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Department of English



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Presented by:

BENNAI Kahina

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**Assia Djebar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985)
and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002):
A Comparative Study**

Panel of Examiners:

MAOUI Hocine, MCA, Université Badji Mokhtar d'Annaba, Président.
RICHE Bouteldja, Professeur, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Rapporteur.
ZERAR Sabrina, MCA, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Examinatrice.
GUENDOUDI Amar, MCB, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Examineur.

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Dedication

*To my father Madjid , my mother
Ghania, my uncle Rachid and my aunt
Sakina*

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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with the issue of feminism in two novels belonging to the postcolonial literature, by exploring feminine enunciation in the works of the Algerian writer Assia Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and the Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002). It postulates that even though the lives of Algerian and Zimbabwean women were shaped by different historical forces and social traditions, common themes exist in their writings because of their common postcolonial background. Both Djébar and Vera examine the relations of women to history in a postcolonial setting, and disclose the double oppression women experienced during colonial and postcolonial times as colonized and gendered subjects. In exploring feminine enunciation in the two novels, we intend to compare the events evoked by the two writers, and to draw some similarities between the two struggles for independence provoked by the French and British colonial invaders and next, by the discourse of neo-nationalism in the two countries Algeria and Zimbabwe, respectively.

This study also explores the two authors' respective language and style. The colonial language and poetic style engaged in Djébar's and Vera's selected narratives negotiate the liberation of the subaltern in accordance with the basic ideas of postcolonial gendered subaltern, as articulated by Gayatri Spivak, in particular.

One of the main themes in the works of Djébar and Vera is that of women's body. Both writers impose the materiality of the female body and experience it within the contexts of colonialism, oppositional nationalism, and feminist discourses through details of sexual violence that the women of the colonized nation endured in colonial and post-independence periods.

General Introduction

The issue of gendered practices and resistance still holds the centre of the stage in feminist scholarship. Despite recent gains made by women in many fields and the relative openness of African countries to progress, no one can deny how critical laws regulating marriage, divorce, polygamy, and inheritance could be in defining women's life choices. This can be explained by the fact that African societies still perpetuate rigid gender-based standards for behaviour urging women to act modestly and unselfishly to avoid promoting her personal interests. The woman who rebels against the common social and cultural beliefs by pushing more overtly on their own behalf often risks severe punishment and a complete rejection by the family as well as the society for her acts.

Working from this foundation, the Algerian novelist Assia Djebar and the Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera discuss their respective societies' placement of women in a subordinate status by giving power to men as husbands and as male relatives. Literature provides for both authors a discursive space for subjects otherwise silenced by dominant socio-political practice. As feminist writers, they reflect, in particular, the patriarchal values which have a strong hold on African women who, without power to govern, often have no platform for expressing their disapproval other than their literary texts.

Charlotte Bruner suggests that African women authors were influenced by different historical and social forces, discourses and traditions. Though the woman's position is subject to male domination from father, brother, and son, the woman remains the transmitter of historic values and art. In their writings, African women writers portray their African backgrounds as well as female experience (Bruner, 1994: 177). They express common themes because of their common colonial background. Literature is an ideological site for the representation of women as agents of social change. Their work is a reconstruction of history from woman's point of view, with an attempt to evoke the mood

of the times and capture the repression of colonial conquest and authoritarian nationalism with the righteous resistance against it.

However, a specific attention is given to that of women's writing from Algeria, for it is in most cases accurately those women who in some way break away from the provision of their sisters through wealth, education, or expatriation who are the fictional chroniclers of the condition of women. In Algeria, the novel is the literary form for the Algerian women through which they represent what was formerly silenced and absent from representation. The participation of Algerian women in resistance struggles against the French colonization of their country has been ignored and often effaced in the historical accounts of revolution, though they have played the same roles as their male counterparts in the struggle for independence.

As Algeria's leading female literary figure, Assia Djébar examines the relations of women to the history of Algeria and the postcolonial setting, the problem of inscribing women into history, and the double oppression women experienced during colonial and postcolonial times as colonized as well as gendered subjects. Djébar's writing is known for portrayals of female subjugation and is set against the historical backdrop of Algeria's struggle for independence which focuses on the intricate lives and experiences of ordinary Algerian women who strive to liberate themselves from the oppressive traditional family regulations and social norms.

In addition to female writing in French language, there emerged a similar one in English expression. One of the representatives of this trend in Zimbabwean postcolonial literature is Yvonne Vera. Since 1980 her writing has been the subject of a number of studies, especially those conducted on the effect of patriarchy on gender relations. Like Assia Djébar, Vera's writings are dominated by the historical and hence the nationalist themes. The power of her novels derives, not from the description of events as such, or, from the pace and pulls of narrative realism, but from the mental worlds that open up about

the effects of colonial and postcolonial political and patriarchal violence on women's minds and bodies (Zezeza, 2007: 14).

The works of Assia Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) unite the discourses of history, pain, and female body. The experience unacknowledged before by their African male fellow writers is expressed through details of sexual violence and other types of oppression that the women of the colonized nation had endured. Both writers appropriate stylistic choices and specific characterization in a feminine language which in a way or another portrays particular ideas about Algeria and Zimbabwe culturally, socially, and politically.

Review of the Literature

In recent years, Assia Djébar's and Yvonne Vera's works have been subject of a large criticism that has been carried out from a feminist stance. Within the framework of this research, we will focus on the most representative critics of Assia Djébar's and Yvonne Vera's works with particular reference to *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Given Djébar's and Vera's commitment to privileging the experience and voice of women in their novels, their works have most consistently been approached from a feminist perspective. In fact, several critics regard their writings as being specifically framed by female characters, through which they demonstrate how they are influenced by historical and political events, colonial memory and neo-colonial discourse.

To start with Djébar, much criticism on her fiction is varied and has been carried out from feminist standpoints. Jane Hiddleston is a case in point. In her book *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria* (2006), she argues that in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, the narrator "attempts to write a collective autobiography of Algerian women, interweaving accounts of the invasion of Algiers in 1830 with testimonies from the war of independence" (Hiddleston, 2006 :68). She regards the novel as a fictionalized

documentary, and revisionary history in which the historian Djébar brings accounts of colonial and postcolonial Algeria from the point of view of female characters and attempts to reclaim the voice and the freedom of Algerian women.

In the case of Vera, one of the illustrative critics is lene Bull-Christiansen. In her Book *Tales of the Nation* (2004), she analyses *The Stone Virgins* focusing on different articulation of Zimbabwean history within the discursive field of Zimbabwean identity. She claims that Vera depicts society and history in relation to women's lives (Bull-Christiansen, 2004:30). Bull-Christiansen further claims that "Vera's writings portray the way in which women's lives are interwoven with the societal chaos of particular times and places in Zimbabwean history" (Ibid). In other words, Vera's novel is interpreted as different articulations of history with a profound examination of women personal tragedies, which are interwoven with the social turmoil that is the backdrop of her stories. The narrator seeks a way out to final liberation of women by positing them in crucial moments in history. She inscribes them with agency and visible body to reinscribe them in new reconstructed history perceived from woman's point of view.

