hidden histories.

c /Female Resistance and Agency:

Female Resistance and Agency refer to the power women have to challenge systems of oppression, make their own choices, and change their lives through both everyday actions and organized effort. Scholars like Mirza emphasize that intersectionality changes how women resist. Her work shows how race, gender, and class affect women's specific strategies for self-determination. Mirza observes that Black women are always focused on fighting for justice and against exclusion:

> Black women remain preoccupied with social justice, discrimination, and exclusion. Health and incarceration reflect access to struggles and our pay. Black feminist engage in being ever the contextual vigilant [13].

This idea confirms that the resistance shown by Morrison's Sethe and Djebar's women is not random; it is a careful and contextual response to ongoing struggles. Using Mirza's theory helps us argue that their agency is real and active, advocating for a better understanding of resistance in both literature and history.

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[12] Mirza, *Black Feminism* 15.
[13] Mirza, *Black British Feminism*, 20.

2/Materials:

In this section of our thesis, we provide an essential overview of the two novels, *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and *Beloved* (1987). We begin by presenting the historical context of these works, allowing readers to understand the past influences that shape their narratives. Next, we provide brief summaries of the two novels. Finally, we explore the lives of Toni Morrison and Assia Djebar through engaging biographical outlines.

a/ Historical and cultural context of *L'Amour, La Fantasia and Beloved:*

Postcolonial Algeria and the Role of Women in L'Amour, la Fantasia

Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (1985) is set against the backdrop of French rule in Algeria, which lasted from 1830 to 1962. The novel addresses the long period of colonial control and the bloody War of Independence that led to Algeria becoming free. While women's efforts and stories were often forgotten or ignored when the new independent Algerian nation was created.

Djebar's work directly confronts this missing history by focusing on the lives of Algerian women. These women were silenced in two ways: first, by the French colonial system, and later, by the social rules of the new Algerian state that still favoured men.

She wrote the book in French and used different kinds of sources, including her own memories and old records from the French military. By bringing these sources together, the novel highlights the historical violence women faced and brings their hidden stories to light. The way Djebar tells the story not in a straight line, but through fragmented voices shows how difficult it is to piece together histories that powerful groups tried to erase.

Slavery, Reconstruction, and Historical Haunting in Beloved

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is set after the end of American slavery, during the time known as Reconstruction. The novel explores the deep psychological and historical effects of being enslaved. The story is inspired by the true case of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who, in 1856, chose to kill her child rather than see her child returned to slavery. Morrison uses this true event to explore ideas about memory, motherly love, and the lasting damage caused by slavery.

The story mostly takes place in Cincinnati, Ohio, and it shows how the painful past remains active in the present, not just through memories but also through the presence of a ghost. The ghost, Beloved, is the spirit of Sethe's dead daughter, and she represents the return of buried trauma. Through this haunting, Morrison shows how slavery destroyed not only the body and the family unit, but also a person's sense of time, identity, and ability to speak freely. The novel focuses on the experiences of enslaved women especially the sexual abuse, the control over their bodies, and the tearing apart of their families which were left out of official history books. Morrison uses many different voices in her narrative to give back a sense of self to those who were denied it, creating a history that American official history often tries to ignore

Reclaiming Female Subjectivity in *L'Amour, la Fantasia* and *Beloved*

Although set in different centuries and geographical regions, Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* share a profound commitment to restoring the stories of women silenced by systemic oppression. Djebar grounds her narrative in the dual historical timeline of the French invasion of Algeria in 1830 and the mid-20th-century War of Independence. This context is defined by a landscape of colonial violence where the female voice was doubly marginalized first by the colonial administration and then by the patriarchal structures of the national resistance. By centring the lived experiences of Algerian women,

Djebar exposes the intersectional barriers they faced while navigating a country under siege, transforming the colonial battlefield into a site of female presence.

In a parallel fashion, Toni Morrison situates her narrative within the mid-19th-century United States, navigating the brutal transition from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to the post-Civil War era. The historical context of *Beloved* is the institutionalized commodification of the Black female body and the systematic destruction of the family unit under chattel slavery.

Drawing from the real-life account of Margaret Garner, Morrison highlights how Black women exerted agency and resistance under conditions designed to strip them of their humanity. This focus challenges traditional historical records that often prioritized the political and economic aspects of slavery while overlooking the specific, intersectional struggles of enslaved women.

Both authors engage rigorously with official historical sources to construct their narratives: Djebar utilizes 19th-century French military documents and oral testimonies, while Morrison draws from slave narratives and period-specific newspaper reports. However, their work transcends simple documentation; they actively re-imagine these archives to prioritize female agency. By focusing on the internal lives and collective resistance of their protagonists, Djebar and Morrison dismantle the male-centric frameworks of traditional history books. Their novels serve as critical spaces for the assertion of female identity, transforming forgotten suffering into a lasting record of historical empowerment.

b/Summaries:

Summary of *L'Amour, La Fantasia* by Assia Djebar:

Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) is a novel that mixes historical stories, personal memories, and thoughts on women's rights to look at the impact of French rule on Algerian

women. The novel moves between two time periods the French invasion of Algeria in 1830 and the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) to show the silenced voices of Algerian women and challenge histories written only by men.

The title has a double meaning that reflects its ideas: *Fantasia* refers to a traditional Algerian horse show that stands for resistance, while *L'Amour* represents Djebar's personal feelings about Algerian history and her struggle with the French language. Through telling the story in pieces, the novel successfully recovers women's narratives, focusing on memory, identity, and resistance.

Summary of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison:

Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) tells the story of the mental and lasting harm caused by slavery in America after the Civil War. The novel centres on Sethe, a woman who used to be enslaved, living in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is haunted by the ghost of her baby, whom she killed years ago. Through broken stories and memories, the novel shows that Sethe acted out of fear of being caught under the Fugitive Slave Act and killed her daughter to keep her from being enslaved again.

The story changes when Beloved arrives. She is a strange young woman believed to be the spirit of Sethe's dead child. Her presence forces Sethe and Sethe's daughter, Denver, to face the painful past. Sethe is overwhelmed by guilt, and Paul D, another person who was formerly enslaved, deals with his own deep pain. The novel focuses on important ideas like memory, what it means to be a mother, and the pain passed down through families. It shows the permanent scars left by slavery and the difficult way people try to heal.

c/Biographies:

Assia Djebar (1936-2015)

Assia Djebar's work as a writer and historian is defined by a rigorous focus on the intersections of colonial rule and the oppression of women. Her literary project, most notably in *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985), functions as a site of female resistance by weaving the history of the 1830 French conquest with the intimate, oral testimonies of Algerian women. By mixing archival documents with personal narrative, Djebar challenges the "official" histories written by men. Her election to the Académie Française serves as a testament to her success in making women's voices heard in a male-dominated literary world, transforming the act of writing into an assertion of female subjectivity against colonial erasure.