Indebtedness to these two critics should be acknowledged in the sense that they propose interesting analyses of the two novels' denunciation of the pathologies of colonialism, the effect of patriarchy and gendered nationalism on women. They draw on postcolonial theories and feminist scholarship on nationalism to reveal the writing strategies engaged in both selected authors. These authors outline relations between history, the nation and women in particular. To our knowledge, no comparative study has been done between Djébar and Vera even with an emphasis on the way they narrate the nation from a feminist perspective. Narrating the nation from the Enlightenment perspective means that Djébar and Vera believe in progress and perfectibility as viable goals for women. The enlightenment project that some feminists regard as inapplicable to

Third world women because of what is supposed to be a cultural specificity appropriated by putting forward the historical agency of these women.

Issue and Working Hypotheses

The review of the existing literature on the two writers and their feminist stance make it clear that they have never been put into perspective together. In fact, the critics have never attempted a comparative study between Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera with particular reference to Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), and Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Therefore, we propose a comparative study of the two authors on the basis that both of them share a common concern with women's history unrecognised by their societies, a language and style marked by an emphasis on female body as a metaphor for writing. In other words, we will refer to the shared ways in which they describe African women in defiance of traditions by speaking out as individuals. We shall rely on the following methodological outline to implement our research.

Our dissertation will be divided into three chapters, each dealing with the comparison of both the points shared between Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Vera's *The Stone Virgins*. The first chapter will be devoted to the historical solidarity between *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) by Francophone Algerian writer Assia Djébar and *The Stone Virgins* (2002) by Anglophone Zimbabwean Yvonne Vera. The study functions as a point of reference for further analysis of the two selected novels. The emphasis on history is justified by the fact that the past is a contesting ground between the protagonists for the definition and circumscription of identities and roles for women and men in both the colonial and postcolonial contexts.

We have the intention to depict the personal and autobiographical elements in Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* through the study of their biographies. Both authors blend the history of Algerian and Zimbabwean women with their own experiences. They wrote fictions inspired by some of their private

experiences, and therefore, expose some modalities of women's life conditions in the post-colonial practices and nationalist regimes that govern their countries.

In the second chapter, we analyze both authors' language and style. The language and style used by Djebbar and Vera in their narratives negotiate the voicing of the subaltern women. Both deconstruct the relation between historical forms and the constitution of the subject in their literary works. Drawing on large theoretical elaborations, this analysis seeks to present the linguistic strategies employed by the two authors in their novels with an emphasis on temporality. Djebbar and Vera use the language of the colonizer articulated on individual subjectivity which interacts as a generating force for the collective identity of the Algerian and Zimbabwean women. In their texts, subjectivity promotes female expression of the oppressive pathologies of colonialism and denounces the abusive ideology of the postcolonial state.

Our review and reading of the literary works of both selected authors in connection with their life writings and their use of the language of the colonizer creates a dramatic situation, in which the produced text is rich in ambiguities and paradoxes. Both feminist writers seek the transformation of silence into language and action deconstructing the uncomfortable questions of gender inequality, privileged versus underprivileged, men versus women. These binaries form the basis of the language deployed in both authors' texts. We shall argue that the style is characterised by a manichean aesthetics that the author tries to deconstruct.

In the third chapter, we explore how Djebbar's and Vera's selected narratives are engaged in the discourse of resistance with a particular focus on the historically entrenched tendency to allegorise the female body as native land. They schematise both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of the female subject. Our analysis will focus on the historical and political ideas communicated by Djebbar and Vera through the metaphoric construction of women's body. The two authors communicate the history of Algeria and Zimbabwe

through women's body deeply marked and inscribed by the visible but still hidden in the history of their countries. They fill significant gaps in recognizing women's status through female body as a site of women's oppression and resistance in this history. They address the issue of violence done to the body of woman, and inscribe resistance at the same time with their bodily confrontation in colonial and postcolonial times.

Method and Materials

As for methodology, we think that it is relevant to make reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theories: *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985) and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987) which we consider relevant for the analysis temporality, and the body as discursive sites. The relevance of Gayatri Spivak's theories for the following research is based on different grounds. The appropriateness of Spivak's concepts to deal with postcolonial feminism and the selected writers seems to be pertinent because her basic concepts and ideas are borrowed from a similar context as the one in which our two authors write their worlds. Spivak is also best known for her political use of contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the legacy of colonialism in the way we read and think about literature and culture. She has generated an important rethinking of feminist thought by opposing the assumption that all women are the same, and emphasized mainly the importance of respecting differences in race, class, religion, citizenship and culture between women.

In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985) and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), the theorist summarizes her project confronting the authority of the social and political inequalities predominant in cultural texts written under colonial rule. The theorist also defies the political promises of Third World nationalism and decolonization, especially from the perspective of subaltern women. The same project is taken up by Djébar and Vera in their novels. In fact, both authors' writings challenge the dominant texts of western culture and take on many ideas of the contemporary era.

We will try to apply Spivak's theories and her basic concepts on the two selected novels for the analysis of the issues of style, deconstruction, the subaltern, the politics of female body, Third world women and post-colonialism. Our reading of the two authors' novels articulates the idea that Djébar and Vera realize the ways in which their stories in the novels are linked to the forgotten and silenced testimonies of Third world women. The marginalization of the female other is a chief issue in Spivak's works. The theorist proposes a postcolonial critique and textual analysis in which "the work of the subaltern studies group offers a theory of change [...] and the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the 'subaltern'" (Spivak, 1987: 197). Thus, on the one hand, we shall include Spivak's construction of the female subaltern as silenced, unrepresented and disempowered women. And on the other hand, emphasis will be put on the resistance that the subaltern woman deploys to be free from passive and gendered representations as the case of its counterparts in Djébar and Vera. This will mainly focus on the idea of female marginalization and the emancipatory means for their rehabilitation.

Finally, Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theories will help us with the issue of feminism in Assia Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* in accordance with the basic ideas of postcolonial gendered subaltern. Our analysis of the two novels is understudy from the feminist perspective defined by a postcolonial women's consciousness of the double marginalization they have experienced in colonial and postcolonial times and will certainly turn out to be more fruitful than a theory that emphasis woman's experiences. As she tells us: "within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced [...]. In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Ibid, 1988: 287).

Notes and References:

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Chapter One

**Assia Djebar and Yvonne Vera:
Times, Life and Influences**

Introduction

The present chapter will deal with the historical similarities that are reflected in Djebbar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002). The two novels are produced in postcolonial periods, and foreground decolonization and the reconstruction of history from women's perspectives in both Algeria and Zimbabwe. Following Edward Said's assertion in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that "one cannot look at African writing except as embedded in its political circumstances, of which the history of imperialism and resistance to it is surely one of the most important" (Said, 1994:288). In this study we attempt to take up Djebbar's and Vera's texts to explore some historical facts as they appear in the two authors' selected narratives. In this context, we shall analyse Djebbar's *Fantasia, an Algerian cavalcade* and Vera's *The Stone Virgins* in relation to the colonial and postcolonial atrocities under which both countries, respectively Algeria and Zimbabwe went through, with a particular emphasis on women's subjugation during the two periods in a way that may make them bubble to the surface and inscribe their active roles in the historical archives of their country.

It is worth noting, however, that it is not our concern to analyse the history of Algeria and Zimbabwe. Rather, our purpose is to select some historical facts, referred to by the two authors in the two selected novels. By comparison of the events, evoked by Djebbar and Vera in their respective novels, we will draw on some similarities between the two struggles for independence provoked by the French and British colonial invaders and next, the postcolonial crisis aggravated by the neo-nationalism post-war practice in the two countries, Algeria and Zimbabwe, respectively.

This chapter will also deal with the biographical similarities between Djebbar and Vera. Such a tendency in the analysis of both authors' biography may produce comprehensive results in a sense that it makes us more aware of their literary works.

Discussion

Djebar and Vera examine the relations of women to the history of Algeria and Zimbabwe. The problem of inscribing women into history and the double oppression women experienced during colonial and postcolonial times as colonized and gendered subjects are the main concerns of the two authors in their works. Their writing is shaped by the portrayal of female subjugation and is set against the historical backdrop of Algeria's and Zimbabwe's struggle for independence, and focuses on the interaction in the lives and experiences of ordinary Algerian and Zimbabwean women who strive to liberate themselves from the oppressive traditional family regulations and social norms..

To begin with, Djebar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), opens with the French colonial invasion of Algeria on June 13, 1830, when a French expeditionary force of 38,000 men, operating with an invasion plan, landed at Sidi Fredj, a sheltered beach twenty miles west of the city of Algiers. The city fell a few weeks later, ending over three hundred years of Ottoman rule and ushering in one of the darkest periods of Algerian history.

The narrator gives an account of the French conquest of Algeria as an inaugural moment with detailed description of the invasion of the city of Algiers in 1830, mapping the position of women with regard to colonial disruption of the conquest. The first part of the novel opens with a scene in which the capture of the city is considered as a violent encounter directed particularly against Algerian women. Djebar wrote as follows: "The first confrontation. The city, a vista of crenelated roofs and pastel hues, makes her first appearance in the role of 'Oriental Woman', motionless, mysterious" (Djebar, 1985: 6). The initial description of the invasion of the city is full of imagery evoking the subjugation of a nation in a feminine language. Here, Djebar tells the story of Algeria in the face of colonial and patriarchal subjugation at the same time. The writer incorporates moments of colonial memories which come together with women's encounter of the French conquest.

Unlike the French experience in Morocco after 1912, and in Tunisia after 1882, an attempt was made in Algeria to dismantle Islam, its economic infrastructure, and its cultural network of lodges and schools (R. Knauss, 1987: 18). Indeed, the French colonial administration seemed determined to dissolve local religious institutions entirely.

Djebar narrates particular experiences that determine her character by positioning herself in relation to French, Algerian and Islamic cultures. Through the opening sequence “A little Arab Girl’s First Day to School” she exposes very rich cultural implications. As colonial restrictions in the controlled areas imposed French education, Djebar benefits from colonial education that enables her to read and to write.

The effect of colonial restrictions, within half a century of the conquest, the system of Islamic education in Algeria was either dismantled or allowed to collapse through lack of funds. This articulated what had become French colonial policy which attempted to make Algerians Frenchmen. Algerian resistance started with one of the most important leaders, Emir Abdel Kader in 1832. He gradually forged a coalition of the most progressive religious confraternities, some Berber notables and Arab tribes into a powerful resistance movement. The Emir Abdel Kader is included in many episodes framing the chapters of Djebar’s novel which are devoted to the chronological development of the war of independence with detailed acts of barbarism and cruel description of the annihilation of Algerian tribes by French colonial forces. The hero inscribed in these episodes is not only the Emir, but also and more particularly women. They are depicted as courageous rebels in the ‘Dahra caves’ where “fifteen hundred corpses buried beneath El-Kantara, with their flocks unceasingly bleating at death” (Djebar, 1985:79), and dignified women as the ‘bride of Mazuna’. Djebar’s creative imagination makes of a real historical moment in the past of Algeria, a reproduction of past events recorded by women’s words, stories and testimonies.

The movement for independence came inevitably from Algerians suffering from the French atrocities as they are pictured in Djébar's accounts of the massacre of different tribes in Algeria's regions. A popular resistance which lasted nearly a century in all parts of the country gave place to political resistance in the 1930s. With the failure of the latter, the Algerians took up arms in 1954. The fact of being treated as second-class citizens by the French colonial government engendered an important watershed for Algerians in 1945 when demonstrators asked for independence in Setif and Guelma while France was celebrating the allied victory in Europe. What begins as a march turned into a massacre; the number of demonstrators killed amounted to nearly 45000 against 100 European settlers assassinated in retaliation. After this historical event, the Nationalist parties which had existed for many years became increasingly radical as they realized that their goals were not going to be achieved through peaceful means.

Assia Djébar's novel is essentially a full presentation of French colonial administration's atrocities and crimes committed against the Algerian regions in colonial times. The narrator mirrors the cruel murder of Berber and Arab tribes. She provides us with war reports and narratives from the French officer Pelissier about Ouled Riah tribe who were suffocated in their caves. Djébar recalls the massacre executed by the French military officer Pelissier to recuperate the event into a meaningful story and to "recollect the palimpsest on which she now inscribes the charred passion of her ancestors" (Ibid). The scene actively performs the atrocity of colonial physical violence and recalls the disturbing confusion and misinterpretation of the true history that the colonialist denies.

The fiercest revolt in Algeria broke out when the call for general insurrection in November 1954 was issued in the name of the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its armed wing, the National Liberation Army, (ALN) carried an armed rebellion throughout

Algeria and issued a proclamation calling for a sovereign Algerian state the first in November 1954.

In relation to women, they were before the outbreak of the liberation war period, totally excluded from public life. The great majority was illiterate, with only 4.5% among them able to read and write. They did not have access to the world of work except in the sectors that did not demand professional qualifications (Amrane-Amine, 1999: 62). Those who had skills had acquired them through experience. However, as soon as the war broke out, the Algerian women joined in the struggle. During the war that began in 1954, women experienced male violence through wars conducted by colonial men and were subject to cruel, difficult abductions of rape, and imprisonment. In Djébar's novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, women indicate the broader problems encountered in the country, including the colonial legacy, patriarchy, and a state of war and dissolution. The historical impact of these problems on women in particular draws her focus on themes she writes of including the silencing of women, and physical attacks against the female body during the liberation process. All of these themes will be discussed in the third chapter.

The Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) at its first wartime meeting at Soummam in Kabylia in August 1956, proclaimed its central organizing principles and the future wartime conduct of the FLN. The Soummam Platform overtly envisaged roles for women in the FLN-ALN that makes of them a frightening and efficient combat component with original methods fitting to the compatriot sister (R. Knauss, 1987: 76). In other words, provisions subscribed in the Soummam Platform for women were moral support for the combatants, supply of information, liaison, food and clothing, and aid of those jailed and kept captives.