Toni Morrison (1931-2019)

Toni Morrison's literary career was dedicated to changing the American canon by centring the African American experience through an intersectional lens. In her most significant work, *Beloved* (1987), she confronts the systemic violence of slavery by focusing on the female subjectivity of Sethe, a mother haunted by the impossible choices forced upon her by an oppressive system. Morrison's use of non-linear storytelling and "re-memory" serves as a form of resistance, allowing her to tell stories that had been kept silent by traditional history. Her Nobel Prize-winning body of work is celebrated for giving "visionary force" to the lives of Black women, establishing them as central agents in the reclaiming of their own historical narratives.

III. Results:

This dissertation set out to look closely at the feminist ideas in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Our main focus was on how both authors show the complex oppression faced by women under slavery and colonialism. Our comparative study revealed two central findings: The first is the Intersectionality of gender, race, and historical experience. The second is the Forms of Female Resistance and Agency that women develop when facing oppression. These key points were explored in the two main chapters.

In the first chapter on Intersectionality**,** we found that both Djebar and Morrison show how systems of oppression like race, gender, and colonial history overlap and shape the lives of their female characters. In *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, Djebar shows that Algerian women suffer under both French colonial rule and traditional mal-ed structures, creating a fragmented, complicated identity. Similarly, in *Beloved*, Sethe's identity is shaped by the painful history of slavery, where her roles as a woman and a mother are tied to racial violence. Both authors also show how cultural expression is used by the women to reclaim their identities and fight against being forgotten by history.

The second chapter, entitled Female Resistance and Agency, revealed the ways women in both novels resist control and assert their power. In *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, Djebar honours Algerian women's resistance through physical fighting and through intellectual defiance. Her use of personal stories and recovered histories acts as a feminist strategy of resistance, transforming historical invisibility into an active presence. In *Beloved*, Sethe's act of killing her child is shown as a shocking but powerful act of resistance against slavery. Morrison also highlights the important role of storytelling and community support as ways for the women to heal and gain strength.

Finally, both *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and *Beloved* are still very important for modern feminist analysis. Although these texts have been studied widely, their value remains high, especially when we look at them through the ideas of intersectionality, female resistance, and agency. The issues they deal with such as the pain of slavery, colonial control, silencing based on gender, and the struggle to define oneself continue to reflect the realities of women in both Algerian and American societies today. These novels prove that literary works based on specific historical and cultural details can still offer powerful ideas about ongoing feminist struggles. The narrative techniques, the complex nature of their female characters, and the authors' focus on memory and voice make them essential tools for understanding how systems of oppression work across time and geography. Therefore, the concepts explored in this research are not just useful but are necessary for understanding how literature contributes to bigger conversations about gender, power, and freedom.

IV. Discussion:

This section of our work intends to discuss the issue of female subjectivity as shaped by intersecting forces of gender, race, and historical oppression in Assia Djebar *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and Toni Morrison *Beloved.* The first chapter explores Intersectionality as a narrative and thematic device, while the second examines various forms of female resistance. Through a comparative feminist and postcolonial lens, this study highlights how both authors reframe history to foreground women's agency and voice.

Chapter one

Intersectionality of Gender, Race, and Historical Experience in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)

Both Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* explore how women's lives are shaped by the combination of gender, race, and history. These novels recover the voices of women silenced by colonialism and slavery. As Heidi Safia Mirza argues, identity is not formed by one thing alone; it is created by the overlapping forces of race, gender, and history [14]. This chapter uses Mirza's intersectional approach to examine how both authors reveal the complex realities of women who have long been ignored.

a/the Interlocking Nature of Oppression

In L'Amour, La Fantasia Djebar writes about Algerian women caught between French colonization and traditional Islamic patriarchy. The narrator feels like an "in-between" figure[15]. She is not physically veiled, but she feels invisible because the French culture does not truly see her, and her own culture hides her. She lives in a world where she belongs to two different sides, yet feels completely at home in neither. Because she speaks the language of the colonizer, she can express herself, but she still feels cut off from her own history. This silence makes her feel like a ghost in her own life, stuck between a society that wants to control her and a world that refuses to acknowledge her.

> Je souffrais de l'équivoque : me préserver de la flatterie... Je découvrais que j'étais, moi aussi femme voilée, moins déguisée qu'anonyme. Mon corps, pourtant pareil à celui d'une jeune Occidentale, je l'avais cru, malgré l'évidence, invisible ; je souffrais que cette illusion ne se révélât point partagée[16].

The narrator experiences a profound sense of isolation that transcends her physical appearance, realizing that discarding the veil does not grant her the true belonging she expected. Although she adopted Western clothing, she finds herself trapped in a state of cultural

[14] Mirza, *Black British Feminism*, 7.
[15] Mortimer, *Assia Djebar*, 45.
[16] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 180.

homelessness, feeling like an outsider who is neither fully Algerian nor truly accepted as French. Even though her face is visible to the world, she still feels invisible because nobody understands who she truly is. This sense of anonymity is deepened by her struggle with the French language, which she views as a tool of authority rather than affection. Using the colonizer's language feels like wearing a mask that does not fit her face. Consequently, expressions of love in French feel artificial, as if she is performing a script rather than speaking from the heart. The words she says do not match the feelings she has inside, leaving her trapped in a deep silence. She remains caught between two worlds, searching for a voice that finally belongs to her. In the end, she realizes that true freedom is not about what she wears, but about finding a way to speak her own truth.

Her transition into Western society reveals that true liberty is not found in a change of dress, but in the ability to be seen and understood without reservation. She has traded a physical veil for a mental one, finding that she is still kept apart from the world. The use of the colonizer's tongue acts as a final barrier to intimacy, turning her private emotions into a cold, hollow performance. The words she speaks are not truly hers; they are borrowed from the same people who took her country's freedom. Ultimately, her journey shows that the scars of history cannot be easily hidden by a new wardrobe or a foreign vocabulary. She learns that you cannot dress your way out of a history that still haunts you. Even with her face uncovered, she remains a stranger because she has no language that feels like home.

> Pilou chérie, mots suivi de touffes de rires sarcastique ; que dire de la distruction que cette appellation opéra en moi par par la suite ? Je crus ressentir d'emblée, tres tôt, que l'amourette, que l'amour doivent pas, par des mots de cliquant, par une tendresse voyante de ferblanterie, donner prise ou spectacle, susciter l'envie de celles qui en sont frustrées je décidai que l'amour résidait nécessairement ailleurs, au-delà des et des gestes publics[17].

[17] Ibid, 43.

When she hears the French term of endearment "Pilou chérie," she hates it. It makes her feel that love in the French language is just a performance, so she decides real love must exist somewhere else, beyond these words. Even inside the home, where women are supposed to be safe, the presence of the father (representing male power) dominates everything. "Mon père, mon héros d'alors, semblait dresser sa haute silhouette au sein même de ces conciliabules de femmes cloitrées dans les patios vieilles [18]". The father's shadow looms over the women, even in their private spaces. This shows that women are silenced by men in their own culture, not just by the French colonizers outside. Writing in French is difficult. It acts as a "neutralizing zone" where her true feelings get lost or swallowed up before they can be understood.

> Le commentaire, anodin ou respectueux, véhiculé par la langue étrangère, traversait une zone neutralisante de silence...Comment avouer à l'étranger, adopté quelque fois en camarade ou en allié, que les mots ainsi chargés se désarmaient d'eux-mêmes, ne m'atteignaient pas leur nature même, et qu'il ne s'agissait dans ce cas ni de moi, ni de lui ? Verbe englouti, avant toute destination.[19].