The integration of women into the war effort is elaborated in Djébar's novel. She voices the contributions and the frustrated experiences of peasant women integrated in the

war. Her texts in many instances show how they were subjugated and abused by French soldiers and officers at the time of the war of independence. These historical experiences were traumatic for women. The narrator underlines that the sacrifices Algerian women had paid were as heavy as those of men, and yet no recognition was given to them in return. She describes Algeria at the most critical point of revolution in 1956 when the Battle of Algiers began with three women planting bombs in public venues. *Fantasia* locates suppressed echoes and juxtaposes the struggles of these women combatant in the war of independence. The traditional resistance of Arab women excluded from public sphere is rendered in Djébar's narrative active contributors in the Algerian war of liberation.

In fact, through her protagonist's story, Cherifa, the narrator presents the representative woman of the 1950s, as a resistant freedom fighter during the war of liberation. Her female characters are given voice, and at the same time, break the silence in a way that makes them free from colonial occlusion. Her narrative story sets out the genealogy of Algerian women's participation and active role by celebrating a century's resistance against colonial imposition and Islamic patriarchy. Though women were often excluded from political or military activities, military exigencies soon forced the FLN to appeal to the help of women combatants, though they were already performing the work of nurses, cooks, and agents of liaison. Frantz Fanon, a postcolonial theorist, who lectured the Algerian troops and wrote articles in the *FLN* newspaper, explains this reluctance to enrol women in military action as follows:

First women married to militants were approached, then widows or divorced women. Then younger unmarried girls persisted in volunteering and finally forced the FLN to accept support from all women

(Fanon, quoted in R. Knauss, 1987: 77).

The most pertinent empirical study of women's participation in the liberation war is that of Djamila Amrane, an Algerian social scientist. Her analysis is based on a survey of 10,949 women participants included in the files of the Algiers Ministry of Combat during

1978-79. Of the total number of women participants (10,949), Amrane states that about 78 percent were active in the countryside. Some of these women fought in the underground in the countryside; the others gave logistical support to the Algerian *maquis* men and about 20 percent were active in the towns (Amrane, quoted in R. Knauss, Peter, 1987: 76).

Amrane observes that the females involved in military camps were younger on the average, than were the civilian female militants. She notes that 51% of the former were less than twenty years of age and almost 84% of the female military personnel were under thirty years of age. She also notes that the unmarried girls could more easily break out of the family and join the *maquis* than could the married ones (Ibid: 77).

There was a potential cause explaining the increase of the younger female participants. Traditionally, women in the countryside were more exposed to patriarchal pressures from their families to be married at younger ages. Accordingly, many Algerian women perceived their active participation in the FLN as an escape from an imposed and early marriage. All of the women aged 25 and over and most of those 20 and over were married and had families (76). Fear of arranged marriages is presented in “Three Cloistered Girls” in Djébar’s novel. The writer reflects the position of three young Arab girls who write letters in secret to men from the Arab world and beyond. The girls believe that, in corresponding with these men, they are less likely to be married by force to a stranger. In other words, they manifest and rebel against the current tradition of arranged marriage that deprives them of erotic experiences.

The cloistered life reserved to unmarried women is explored in Djébar’s *Fantasia*. The first part of her novel, in chapter “Three Cloistered Girls”, where she depicts the Algerian young women deprived of any activity outside home. They “live cloistered in an airy

house in the middle of the tiny Sahel village” (Djebar, 1985: 9). They are restricted to domestic tasks and imprisoned by traditional family codes that govern the Algerian society. This phenomenon may be explained by the fear of violation by French troops which may be stated as an important factor that has effectively increased the escape of the younger ones to the maquis with the permission of their families. It is worth mentioning how the FLN dealt with relations between the younger unmarried women and men in the maquis. Cohabitation, even under conditions of war, was considered as a violation of Islamic injunctions and of the Algerian customary practices. The FLN, by incorporating the religious rules of Islam, becomes the guardian of its own projected Muslim sisters. Under these religious restrictions, the nationalists were obliged to regulate male-female relations in ways that were consistent with Islamic principles (Amrane, quoted in R. Knauss, 1987: 76).

Though military exigencies forced the FLN later to join women in the armed forces, it adopted strict measures for maintaining regularity with the Muslim laws. It also regulated marriage and divorce matters of the men and women under its jurisdiction. It therefore, became for a certain period, a substitute patriarchal authority which determined the instructions governing marriages much like the traditional authorial family which arranged the marriage of women in accordance with traditional Arabo-Islamic-Berber practices (P.77).

Djebar reflects the protective role the FLN played to determine the domestic tasks assigned to women, like the peasantry protagonists of her novel who bore a heavy weight of hardship and repression. They performed the usual "feminine" tasks; they fed and housed the militants, nursed, cooked, and cleaned. However, Djebar also depicts Algerian women who took up arms as transporters of weapons, freedom fighters

and who probably did the most to explode the myth that women do not have the physical or psychic potential equivalent to those of men.

In *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, the narrator incorporates not only the project of anti-colonialism that dominates the colonial space, but also denounces the patriarchal strategies imposed by the FLN ruling party of the liberation war. She proposes various historical approaches to offer an anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal political stance. To reach this purpose, Djebbar invests the heroine, Cherifa with a resilient character and powerful sense of women's agency. On the one hand, she focuses on her active role in the liberation struggle, and on her opposition to nationalist's traditional beliefs. On the other hand, she reveals her resistance to the colonial abuses and colonial sequences of torture in the context of the war.

In due course, Djebbar reflects through her female heroines, who act as some sort of mirror the oppressive operations committed by the French administration under which women were maltreated by the soldiers, also their jailors and torturers. In this sense, her project is not only limited to the denunciation of the colonial and patriarchal system, but also a kind of tribute to the female militants who were interned and tortured. Among the most famous combatant in Algerian war of liberation are Djamila Bouhired, Djamila Boupacha, and Zohra Drif Bitat who figured prominently in revolutionary activities portrayed in the Battle of Algiers. In this respect, R. Knauss, in his book *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria*, referred to David C. Gordon's description of Djamila Bouhired's contribution to the Revolution:

Djamila Bouhired was twenty-two when, while acting as a liaison agent for Saadi Yacef [commander of a terrorist network in the Casbah], she was wounded and arrested, subjected to torture several times, and on July 15, 1957 condemned to death, which penalty was not carried out

(Gordon, quoted in R. Knauss, 1987: 80).

One may understand, in a way or another that Djébar's heroines are fictional but created essentially after models of ex-guerrillas, war combatant and women martyrs of the Algerian war for independence. Women's contributions to the Algerian War of independence in Djébar's work are not a non-entity. They exist, they live, and their existence was proved by their successful performance in battles. This shows their undeniable sacrifices in working to build their country.

Djébar continues her project in representing women's emancipation by going to the period after the negotiations in Evian when the two protagonists declared a cease-fire. In July 1, 1962 a referendum was held in Algeria to approve the Evian Agreements. Six million Algerians cast their ballots for independence and Ben Bella became the first president of independent Algeria. She has succeeded in transforming the history of her country by constructing gender roles in literature. Women are depicted as being deeply involved in resistance; she explodes the gendered history, both colonial and post-colonial, and inscribes women in an emancipatory temporality. Women are inscribed in time rather in space and so are agents which carry their history on their suffering bodies.

A similar process of representation as Djébar's novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), including the historical influences of her country's past can be discerned in Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002). In fact, just as Djébar's motherland Algeria has suffered from colonial trauma, Vera's country Zimbabwe was reduced to a settlement colony in 1890 by the British. It was named Rhodesia after its founder, Cecil John Rhodes, who obtained a mining concession, and formed the British South African Company which sent military-style Pioneer Columns to impose its territorial claims. The British invasion was followed by "the subsequent acts of brutal repression, dispossession and destruction of pre-colonial power structures, African religion and values" (Wilfred, 2005: 1). In the

colony of Rhodesia the native Africans were ruled by an all-white government in which they were not allowed to participate. The people of Zimbabwe just as the Algerians heroically resisted the unprovoked acts of aggression and desperately sought to restore sovereignty over their resources, their freedom and dignity.

In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera resembles Djébar in the way she seeks to represent the national resistance of her country from a woman's point of view. She refers to the Rhodesian war which began in 1890 from a woman's perspective. One of the most and popular resistance leaders to whom Vera points out is Nehanda Nyakasikana, the spirit medium who calls her people to fight the British invaders between 1896-1897 in the anti-colonial struggle, called the 'First Chimurenga'. Nehanda took up arms, acted as a commander and helped to lead her fellow countrymen in the struggle to throw the British out of the country. She was the first war heroine and martyr (Urdang, 1982:103). Her case is comparable to that of Lalla Fatma Nsoumer in Algeria. Nehanda belongs to the Shona-speaking groups who made up 75 percent of the African population of what came to be called Southern Rhodesia and the Ndebele-Shona who revolted against the colonial rule of the British South African Company. The narrator's re-articulation of Nehanda Nyakasikana in *The Stone Virgins* refers to the Shona rising which started the first liberation struggle, and provided later an inspiration for later nationalists. She stands as an early testament to challenge both European historiography and male dominated narratives of Zimbabwean history for the realization of the key role Zimbabwean women played in the upcoming movements against British dominance (Christiansen-Lene Bull, 2004: 38).

Like Nehanda, women in *The Stone Virgins* were not merely survivors. They were prime actors in the fight for the liberation of their country. Vera's choice of a female leader in the novel is similar to that of Djébar's protagonist Cherifa in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*. Both authors tell stories of women's active role in the encounter of the Algerian and British invaders. They give tribute to the women of Algeria and

Zimbabwe who have taken an increasingly vigorous part in the liberation movements during all the phases of the struggle. History informs that Zimbabwean women effectively led strikes and protests as well as demonstrations against the oppressive regime. In this respect, Thandjiwe Nkomo, who was a member of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) wing of the Patriotic Front before independence, describes woman's historical role in the struggle for independence in this way:

Since 1896, women of Zimbabwe have taken an increasingly active role in the liberation movement, and in all phases of the struggle. They have effectively led strikes and protests as well as demonstrations against the oppressive regime. Over the years, the positions of women in our Liberation Movement have slowly but surely emerged from playing supportive roles to men to those showing equality.

(Nkomo, quoted in Urdang, 1982:103).

Apart from these active roles, women were essential to the survival of the troops, because they prepared food for them and provided them with clothing. Just as in Algeria, it is only the traditional duties assigned to women that received recognition and earned praise as contributions to the Zimbabwe revolution. The other side of women's roles were overlooked in the writing of Zimbabwean history.

By 1879 when the situation in Zimbabwe was "pacified", the settlers were firmly in control. Company rule ended only in 1923. A new constitution granted representative government to almost all the white electorate. The new government local policy conserved some acts such as a Land Apportionment Act (1930) and Native Registration Act (1936) which imposed the conquest of Zimbabwe people by the colonial authorities that set the stage for racist repression, dispossessions of their livestock in the rural areas and brutal exploitation of their labour with dehumanisation of the working conditions as well (Fink, 1981:608).

The preoccupation of Djebbar with the discourse of nationalism (FLN) in her novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* is analogous to Vera's standpoint towards the

development of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the principal party in the national liberation who fought against the British colonial forces. Since the discourse of nationalism is at the centre of Vera's preoccupation in *The Stone Virgins*, it is necessary for us to give some accounts of the development of the African nationalist revolution in Zimbabwe. It was embodied by three parties: The National Democratic Party (NDP) which was reconstituted under the name Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in 1962 and led by Joshua Nkomo, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) originated in 1963 under the leadership of Ndabaningi Sithole. The Front for the Liberation Army (FROLIZI) formed in 1970 by separatist sections of both ZAPU and ZANU and disappeared after 1974. In May 1956 the Rhodesians issued their Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and renamed their country simply 'Rhodesia'. The African freedom fighters received outside help from newly independent black African states like Zambia and Tanzania. Equipment and more specialized training in sabotage and the general techniques of revolutionary warfare were also supplied by both Russia and Communist China (Abbott and Botham, 1986: 9).

As regards Zimbabwean women, their contribution turned out to be effective. Just as the FLN party in Algeria integrated women in revolutionary activities, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) called on women to help to organize a mass demonstration against both the constitution and the increasing intimidations and arrests of the nationalist leaders. More than ten thousand women protested at the Prime Minister's office in the centre of Salisbury in 1961. Though many series of diplomatic attempts made by the Rhodesian leader, Ian Smith and the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson to save the colony, the peace talks failed. The first shots were fired on 22 April 1966 on what later came to be commemorated as 'Chimurenga Day', also known as the Rhodesian Bush War that refers to the guerrilla war of 1966–1979 (Ibid: 6).

Like Djebbar, Yvonne Vera grew up during the tremulous years of the colonial occupation. She witnessed the second anti-colonial struggle of 1966–1979 in Zimbabwe. The resistance during this period stretched over decades assuming the form of a national liberation war. Rhodesia declared itself to be a republic on 2 March, 1970. The war was announced as a struggle for self-determination, democracy, freedom, social justice, human dignity and peace. Women more than men heard this call because the white settler regime in Southern Rhodesia, (now Zimbabwe), through its racist and gender policies eroded the position of black women.

As the FLN in Algeria enrolled women in the liberation war, colonial oppression pushed male nationalists ZAPU in Zimbabwe also to accept the contribution of women to the military activities. Their indispensable role in the struggle was in many ways responsible for the increased acceptance of women's participation in the struggle. Sally Mugaby, the first lady of Zimbabwe, noted these changes:

The protracted struggle for liberation forced some realities upon our own tradition. It became very necessary that every human resource be used, so about one third of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) liberation forces were women. We observed that it is through a joint effort that makes possible societal aspirations. When men and women hold hands as equals, we benefit from our environments.

(Mugaby, quoted in Urdang, 1982:101).

The above passage indicates women guerrilla in the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle fought side by side with men because of the necessity of war. This is a mirror image of the heroic woman warriors in Zimbabwe's anti-colonial national liberation war. In examining Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, female heroines Thenjiwe and Nonceba are ex-combatants and guerrillas, used to display the role of women's war time activities. They are made to challenge the official accounts of women's role in the resistance against territorial occupation.