She describes her words being "swallowed" (verbe englouti). Even when she tries to speak to allies, the French language strips her words of their real emotion and meaning. The narrator's mother does not speak much, but Djebar argues this is not weakness. Her silence is a form of refusing to participate in the system. "Ma mère se tut. Sans doute satisfaite, flattée, mais ne disant rien[20]". The mother stays quiet. This silence is a "coded revolt" a way of keeping her dignity and power by refusing to give the colonizer or the men the satisfaction of hearing her voice. It is how she escapes the traditional enclosure of women. "Je vous rappelle que j'ai appris à lire le français maintenant ! C'est de fait, la plus audacieuse des manifestations d'amour."[21] She calls reading the "boldest" act of love. By mastering the colonizer's language,

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[18] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 55.
[19] Ibid, 181.
[20] Ibid, 112.
[21] Ibid, 57.

she gains the power to tell her own story, claiming a freedom her ancestors did not have. Ultimately, writing is about memory. She uses French to bring the forgotten women of Algerian history back to life. “Ecrire en langue étrangère... Ecrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de sœurs disparues[22].” She concludes that writing does not kill her oral tradition; it wakes it up. She writes to "resurrect" the sisters who disappeared from history.

While in *Beloved*, Morrison writes about the trauma of slavery in the USA. Her characters deal with the "interlocking" pain of being Black, female, and treated as property[23] . The Scarred Body Like Djebar’s narrator feels the "veil," Sethe (the protagonist) feels the history of slavery physically. Her back is covered in scars from a whipping. “It was a revolting clump of scares. Not a tree as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting, things you could trust and be near, not repulse you, shut you out[24]*”.*

The white slaveowner called the scars a "tree," but the quote shows it is actually a mark of horror. Her body is a text that records the violence of slavery. It makes motherhood a tragedy, Sethe kills her own daughter to save her from being taken back into slavery. “I stopped him, I took and put my babies where they should be safe[25].*”* Sethe believes death is safer than slavery. This shows how oppression twists a mother’s love she tries to "put them where they are safe" (heaven) because the real world considers her children property. After slavery ends, physical freedom is not enough. Sethe has to do the hard work of psychologically owning herself again. “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another. The pieces

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[22] Djebar*, L’Amour, La Fantasia*, 285.
[23] Crenshaw*, "Demarginalizing the Intersection*," 140.
[24] Morrison*, Beloved*, 25.
[25] Ibid, 22.

she had lost, things it took years to collect, now belonged to her again[26]. ” Legal freedom is easy; mental freedom is hard. Sethe has to pick up the "pieces" of her identity that slavery broke apart.

The character "Beloved" represents the confusion of trauma. She speaks as if she has no separate self, merging the living and the dead. “I am Beloved and she is mine. I am not separate from her. There is no place where I stop. Her face is mine. I am not dead. I am not. There is no me. Me[27].” Trauma blurs the lines between people. Beloved doesn't know where she ends and her mother begins ("There is no me"), showing how slavery destroys individual identity. In the end, words are not enough to heal the pain. The women of the community come together and use sound and collective cry to drive out the past. “It began with the soft voices of the women searching for the right combination... The voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words[28]”. The women find a sound that is deeper than language ("broke the back of words"). This shows that healing comes from community and shared feeling, not just from talking.

Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison are mirror images of each other. Djebar deals with Colonialism: She fights the silence imposed by the French language and the veil. Her weapon is Writing using the enemy's language to remember her "sisters." Morrison deals with Slavery: She fights the silence imposed by trauma and violence. Her weapon is Song/Community breaking language to find a healing sound. Both authors show that while oppression tries to erase women, their voices can survive through memory and resistance.

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[26] Morrison, *Beloved*, 200.
[27] Ibid, 210.

b/Fragmentation and Solidarity

In L'Amour, La Fantasia, Djebar describes how Algerian women, despite being damaged by French colonization and male-dominated systems, build connections through memory, language, and quiet forms of protest. She argues that women's lives, although ignored by history books, are passed down secretly through generations, this quiet sharing keeps their culture alive. "Chuchotements des aîeules aux enfants dans le noir, aux enfants des enfants accroupis sur la natte, aux filles qui deviendront aîeules. Voix basse qui assure la navigation des mots[29]."

Instead of shouting, grandmothers and mothers whisper stories in the dark. This "low voice" is a hidden path of memories that fights against being forgotten and creates a secret bond among women. The narrator's own voice is supported by the suffering of the women who came before her, especially those imprisoned during the war. Their pain gives her the courage to speak.

> Avant d'entendre ma propre voix, je perçois les râles, les gémissements des emmurés du Dahra, des prisonniers de Sainte Marguerite; ils assurent l'orchestration nécessaire. Ils m'interpellent, ils me soutiennent pour qu'au signal donné, mon chant solitaire démarre[30].

The groans of dead and imprisoned women become a kind of support system for the narrator. Their shared trauma gives her a necessary foundation and strength to begin her own solitary song. The colonial past divides the writer from the women she writes about because she uses different languages for different parts of her identity. "Le français pour l'écriture secrète, l'arabe pour nos soupirs vers Dieu étouffés, le libyco-berbère quand nous imaginons retrouver les plus anciennes e nos idoles mères[31]." The writer is split by language: French for

[29] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 249.
[30] Ibid, 302.
[31] Ibid, 254.

her professional writing, Arabic for her faith and private feelings, and Berber for connecting to ancient ancestors. This shows the writer feels both connected to and separated from her own culture.

Private grief, such as mourning a loss, is turned into a powerful political act when women sing together. "La voix monte, rauque ou chantante, par strophes régulières avec des malédictions rimées en gerbes finales. Aprés un silence, sa prière rituelle intervient[32]." When an old woman sings her sorrowful laments, the personal pain becomes a shared, public expression. This collective act of remembering and mourning unifies women and helps them resist silence.

In *Beloved,* Toni Morrison shows how the cruelty of slavery broke the bonds between women, separating mothers and daughters. However, she also shows that the Black community finds real strength by standing together and sharing their stories of pain. The most powerful moment of support happens when a group of local women comes together at Sethe's house. Their voices and their presence act as a shield, helping Sethe finally face her past and push away the ghost of her trauma. This act proves that even though slavery tried to destroy them, the women can heal by looking out for one another. By joining together in song and prayer, they show that no one has to carry the weight of the past alone. Their shared love becomes a force that is stronger than the suffering they all went through.

> Then Denver stepped out the door and knocked, and the women came and the chill air of the house and the hill of dead behind it disappeared. They sang. They fell upon their knees. And sang. They told her they knew what she knew: that the circle of sorrow was not theirs alone[33].

[32] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia* , 216.
[33] Morrison, *Beloved*, 256.

The women use singing and shared understanding to heal Sethe. By acknowledging their "circle of sorrow," they realize their pain is connected, creating a unity strong enough to fight the haunting trauma. The heavy guilt and trauma Sethe feels after killing her daughter poisons her home, separating her from the community. "She announces: "124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom[34]." Sethe's guilt turns inward, making her house hostile and haunted. This shows how unresolved trauma causes emotional harm that destroys love and isolation relationships. Beloved, the ghostly child, represents how trauma destroys individual identity. Her presence threatens to consume Sethe. "I am Beloved and she is mine. I am not separate from her. There is no place where I stop. Her face is mine[35]."

Beloved's obsessive desire blurs the boundaries between mother and daughter. This illustrates how the legacy of slavery can destroy the sense of self, turning close ties into a consuming, dangerous dependency. The cycle of isolation is finally broken when Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter, steps outside the haunted house to ask the community for help. Morrison writes: "It was Denver who had begun to see the other, the very real other, whose name she did not know and who had stepped out of the water[36]." Denver's decision to leave her isolation is a turning point. It is an active choice to mend broken community ties and shows that while trauma is real, so is the potential for reconstruction and renewal**.**

c/The Power of Intersectionality

Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* portrays how Algerian women are silenced by two forces: French colonialism and traditional patriarchy. This overlapping pressure limits their freedom, making even simple acts, like learning, a form of rebellion. It is dangerous for a young

[34] Morrison*, Beloved*, 3.
[35] Ibid, 210.
[36] Ibid, 50.

Algerian girl because it violates both the norms of her society and the expectations of the colonizer that she should remain invisible.

> Dès le premiers-jour où une fillette 'sort' pour apprendre l'alphabet, les voisins prennent le regard matois de ceux qui s'apitoient, dix ou quinze ans à l'avance: sur le père audacieux, sur le frère inconséquent. Le malheur fondra immanquablement sur eux. Toute vierge savante saura écrire, écrira à coup sûr 'la' lettre. [37]

The girl's education is seen as a guaranteed source of misfortune. This shows that family honour and colonial control mix together to suppress the girl's ability to read and write, making learning a secret act of rebellion. Djebar articulates the paradox of colonial writers: using the enemy's language offers a platform to speak, but it simultaneously signifies a betrayal of her native identity. "Le français m'est langue marâtre. Quelle est ma langue mère disparue, qui m'a abandonnée sur le trottoir et s'est enfuie?"[38] French is called a step-mother tongue because it allows her to express herself but leaves her feeling lost and alienated from her native Arabic. This reflects the deep division caused by colonization. The act of writing becomes a powerful form of resistance. The narrator feels a duty to speak for the women whose stories were historically erased. "Dire à mon tour. Transmettre ce qui a été dit, puis écrit. Propose d'il y a plus de un siècle, nous femmes de la même tribu. Tessons de sons qui résonnent dans la halte de l'apaisement."[39] Her goal is to speak in turn and pass on the fragmented sounds and stories of her female ancestors.

This writing reclaims space for those women who were silenced by both their culture and by imperial history. Within her own culture, women are discouraged from speaking out or asserting their individual identity."Comment une femme pourrait parler haut, même en langue arabe, autrement que dans l'attente du grand âge? comment dire 'je', puisque se serait dédaigner

[37] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 11.
[38] Ibid, 298.
[39] Ibid, 234.

les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation collective?"[40] This shows the pressure on women not to use the word "I." A woman is expected to keep her voice low and hide her individuality, aligning her personal path with the collective resignation dictated by tradition. Djebar focuses on the hidden suffering of women during the Algerian war, showing how their pain is often ignored by official, male-focused histories."Au-dessus de l'abîme, les hommes rivés la regardent: faire face à la durée du cri qui tangue, tel le balancement d'un drap de sang."[41] This prolonged, suspended "cry" represents the unspeakable trauma of women that remains outside the historical record. It emphasizes that female suffering is an inseparable, haunting part of the national history.

Turning to Morrison's *Beloved* explores intersectionality through the character of Sethe, whose life as a Black, formerly enslaved woman embodies the convergence of racial, gendered, and historical trauma. Sethe's desperate act of killing her daughter is framed as an act of resistance. It highlights the impossible moral dilemma faced by enslaved Black mothers whose reproductive rights were denied. Morrison reports: "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe."[42] Sethe's choice to prioritize death over enslavement is a horrifying assertion of maternal power. It directly challenges the system that denied her the right to own and protect her own children. Denver, Sethe's daughter, inherits the psychological scars of slavery, even though she was born free. Her identity is haunted by silence and isolation. She mentions: "I have no one to ask, I have to know what to do."[43] Denver's feeling of having "no one to ask" demonstrates how trauma extends across generations. Her eventual journey from silence to seeking community symbolizes the potential for reclamation and agency. Beloved, the ghost, represents

[40] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 233.
[41] Ibid, 177.
[42] Morrison, *Beloved*, 193.
[43] Ibid, 251.

the combined pain of being Black, female, and living through slavery. Her presence blurs the lines of time and self. She says: "I am Beloved and she is mine. I am not separate from her. There is no place where I stop." Beloved's fragmented identity shows that deep trauma destroys the normal borders between people (mother and child, past and present). She is the unresolved suffering come to life, demanding that the community deal with its history.

The novel's climax is the collective intervention of the Black women community, which uses shared spiritual force to confront Sethe's trauma. She writes: “They came and they stood with her. They sang. They chanted. They wept.”[44] This scene demonstrates the transformative power of unity. Healing from deep, layered oppression is not a solo journey; it requires the community of Black women to stand together to release Sethe from her past. The sound the women create becomes a language of survival, a force deeper than words. The collective voices of black women gather to confront Beloved’s hold: “In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like.”[45] This primal sound transcends rational language and becomes a spiritual, unifying force. It challenges the fragmentation caused by racism and patriarchy, providing a model for restoration through collective female voice.

d/ Spatial Confinement and Gendered Politics of Space

Both Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* use space, physical walls, public areas, and even language to show how women are controlled, and how they fight back. Djebar focuses on how Algerian women are confined by domestic walls and by the gaze of both traditional society and colonial powers. She shows that the private home is often a

[44] Morrison*, Beloved*, 262.
[45] Ibid, 261.

prison. Traditional society keeps Algerian women hidden, silent, and fully covered. This forced stillness is treated as a cultural and religious requirement. “Femmes se dressent, têtes et épaules entièrement enveloppées de voile, amincies, silencieuse, paupières baissées, à la fois raidies et affaiblies par la liturgie propitiatoire.” [46] The image of veiled women standing silently suggests they are stuck and silenced by old customs. Calling this a sacred ritual that emphasizes their obedience, is not just expected, but made holy, confining them spiritually and socially. Djebar finds a space of escape and freedom through writing. By choosing to write in French, the colonizer's language, she turns it into a powerful tool for her own liberation.

> Quand j’étudie ainsi, mon corps s’enroule, retrouve quelle secrète architecture de la cité et jusqu’à sa durée. Quand j’écris et lis la langue étrangère: il voyage, il va et vient dans l’espace subversif, malgré les voisins et les matrones soupçonneuses ; pour peu, il s’envolerait![47]

When she writes in French the "foreign language", her mind travels and escapes the physical walls and the watchful eyes of her neighbours. This act of writing creates a subversive space where she can be free, even if she cannot leave the house. Paradoxically, confinement allows women to create secret, strong connections through shared storytelling.“Les chuchotements qui se tissent aujourd’hui à l’endroit où la Zaouia a brûlé au milieu des vergers plus rares. l’eau nourrissait d’abord les mémoires, et que le ravinement s’accélérât sur les roches.”[48] This quote shows how whispered stories (chuchotements) keep collective memory alive, especially in places where war and trauma have destroyed formal buildings. The small, private spaces of female communication become vital arenas for survival and shared strength.