However, women's subjugation worsened when the colonial division of the economy in Zimbabwe between industrialized and subsistence sectors forced the Africans to be a source of cheap labor for the whites. This affected mainly the conditions of women in the tribal trust lands which were dumping grounds for them as the economically active men were working elsewhere (Urdang, 1982:103). As a consequence, women were obliged to raise the family alone and manage with their own subsistence agriculture. Many married women also began to move to the towns to live with their husbands and rebuild the family on neo-patriarchal grounds (Ibid).

Just as Djébar in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* contradicts the traditional views about women's domestic roles in the Algerian struggle for independence, Vera also challenges the cultural traditions which attribute passivity to Zimbabwean women during the Zimbabwean resistance. For both writers women are active agents and need to be rehabilitated as such. Vera's book title *The Stone Virgins* is thus a misnomer because women are portrayed as potential soldiers and armed freedom fighters during the war of liberation. Referring to Zimbabwean history, Teurai Ropa Nhonga, ZANU minister of women's described the deep involvement of women during the last few years of the liberation struggle:

Our women's brigade is involved in every sphere of the armed revolutionary struggle. Their involvement is total. In the frontline they transport war materials to the battlefield and [...] fight their way through enemy territory [...] They do politicization work among the masses [...] They teach the masses how to hide wounded Comrades, hide war materials and carry out intelligence reports behind enemy lines [...] In many parts of the country women Comrades, together with their menfolk, are reconstructing a new social order. They are engaged in administration, health work, production and construction, educational and work.

(Nhonga, quoted in Urdang, 1982:106).

The situation of women in Zimbabwe becomes more complex in 1976, when the Americans added their weight to British efforts and were able to bridge the gap between British insistence on majority rule, and the White settlers' reluctance to plunge Rhodesia

into what they saw as communist-inspired chaos (Abbott and Botham, 1986: 6). The Rhodesians revolted against the Anglo-American proposals, and instead began negotiations with nationalist leaders. This led in 1978 to a so-called 'internal settlement', which introduced universal suffrage and re-named the country 'Zimbabwe-Rhodesia' and was rejected by the international community (Ibid).

The first part of *The Stone Virgins* reflects the period of the late 1970s. It is set in Zimbabwe's city Bulawayo and in the little village Kezi. Although Vera describes Kezi as a functioning village, the atmosphere in the novel reveals inhabitants' fear of the war. Guerrillas of Zimbabwe people's liberation army such as Vera's antagonist Sibaso, are leading the operation of eliminating the Rhodesian sympathisers of the British government. The Zimbabwe People's Liberation Army (ZIPRA) resorted to the armed struggle again in 1977-1978 because they were determined to achieve liberation. In 1980, a cease-fire was declared and new elections were supervised by a commonwealth monitoring force composed of members from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Kenya and Fiji. Robert Mugabe, leader of the Shona-dominated ZANU became Prime Minister of what was now to be called 'Zimbabwe' (Ibid, 8). The war which the nationalists had called the 'Second Chimurenga' was over at last. In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera refers to the cease-fire of 1980 during the colonial time. The narrator of *The Stone Virgins* does not only mark the end of the colonial period, but announces the beginning of another war for women: "The war begins. A curfew is declared. A state of emergency. No moment is allowed. The cease-fire ceases" (Vera, 2003:65).

Assia Djebar and Yvonne Vera stretch forward the project of representing women to include the period after the Algerian and Zimbabwean independence. After many years of violent war, the Algerians and Zimbabweans expected national unity for tolerance and social justice. The years following independence in both countries were marked by a large social reform and possible national consolidation under authoritarian one party rule.

Despite the large national reform that was introduced for improving the living conditions of the two nations, the two countries submerged into postcolonial civil-conflict because of the extreme authoritarian ideologies of the FLN and ZAPU which affected severely the status of women after the liberation struggle.

To start with Djébar's novel, it reflects the gender and male usurpation of political power after independence. Individual upward mobility fed the tendency to social fragmentation and political clans born of the factions of the liberation war jockeyed for political power in the new government left women in the margins (R. Knauss, 1987: 95). The nationalists' party of the FLN after their triumph in the liberation war proclaimed themselves as sole rulers of the country because they considered that they had the natural right to dominate and impose their rule. The power was concentrated in President Ahmed Ben Bella who acted as a smokescreen for male oligarchy. The postcolonial regime was officially managed by the FLN party, but in fact it was largely controlled by the army behind the scenes (Gafaïti, 1999:51).

Though many Algerian nationalists publicly acknowledged the important role that women had played in the revolution, most of them were persuaded that women's place in the postcolonial period is the home. As the only legal party, the FLN called on women to fulfil the pseudo-revolutionary role of raising a family. Its project was deeply conservative because women were seen in reproductive rather than the productive role as bread winners. The special language concerning women's status in the Algerian constitution inscribes patriarchal standard for former freedom fighters and the other Algerian women. In other words, women are given the status of female domestic agents because of the dominant norms of the new nationalist return to the traditional patriarchal family.

Djébar's novel ends with the harsh criticism of the new independent Algeria. Her criticism of the political structures sheds light on social and familial gender inequalities of

the postcolonial system. She depicts the post-war situation of Algerian women suffering from the oppressive bonds of traditional Muslim family roles and social norms of the Algerian cultural milieu imposed by the dictatorial ruling party of the FLN after 1962. Her novel can be included in the literature of combat that Fanon situates as the third and last phase of postcolonial literature. The way the narrator revisits Algeria's history to reclaim the voice and freedom of Algerian women engenders certain ambivalence in time and characterisation stressing mainly the themes of hardships and the oppressions of a postcolonial regime. Powerful feminist language marks the women characters' speech about female existence and sexuality. Djébar's feminist writing undermines and subverts the postcolonial patriarchal ideology which was based on a combination of nationalist discourse and on an amalgamation of socialist ideals and Arab-Muslim principles. The narrator gives the voice to oppressed women during the tremulous events after the liberation war in order to counter the patriarchal textual evidence. These voices develop into a kind of oral history as told by Arab and Berber women.

As Djébar's career progresses, she becomes increasingly preoccupied by the construction of female political stand in her country. Her novel *Fantasia* does not advocate direct political action that would have transformed the novel into propaganda. Writing in a strongly patriarchal Algerian-Islamic context, she makes an objective presentation of the many historical reports from women's experiences. Her writing, in many instances, implicitly thrusts at new established nationalist order which promotes a patriarchal language and accentuates sexual discrimination and gender practices. In any case, being a journalist and a historian aware of the political necessity for solidarity and mutual support for women, she participates overtly in a wider feminist movement and gives them support by adopting a feminist enlightenment project for the liberation of women. A small case was made for the cultural specificities and cultural relativism.