Morrison shows how the ultimate physical confinement was the slavery plantation. After escaping, the trauma creates a new form of mental imprisonment. Slavery violently denied

[46] Djebar, L'Amour, la fantasia, 19.
[47] Ibid, 260.
[48] Ibid, 250.

Black women ownership of their bodies and their lives. The struggle for freedom is not just about leaving a place, but about reclaiming the self. She explains: "Freeing yourself was one; claiming ownership of that freed self was another."[49] Escaping the plantation is only the first step. True freedom is the long, hard work of claiming ownership of the body and mind that were once treated as property. This shows that the confinement of slavery leaves deep, lasting psychological scars. The house at 124 Bluestone Road, though a safe haven, becomes a mental prison for Sethe because it is haunted by the past trauma. Sethe says that the house was "too small to hold it all. Too small to hold what was in it. The physical walls of the house are not big enough to hold the immense emotional and historical weight of slavery, guilt, and the ghost of Beloved. The home, which should offer safety, becomes a site of unbearable mental confinement, forcing Sethe to confront her past [50].

Morrison shows that even open public spaces on the plantation were designed for control. Forced gatherings were used to publicly reinforce the system's power over enslaved bodies. She writes: "They were called together for work in the fields. And sometimes, they were called together to watch a hanging. Or a whipping. And sometimes to hear the auctioneer[51]." These forced gatherings meant that every inch of the plantation was a site of controlled oppression. The enslaved people were forced to watch violence, showing-them they had no autonomy over their own bodies or those of their loved ones. In a powerful act of defiance, the formerly enslaved Baby Suggs creates a temporary, sacred outdoor space where the community can heal and affirm their humanity. Morrison announces: "In the beginning, there were no words. In the beginning, there was the clearing[52]. "The "clearing" is a sacred space where Black people,

[49] Morrison, Beloved, 95.
[50] Brown, "*Haunting in Beloved: The Politics of Space*."
[51] Morrison*, Beloved,* 111.
[52] Ibid, 87.

especially women, can reclaim their bodies through spiritual expression, bypassing the violence of language. This space, created outside the bounds of the plantation, is a powerful feminist act of autonomy and healing [53].

As a conclusion of the chapter, both Djebar and Morrison clearly show how their female characters deal with and fight against confinement. Whether it is within the homes in Algeria or the harsh limits of the American South under slavery, their stories reveal how much gender-based power affects their lives. These authors do not just point out how unfair these spaces are; they also celebrate the amazing strength, unity, and strong efforts of women. In the end, women manage to take back their bodies, voices, and stories, turning places meant to hold them back into powerful areas where they can truly act and be free.

By reclaiming these spaces, the characters prove that their spirits cannot be locked away or silenced by force. They transform their suffering into a shared history that gives them the courage to stand tall against oppression. Their journey shows that freedom is not just about moving to a new place, but about owning one's own identity and speaking one's own truth. Even in the darkest conditions, these women find ways to build a sisterhood that protects and heals them. Ultimately, their victory lies in the fact that they refuse to be forgotten, ensuring that their voices will be heard by future generations. This powerful bond between women becomes the very thing that breaks the chains of the past and opens the door to a new future.

[53] Rody, "Toni Morrison's Maternal Space."

Chapter two

Forms of Female Resistance and Agency in *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (1985) and Toni Morrison *Beloved* (1987)

This chapter will dive into the many ways women in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* fight back against unfairness and claim their own power. Both books show that even when women face great challenges and control, they find powerful ways to resist and assert their freedom. We will explore how they use their voices, their memories, and even their physical selves to challenge the forces that try to silence them. This includes battling not just outside powers, but also the deep-seated historical and cultural rules that limit them.

a/Embodied Resistance: The Politics of the Female Body

"Embodied Resistance**,"** which means fighting back using your body, is a very strong and repeated idea in how people think about women's rights. Many thinkers show how society's power tries to control the body, and how gender is expressed through what our bodies do. Through their stories, Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison make it clear how women's bodies are controlled by male-dominated rules and colonial powers. Yet, these bodies also become powerful ways for women to show strength, hold onto memories, and take charge. Black feminist thinkers like Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins particularly highlight this. They stress how the female body becomes a main place for fighting many unfair problems, all at once.[54] In *L'Amour, La Fantasia* Djebar uses the Algerian woman's body to show how colonialism and male dominance tried to control her. But even under this control, the body finds ways to resist, especially through writing and memory. The writer finds sudden, powerful freedom by breaking the long silence that was forced on her body and her words. This act is a bold claim of her true self. "J'ai fait éclater l'espace en moi, un espace éperdu de cris sans voix, figés depuis longtemps dans une préhistoire de l'amour. Les mots une fois éclairés ceux-là

[54] Hooks, 51–52; Collins, 120–22.

mêmes que le corps dévoilé découvre, j'ai coupé les amarres[55]." She felt a powerful burst of energy inside her, shattering old limits. When her words finally lit up, her body also found its voice, and she cut the ties that held her captive.

Djebar shows the brutal torture Algerian women faced during the war, turning the body into a battlefield. Even when words were impossible, the body refused to be fully broken. "Enfin la crise intervenait: ma grand-mère inconsciente, secouée par les tressaillements de son corps qui se balançait, entrait en transes. Ils déchiraient la poitrine creuse, sortaient enfin en gerbes d'arêtes hors de la gorge de la vielle[56]." This quote shows extreme suffering, but the grandmother's body, shaking and trembling, acts as a historical witness. Her silent screams and the body's refusal to stop fighting become a way to speak the truth when her voice is forbidden. For Djebar, writing is not just thinking; it is a physical process of breaking the silence and reclaiming history that was erased by the colonizers. "Je me souviens donc de cette lettre d'amour, de sa navigation et de son naufrage. L'évocation de la mendiante rejoint, avant de me parvenir[57]." Writing becomes a physical journey and an exploration of the past. The female writer is an active restorer of truth, using the pen to connect her personal memory to the shared, forgotten stories of other women.

The female body is a strong container for historical memories and trauma, passing them down through generations."Le corps, de l'embaumement des plantes rituelles, se retrouve comme fagoté de hasardes. Reviennent en écho les clameurs des ancêtres désarçonnés lors des combats oubliés; et les hymnes des pleureuses, le thrène des spectatrices de la mort les accompagnent."[58] The body holds the raw sounds of sadness, battle, and shared hurt the echoes

[55] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 13.
[56] Ibid, 207.
[57] Ibid, 91.
[58] Ibid, 224.

of ancestors. This shows the body is a living library of the people's past, speaking through deep physical feeling, not just words.[59]

In *Beloved*, Morrison shows how the Black female body was violently marked and controlled by slavery. But she also proves that this same body can find healing through extreme acts of agency and tenderness. Sethe's whip scars are more than just physical marks; they are living proof of the pain and cruelty of slavery. Her body literally carries her history on its skin. The flesh on her back was permanently reshaped by a system that viewed her only as a tool for labour and reproduction. These scars are not just signs of defeat, but symbols of everything she has survived. Every mark represents a moment where she refused to die or be broken, turning her skin into a record of her own resilience. Even though slavery tried to turn her body into a piece of property, Sethe reclaims it by choosing to love herself and her children. By caring for her own body and the bodies of her children, she takes back the physical autonomy that the law tried to steal from her.

This act of self-love is a powerful way to fight back against a system that tried to break her spirit. By caring for her own wounds and accepting her past, she begins to turn her pain into a story of endurance. She stops looking at her scars as marks made by her masters and starts seeing them as part of her own life. In the end, her body becomes a map of resistance, proving that the human spirit can remain strong even when the skin is scarred.

Even though others tried to use her body for their own profit, she proves that they could never truly own her mind or her heart. Her journey shows that true healing starts when a person

[59] Van Der Kolk, 205–7; Brave Heart, 130–32.

decides that their body belongs only to them. She takes back control by deciding who gets to touch her, who she feeds, and how she lives her daily life.

> Paul D looked at her neck and shoulders, at the lumps and excrescences that ran all the way to the curve of her spine. And without touching it he knew what it was. A tree. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, limbs, branches, leaves. Not a tree, but a topographical map of a cityscape, he thought, with hot white alleys and cul-de-sacs, where the blood ran and the spirit choked.[60]

Paul D sees the scars not as a tree, but as a map of violence where "the blood ran and the spirit choked." This means Sethe's body is a permanent record of the brutal past, showing her history of suffering and her refusal to be erased. Slavery took away mothers' rights to own their children. Sethe's desperate act of killing her child was the most extreme way to reclaim control over her family's future.

> She had to get them out. All of them. And she did. Because if she didn't get them out, they would be put back in the Keeping Room, and they would be branded, and they would be used, and they would be broken. She couldn't stand that. She had to take the baby by the throat herself, rather than see it take the life and breath out of a slave[61].

Sethe chose to kill her baby rather than let it be used and broken by slavery. Her terrible choice was a desperate, political assertion of maternal agency, using her body to prevent her child from ever experiencing the dehumanization of being a slave[62]. The women of the community unite their physical presence and spirit to confront and throw out the trauma (Beloved) that haunts Sethe. They came and they stood with her. They sang. They chanted. They wept. Healing from deep trauma is not a solo journey. This collective action shows the women are wise, strong healers whose shared memory and physical presence are essential to

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[60] Morrison, *Beloved*, 16.
[61] Ibid, 163.
[62] Collins, 150–52; Davis, 20–22.

dislodge the painful past and start moving toward a future[63] . After a lifetime of abuse, Sethe reclaims her body for pleasure and connection. This quiet act is a deep political statement affirming her basic humanity.

> He rubbed her back, a slow, gentle rub, without a word. Then he kneaded her shoulders, and with each circle of his thumbs, the chokecherry tree on her back spread its branches and flowered. Then he just held her, and his holding her was the most intimate thing, the most tender, the most complete joy she had ever known[64].

The gentle touch changes the scarred "chokecherry tree" into a flower a symbol of healing and new life. This shows Sethe getting back her ability to feel love and joy, defying the shame and abuse of slavery. This reclamation of self and pleasure is the ultimate way her body fights back [65].

b/Education and Intellectual Resistance

The strong link between education and intellectual resistance is a main theme woven deeply into how the characters are created. It is not just a small detail; seeking knowledge and building mental strength are vital ways for them to survive, protect themselves, and quietly yet powerfully fight back against systems that keep them down. When these characters learn to read or think for themselves, they break the mental chains that were meant to hold them back. This many-sided intellectual resistance goes beyond simple schooling. It includes sharing important oral histories, carefully keeping cultural memories alive, and the bold act of claiming and telling one's own story when others try to silence it and erase history. By remembering their past and speaking their truth, they refuse to let their enemies decide who they are. Through different and often unusual kinds of "education," these characters carefully find ways to

[63] Morrison*, Beloved*, 286.
[64] Ibid, 17.
[65] Lorde, 53–55.

freedom. They understand that a mind that can think critically is a mind that can never truly be enslaved. They strongly declare their basic humanity and bravely challenge the powerful, oppressive stories forced on them by those who control them. Their refusal to believe the lies told about them is their most successful form of rebellion.

Assia Djebar focuses on the narrator's conscious use of language and the power of storytelling women use to preserve history. The narrator resists colonialism by purposely engaging with both French (the colonizer's language) and Arabic (her mother tongue). This is a smart way to turn a tool of oppression into a weapon for self-expression.“La langue française s’installe en moi comme un orgueilleux préside, tandis que la langue maternelle, toute en oralité, en hasardes dépenaillées, résiste et attaque, entre deux essoufflements.”[66] French settled in her mind like a "proud fortress," but her mother tongue "resists and attacks." This shows her mind is an active battlefield where she fights the colonizer's control by using both languages to express her complex identity.

For women who were denied formal school, the act of storytelling became a vital way to keep culture and history alive. The storyteller is the intellectual guardian of collective memory. “Chuchotements des aiêules aux filles qui deviendront aieules: ne subsiste du corps que ouie et yeux d’enfance attentifs, dans le corridor, à la conteuse ridée qui égrène la transmission, qui psalmodie la geste des pères.[67]” The "woman of the tale" whispers stories to

[66] Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia*, 299.
[67] Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia*, 249.

the girls. This quiet, detailed storytelling is an intellectual act of preserving cultural heritage and resisting the historical erasure caused by colonial rule. Djebar highlights that the most powerful mental challenge is breaking the imposed "silence of women," which is a deep, heavy mental prison.“Car le silence de toutes les autres perdait brusquement son charme pour révéler sa vérité: celle d’être une prison irrémédiable.[68]” The silence is not peaceful; it is an "irremediable prison." Breaking it whether through whispers, writing, or art is a conscious, intellectual choice to go against societal rules and reclaim the right to have complex thoughts and feelings. The narrator's intellectual development comes from sharp observation of the world, even when she is physically restricted by the veil or home.“Fillettes arabe allant pour la première fois à l’école, un matin d’automne, main dans la main du père, aux maisons aveugles[69].” This experience is the narrator's "first school." She learns by seeing and mentally processing information, developing critical thought despite being physically confined. This shows the mind's power to resist passivity.

Morrison illustrates that for Black women under slavery, intellectual clarity about their situation was essential for survival and resistance. Sethe's internal thoughts show she has a profound, painful intellectual understanding of the risk of love under slavery. She knows the system is designed to destroy her attachments. She commentes: “Risky, thought Sethe, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it

[68] Ibid, 285.
[69] Ibid, 11.

was her children. Out beyond this tree, say, it was another tree, and that was another. That one there, look, with the white bark, that was Sweet Home."[70] Her reflection on the "risk" is a calculated, intellectual assessment of her dire circumstances. Her knowledge, forged by experience, dictates her desperate acts of resistance, as she tries to protect her children from the system's ability to corrupt and destroy.