There were many attempts from new women like Djébar to organize unions and support former freedom fighters in their bid to share political power. These organizations found themselves limited and mainly controlled by the general tendency of Ben Bella regime to adopt independent mass organizations into the National Liberation Front. For instance, the formation of the Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes (UNFA) was promulgated on September 10, 1962 of the new national constitution. It guaranteed equality between the sexes and granted women the right to vote as Algerian women were first given the right to vote by the French in 1958 (R. Knauss, 1987: 98).

In the new independent Algeria, Islam was made the official state religion and Arabic was declared the official state language. Djébar's writing is clearly linked to the Islamic context and all it implies regarding to the religious distinction between men and women that the Muslim society commands. Most of her texts frequently illustrate the religious codes deployed vehemently by the nationalist discourse as barriers enclosing women within the domestic space. The narrator uses the theme of love forbidden in the Algerian traditional society between women and men without religious celebration. She writes of love and sensuality, and therefore, breaks the taboo of erotic experiences out of wedlock. Djébar writes:

Never did the harem, that is to say, the taboo, whether it be a place of habitation or a symbol, never did the harem act as a better barrier, preventing as it did the cross-breeding of two opposing worlds; as if my people, as if my brothers and thus, by definition, may jailers, had first been decimated, then uprooted, and finally risked the loss of their identity: curious dereliction which caused even their sexual image to become blurred...The impossibility of this love was reinforced by memory of the conquest

(Djébar, 1985: 128).

Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* is presented as adopted conventions that do not stem from a history of negative writing or report of Algerian society, but from the oppressive governmental ideologies of the postcolonial state which provokes the renewed sense of gender roles proper to the misunderstanding of the position of women within the

Islamic bound. The abuse of power by the national party ruler in Algeria submerged the country into more disturbances. Repercussions were alarming in 1965 when the party experienced severe internal power struggle. This has resulted to a more restriction of freedom to women. Ahmed Ben Bella's dictatorial attempts to reconstruct the country without any economic and social exigencies bring to power Houari Boumediene in 1965. Boumediene hold the presidency and became Algeria's Chairman of the Revolutionary Council. As Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, he momentarily abolished the country's constitution and political institutions that Ahmed Ben Bella had established (Jung, 2008).

One may guess the ambivalent position of Djebbar as a writer and a historian who tries to make sense of her country's history torn apart first, by the colonizer, next by the politicians, and the Islamists of postcolonial Algeria. Djebbar's chapter "A Widows Voice" reveals the lost hope for the important insurances of the post-revolutionary period in Algeria by the nationalists that give aspirations for a change in the social standing of people excluding women. Their status worsened further and they became victims of unjust treatment under male domination. In this respect, Djamila Amrane presents a careful study of the post-independent Algeria's ex-fighters. By interviewing those women who participated in the "battle of Algiers", she states that "most of the fighters prayed not to be alive after independence; because they thought it would not end well" (Amrane, quoted in Kutschera, 1996: 1).

In fact, the FLN, for example, maintained its practice of sex-segregated cells. Women's movement towards their emancipation weakens further after the coup d'état in 1965 by the Colonel Boumediene. His politics was more strict and radical than Ben Bella towards women. Djebbar's novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* seems to reveal the substance of a community that has been denied the means to express itself. It

pinpoints the various external factors acting on the advancement of women. From this point of view, the novel draws a fairly comprehensive picture of women's despair and opens the testimony of women who have been wounded and tortured in the bloody struggle for independence by evoking the personal story of Lila Zohra, from Bou Semmam who, at the colonial occupation was arrested and tortured, and had lost her husband and three sons when they took up arms in the war of independence. Later, she is commuted and remained frustrated by the new postcolonial nationalist's regime: "At independence, the people in the city didn't give me anything [...] They didn't give me a thing... You can see where I'm living now, I had to pay to occupy this hut. 'You pay or you don't put a foot inside!' they told me. All the men I used to depend on, all those men have gone!" (Djebar, 1985: PP.199-200).

In this sense, Djebar's exploration of women's singular wartime memories is a deep investigation of female subjugation throughout the history of colonial oppression and examination of women defective transition in the postcolonial period. She narrates female stories embracing Algeria in post-colonial time. She gives an oblique reflection to the treatment of women throughout FLN presidents who hold the power in post-independence Algeria. After Boumediene's death in 1978, long suppressed popular feelings were expressed publicly in the more relaxed political climate permitted by his successor, President Chadli Benjedid (R. Knauss, 1987: 96). His dramatic shelving of the 1981 patriarchal Family code issued by his government in 1982 was a profound testimony to the potential power of Algerian women to militate successfully on their own behalf. This victory was short lived; the government reintroduced a revised Family Code in 1984 which was more regressive for women in some respects than the previous version (Ibid).

Djebar is deeply concerned with the socio-cultural environment since it determines the family codes which, in a way or another, restrict women's freedom and keeps them

subjugated by the authoritarian nationalist practice. In many scenes of *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, the narrator articulates the different paradigms that circumscribe the family code. She analyses the Algerian women's reaction to Muslim customs with regard to love, marriage and male female relationships, identifying the ways in which the rule and family patterns functions according to the inherited beliefs from traditions. This is because female and male relations and even though in terms of marriage are still governed by a traditional patriarchy in which the feminine position is silent and passive "at a time when, for more than a century, the vilest of men from the dominant society had imagined himself a master over us" (Djebar, 1985: 128).

Djebar's novel depicts the continuity of female subjugation perpetuating the post-colonial Algeria. In the chapter "A Widow's voice", she traces a series of episodes of active mistreatment of women in a patriarchal society, both during and after the colonial period. She focuses on women's yearning for their loss during the war, and the present experiences of feminine subjugation framed by the social customs. For the narrator, to analyse the crisis through which Algeria is going through necessitates to revisit all the negative aspects from the colonial time and the present including the social repression and taboo exacerbating women's occlusion and disenfranchisement.

Just as the FLN in Algeria proclaimed the right to rule the country after the independence, the Zimbabwean nationalist party ZANU which was basically formed for the anti-colonial struggle, with his heroism in the war of liberation was also proclaiming the privilege to rule the country as its natural right. The resonance of that kind of discourse is that since independence Zimbabwe has moved from being perceived as a model of racial reconciliation in a post-guerrilla-war context to receive a widespread condemnation as a result of the ruling party's repudiation of this reconciliatory politics (Raftopoulos and Savage, 2004: 1). In this respect, Alexander Jocelyne argues:

In Zimbabwe today, it almost goes without saying that a critical history of nationalism is essential: many of the fundamental issues which effect Zimbabwean society arise out of promises, the disputed character and the failures of nationalism (Jocelyne in Christiansen-Lene Bull, 2004: 5).

When Zimbabwe attained its first independent government in 1980, the country was exclusively ruled by the president Robert Mugabe and liberation fighters of the Zimbabwe African National Union –Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). As it was the case in Algeria, in Zimbabwe too, the nation hoped for a bright future, but the nationalist's reconciliation served only the priority the exclusive ruling party. After 1980, Zimbabwe became a mirror image of the oppressive system that the liberation struggle had sought to destroy and transform. This marked a direct transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism (Wilfred, 2005: 1).