Baby Suggs, an exhausted but wise figure, uses her sermon in the Clearing to deliver a powerful intellectual counter-argument to the dehumanizing logic of white supremacy. When she says: "Here, in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it."[71]Her sermon is an intellectual statement of existence that affirms their flesh and humanity. By urging them to "love it hard," she challenges the outside world's belief that their bodies and lives are worthless. This shared re-education is a powerful form of resistance. Denver's journey is an intellectual one, as she must find a way to understand and escape the trauma that haunts her home. Her growth is based on seeking knowledge and breaking isolation.

Morrison further illustrates intellectual resistance through the characters' persistent effort to understand the inexplicable horrors of slavery, even when formal explanations are absent. She writes: He would be the first to admit that it was the way things were, but he couldn't accept

[70] Morrison, *Beloved,* 42.
[71]Ibid, 88.

it. He couldn't. It was not in him to take a day and let it go. Every single thing done to him, every single thing he saw, he had to take in and give it a name[72]. Denver's final act of leaving the house is an intellectual assertion of self-liberation[73] . She rejects the passive role prescribed by the trauma and forges her own future by actively engaging with the world, proving that intellectual growth is vital for freedom.

c/ Maternal Resistance: Reclaiming Motherhood as Power

Motherhood, often seen as simple nurturing, becomes a deep and hidden form of resistance in Djebar's colonial Algeria and Morrison's post-slavery America[74] . These mothers actively take back control through acts of protection, preserving memory, and asserting their children's humanity[75]. Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* shows that Algerian mothers' resistance is a persistent struggle for cultural survival. They fight against colonial efforts to erase indigenous language and history. Algerian mothers and grandmothers are the primary guardians of cultural memory and tradition, keeping a vibrant past alive when official histories are written by colonizers.

> Dans les fêtes de mon enfance, les bourgeoises sont assises écrasées de bijoux, enveloppées de velours brodé, le visage orné de paillettes ou de tatouages. Je n'ai d'yeux que pour mon rêve, Les rues de la ville sont loin ; les hommes n'existent plus. L'éden reste immuable : danses lentes, visages mélancoliques qui se laissent bercer.[76]

This image of women in their inner world shows they are actively saving their culture's heritage. They pass on memory and identity, which is a quiet but powerful act of defiance against efforts to erase the native past. The stories told by matriarchal figures (grandmothers) create a strong defence against historical forgetting enforced by the colonizer. "chuchotements

[72] Morrison*, Beloved,* 173.
[73] Ibid, 286.
[74] Collins, 175–77.
[75] Davis, 19–21.
[76] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 285

des aieules aux enfants accroupis, Voix basse qui assure la navigation des mots[77].” The "whispers of the grandmothers" pass down the experiences and wisdom of the past. Her constant storytelling keeps the collective history alive and strong, preventing it from being replaced or twisted by the colonizer's view. The primal sounds and cries made by women under violence are fundamental assertions of their existence and a foundation for a reclaimed voice.

> L’ amour, ses cris(s’écrit): ma main qui écrit établit le jeu de mots français sur les amours qui s’exhalent ; mon corps qui, lui, simplement s’avance, mais dénudé, lorsqu’il retrouve le hululement des aieules sur le champs de bataille d’autrefois, devient lui-même enjeu : il ne s’agit plus d’écrire que pour survivre. [78]

The women's cries are a deep, instinctive form of maternal resistance that defies being silenced. They are a protest and an assertion of humanity that helps lay the groundwork for a language that strives to be heard. Djebar's choice to write in French, the language of the colonizer, is a metaphorical act of maternal resistance reclaiming the tool of oppression to protect and give voice to Algerian women. “Cette langue était autrefois sarcophage des miens; je la porte aujourd’hui comme un messager transporterait le pli fermé ordonnant sa condamnation au silence, ou au cachot*”* [79] By writing about Algerian women's suffering and resilience in French, Djebar transforms a language that was once a "sarcophagus" (coffin) into a medium for liberation, restoring agency to those who were silenced.

Morrison shows that under slavery, maternal resistance was a desperate, tragic struggle to assert and protect the sanctity of motherhood within a system that denied Black people their family bonds. After escaping slavery, the struggle for Sethe was not just physical freedom, but the hard battle to reclaim her selfhood, which was tied to her right to mother her children. She says: “Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.”

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[77] Djebar*, L'Amour, la fantasia*, 249.
[78] Ibid, 299.
[79]Ibid, 300.

[80]Sethe's journey is about "claiming ownership" of her-self, which includes the fundamental right to nurture and protect her children from the horrors of enslavement, a right the system violently denied. Slavery systematically took away the maternal bond, treating children as property. Sethe felt a devastating alienation from her own offspring. She adds: "She had two babies, one at her breast and one in her belly, and a two-year-old boy in the woods. And they were not hers. They were Denver's."[81] Sethe knows her children are legally the slaveholder's property ("Denver's"), not hers. This denial of maternal rights is the existential terror that drove her ultimate, tragic resistance to save them from being treated as commodities. The ability to love one's children without fear of separation or loss represents the pinnacle of liberation for a formerly enslaved mother. She writes "To get to a place where you could love anything you chose not to need permission for desire well now, that was freedom."[82] This quote describes the ultimate freedom Sethe is fighting for: the right to love without needing permission. Her resistance is fundamentally about securing this unalienable right for her children, even if it meant extreme measures. Faced with the imminent return to slavery, Sethe's desperate declaration shows the most extreme form of maternal resistance. She writes: "No, no. They ain't gonna get my children. No, no. Not this one."[83] This repetitive declaration is the rawest expression of maternal resistance. Sethe prefers the choice of death for her child over a life of dehumanization, a profound rejection of the slave system's claim on her children's bodies and souls.

[80] Morrison, *Beloved,* 111.
[81] Ibid*,* 152.
[82] Ibid, 162.
[83] Ibidem.

d/ Storytelling and Voice: Language as a Tool of Emancipation

Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison stand as towering figures in literature, each storytelling and voice are powerful instruments of emancipation**.** While navigating distinct postcolonial and cultural landscapes, both writers demonstrate how language can be a crucible of oppression, liberation and self-definition. Their works invite us to consider the profound act of reclaiming narrative and asserting identity through the spoken and written word. Assia Djebar, grappled with the complex legacy of French colonialism and its impact on Algerian identity, particularly for women. Her seminal work, *L'Amour, la fantasia*, exemplifies her use of language for emancipation. Djebar's writing is a balance between the historical weight of a colonizer's tongue and the urgent need to articulate a silenced past.

Djebar uses French, the language of the colonizer, as a strategic tool to write against colonialism and restore the voices of Algerian women. Djebar's decision to write in French, the language forced by the colonial power, shows her clever strategy: using the oppressor's tool to fight back. "Le français m'est langue marâtre. Quelle est ma langue mère disparue, qui m'a abandonnée sur le trottoir et s'est enfuie ? Langue-mère idéalisée ou mal-aimée, livrée aux hérauts de foire ou aux seuls geôliers!" [84]She calls French a "stepmother tongue" (langue marâtre), showing the pain of using it. However, by mastering it, she turned this language into a powerful weapon to "write back" against colonial narratives and bring Algerian voices to a global audience.

Djebar actively works to create a distinct Algerian voice within the French language to finally articulate the long-silenced experiences of Algerian women. "La voix raconte? Même pas. Elle débusque la révolte ancienne. La courbe des collines brûlées tant de fois se déploie, le

[84] Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia*, 298.

récit déroule la chevauchée à travers les étendues rousses de ces monts appauvris, où je circule aujourd'hui."[85] The act of storytelling is an emancipatory act that "flushes out the ancient revolt" (débusque la révolte ancienne). Djebar carves out a space where the marginalized experiences of women can be heard and celebrated, reclaiming their place in history. For Djebar, writing is not just expression; it is a necessity for survival and a way to hold onto cultural roots despite linguistic conflict.

> L'amour, ses cris(s'écrit): ma main qui écrit établit le jeu de mots français sur les amours qui s'exhalent; mon corps qui, lui, simplement s'avance, mais dénudé, lorsqu'il retrouve le hululement des aieules sur les champs de bataille d'autrefois, devient lui-même enjeu: il ne s'agit plus d'écrire que pour survivre.[86]

The struggle with language is a deep personal conflict, but the final conclusion is clear: "it's only about writing to survive" (il ne s'agit plus d'écrire que pour survivre). Writing preserves self and culture against the threat of erasure. Djebar's style blends historical facts, personal memory, and oral traditions, ensuring that no single, simple version of history can dominate. "Aussitôt la guerre ancienne entre deux peoples entrecroise ses signes au creux de mon écriture. Celle-ci, tel un oscillographe, va des images de guerre, conquête ou libération, mais toujours d'hier."[87] Her writing acts like an "oscillograph" (a visual plotter), mixing the signs of war and memory. This polyphony (multiple voices) resists colonial attempts to simplify or distort the true, complex history of Algerian identity.

Morrison's ground-breaking use of language is a monumental act of emancipation, centred on defying the dominant perspective and reclaiming narrative authority for Black experiences. She believed that language is the ultimate human act of creation and preservation, especially for marginalized people who needed to assert their humanity. She notes: "We die.

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[85] Djebar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia*, 201.
[86] Ibid, 299.
[87] Ibid, 301.

That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives."[88] The act of speaking, writing, and storytelling is essential for survival. Narrating one's own complex story asserts presence and leaves an indelible mark, ensuring Black lives are remembered and understood. Morrison made a revolutionary choice to write specifically for Black readers, refusing to explain or apologize for the Black experience to a white audience. She says: "I wrote my first novel because I wanted to read it."[89] This simple statement is a powerful act of narrative independence. By writing the stories she wished to read, Morrison created a space where Black experiences were central, affirming the validity of their history and empowering Black readers[90] .

Morrison saw language as a deep, physical force that creates a transformative and intimate bond with the reader. She Writes: "Language is always and only language for me, the thing that I use to get to something else. And the something else is the erotic connection between a word and a reader."[91] Language is a medium for forging a deep. This profound bond helps her bypass superficial dominant narratives, creating a shared experience of recognition and healing, which is intrinsically emancipatory. True emancipation, for Morrison, is not about forgetting the painful history of slavery, but about courageously acknowledging and living with its lasting presence. She declares: "Certain things you can't get rid of. The ghost of it, the haunting, is what you live with, and that's not to be gotten rid of."[92] Liberation is not about erasing the past, but about acknowledging the "ghost" (the lingering pain). By giving voice to

[88] Morrison*, Beloved*, 11.
[89] Ibid, 22.
[90]Hooks, 1–3; Hooks, 120–22.
[91] Morrison, *Beloved,* 11-23.
[92] Morrison, *Beloved*, 200.

this haunting trauma, Morrison empowers her characters and readers to confront historical wounds, which is crucial for achieving a more complete freedom.

As a conclusion, both Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* powerfully prove women's power to fight back. They make it clear that even under the terrible conditions of colonialism and slavery, women are not just helpless victims. Instead, their bodies become sites of defiance, holding scars, expressing pain, and reclaiming joy. Their minds fight back by holding onto memories, telling stories that were silenced, and bravely taking control of language and their own narratives. As mothers, they fiercely protect their children and pass on cultural heritage, turning their role as nurturers into a strong act of survival. Together, these books reveal that female resistance is a powerful, many-sided force. It allows women to assert their humanity, take back control, and find paths toward freedom and healing for themselves and their communities.

Conclusion

This research undertakes a comparative analysis of Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (colonial Algeria) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (post-slavery America), two landmark novels situated in distinct yet interconnected historical contexts. Despite their cultural differences, both authors illuminate the lasting and deep effects of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. These novels powerfully demonstrate how systems of oppression overlap and impose themselves onto women's lives, bodies, and identities, placing female characters within a complex mix of historical pain and resistance. The first chapter, focusing on the intersection of Race, Gender, and Historical Experience, explored how these hardships are interlocked, showing that race and gender are not separate issues but converge to shape identity under systemic violence. It also examined the complex tensions between women's unity (solidarity) and their divisions (fragmentation), as well as how confinement both physical (being trapped) and symbolic is used for control but simultaneously becomes a hidden site for rebellion and resistance.

In chapter two, forms of Female Resistance, the research turned to the various strategies through which women reclaim agency and challenge historical erasure. These include embodied resistance, where the female body becomes a site of both suffering and defiance; education and intellectual emancipation, which empower women to challenge dominant narratives; maternal resistance, which redefines motherhood as a source of cultural and historical strength; and finally, storytelling, through which silenced voices are restored and female subjectivity is reclaimed. These modes of resistance reveal the ways in which women, in both novels, transform personal and collective trauma into acts of empowerment.

However, both Djebar and Morrison do more than simply portray suffering. Through their narrative strategies, they reimagine history from a feminist perspective, offering counter-discourses to official histories that have long marginalized female experience. In *L'Amour, la Fantasia*, Djebar fuses autobiography with colonial archives, creating a polyphonic text where silenced Algerian women speak alongside her own voice. In *Beloved*, Morrison reclaims the

history of slavery through the fragmented, haunted memory of Sethe and her community, privileging the emotional and embodied truths absent from conventional historical accounts. Both novels foreground women as active agents of memory and history, resisting the imposed silence of imperial and patriarchal structures.

Ultimately, *L'Amour, la Fantasia* and *Beloved* serve as powerful books that fight against historical forgetting and place the connected experiences of women at the centre. They build new stories where trauma is not only recognized but also re-expressed through women's voices, bodies, and acts of remembering. Both authors challenge the dominant narrative, not by hiding pain, but by changing it into a source of strength and identity. These works, therefore, act as both literary and political ways to fight back, rewriting history through the eyes of those who were once silenced.

In conclusion, the two novels are incredibly rich for research, offering many perspectives on how gender, race, history, and identity intersect. However, this study could not cover every important part of both works. Topics such as the mixing of languages and language politics in Djebar's text, or the supernatural and scary parts in Morrison's novel, need more scholarly attention. These untouched areas are promising directions for future research and continue to highlight the deep complexity and literary brilliance of both *L'Amour, la Fantasia* and *Beloved*.

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