However, there were some major advances and improvement in the social conditions of working and poor people following the Zimbabwean independence. The new country issued significant improvement from the prior Rhodesian settler regime, as well as modern transportation and communication systems. The first part of *The Stone Virgins* describes the hope attached to independence. Zimbabwe's "burden lifts as a new day appears. This new day. A place to start again, to plant hope and banish despair, to be restored. Everything is changed. Day is light, not heavy; light as a leaf" (Vera, 2003: 52).

The advancement towards socio-economic structures in Zimbabwe was short lived. The struggles for dominance and power within the nationalist parties submerged the country rapidly into a violent crisis which costs the lives of many innocent civilian people. Like Djébar, Vera reveals through her narrative what was prohibited from informing public scale. She depicts the new crisis in which her country went through in the postcolonial transition, and shows the failure of the nationalist's promises of bright change for the

country, in the second part of her novel. Similarly, the nationalist's discourse voicing for a national recovery by ZANU government as the FLN in Djébar's novel is disjointed in the *The Stone Virgins* by Vera:

Independence, which took place only three years ago, has proved us a tenuous species, a continent that has succumbed to a violent wind, a country with land but no habitat. We are out of bounds in our own reality

(Ibid: 82).

Another similarity with Djébar is the atrocities accounted by Vera about the nationalist's violation of the civilian population. There were many crimes committed in Matabeleland including the village Kezi in which the 5 brigade destroyed Muhlathini's store and burnt him to death. Writing about the post-traumatic stress disorder from which postcolonial Zimbabwe suffers, Vera confronts the official history and gives a detailed picture of one of the atrocities committed during the six years of political violence in Matabeleland after 1980s. Muhlathini's store in Kezi as it is described by Vera "razed, bombed to pieces, and silenced" (P.159). Kezi becomes "a naked cemetery where no one is buried" and "no certainty of life, only death" (Ibid). A similar atrocity in the post-independence period was committed against women in Matabeleland, and is voiced through her protagonist Nonceba. Nonceba told us about an instance in which a woman was threatened to kill her two sons unless she killed her husband with the axe of the soldiers. Herewith, the narrator tells women stories of war, oppression and subjugation. She depicts the atrocious crimes committed in Matabeleland by soldiers distorted both during the liberation struggle and the chaos of post-colonial reconciliation policy.

The specific event that Vera depicts in the second part of the novel is the Matabeleland Genocide, or Gukurahundi of 1983 by the president Mugabi through the deployment of the 5 Brigade military units, pretending the resolution of ethnic tensions but, was a pretext to the elimination of opposition in sake of providing public support to

Gukurahundi. As Vera has viewed it in her novel “that this is just talk because the country needs heroes, and flags, and festivities, and the notion of sacrifice” (P. 55). The silenced Matabeleland genocide or Gukurahundi refers to the post-independence government’s strategy led by Mugabe to attack the political rivals and the innocent civilians of Matabeleland through the legitimate use of the national army.

Just as Djébar’s presentations of issues of chaos from Algerian history after colonialism, Vera also reflects the pervading violence harming Zimbabwe in the post-colonial time. She uses Sibaso’s monologues to depict violence as a natural pattern of action that is a consequence of the war because they have been thought to behave a certain way which they repeat after the war (Christiansen, 2004:94). He is the legacy of colonialism and a product of the post-revolutionary military governments. The various scenes of carnage in the novel represent the many violent events which Vera could have chosen to write about, within, a socially and politically engaged critical rewriting of a national history. *The Stone Virgins* is a powerful study of the covertly and silenced events in Zimbabwe’s post liberation history.

Vera’s concern with the postcolonial failure to create a cohesive nation in Zimbabwe resembles to Djébar’s preoccupation with the disruption of Algerian population after the war of liberation. In Zimbabwe, the pre-independence divisions between ZAPU and ZANU that grew out of the class and ethnic divisions developed during white colonial rule and black party nationalism has provoked the post-independence government’s attack on the ex-liberation fighters and innocent civilians in Matabeleland. Yvonne Vera grew up in Matabeleland’s capital city Bulawayo which became known for criminal activities because it was the principal location of ZAPU’s armed wing, ZIPRA.

In this political environment, Vera, just as Djébar, is engaged in critical rewriting of the government's master narratives. The social world, family community and the nation in their novels are broken down almost completely. Their characters are sites of speak to

the violence and betrayal of the post-independence promises. In *The Stone Virgins*, the Matabeleland crimes committed by ZANU soldiers were a current strategy to delineate any critique from opposition by any available mean. Vera frames her characters by establishing perverse and violent relationships, between rapist and victim, or murderer and victim, which are ambivalent sites of the oppressive means deployed by the nationalist agency.

In 2000, Zimbabwe experienced a political and economic crisis that has engulfed it. The authoritarian nationalist state carried out a series of political and economic interventions, marked by the widespread use of violence. The outcome of this revived nationalist assault by the Zimbabwean ruling party has been a repudiation of the national policy of reconciliation that was enunciated by the newly independent state in 1890 (Raftopoulos and Savage, 2004: 1).

Vera reflects the period of 2000s in Zimbabwe and the consequence of ZANU-PF violent campaign against innocent civilians. The ruling party suffered its first-ever defeat at the polls, and a majority voted against the government-proposed revised constitution in a referendum. Within two weeks of the poll defeat, land invasions began, and after decades of failing to adequately address the land issue, ZANU-PF started a massive campaign to displace commercial farmers from their land and to redistribute the land to war veterans and others (Ibid:76). The Third Chimurenga started when Mugabe administration claimed that colonial, social and economic structures remained largely intact in the years after the end of Rhodesian rule, with a small minority of white farmers owning the vast majority of the country's arable land. Thus, By 2000 ZANU militants proclaimed violent struggle for land reform ; the "Third Chimurenga", and carried out the land redistribution were often called "War Veterans"(Ibid: 73). Although many were too young to have served in the liberation struggle, they have been given impunity for tens of thousands of acts of violence and destruction over the last three years, including murder, torture, assault, theft, and the burning of property (Ibid).

In parallel with Djébar's writing about violence and memory come Vera's accounts of tyranny and reminiscence. Both aim to foreground the economic, political, and social crises that constitute Algerian and Zimbabwean post-colonial history. Vera's novel is a textual response to historians' accounts of Zimbabwean history, both those of the colonial ideologues who sought to freeze the history of the indigenous people in a "primitivist" enclosure and the nationalist historians with their androcentric narratives of heroic anti-colonial struggles (Zezeza, 2007:15).

The Violent chaos foregrounding Vera's novel refers to the ZANU- PF massive campaign in 2000 to displace commercial farmers from their land and to redistribute the land to war veterans and others. These occupations were often committed with criminal atrocities against both white landowners and their black staff. The government has resettled people in a hasty and haphazard way, accompanied by violence and the displacement of an estimated 300 000 farm workers and their families. War veterans and other peasants were given small plots of land from commercial farms, while the war veteran hierarchy in the form of government ministers and army leadership were given the best farms intact (Raftopoulos and Savage, 2004:72). In short, ZANU-PF policy did not work to reintegrate war veterans but to handle the government's committing crimes against innocent citizens in order to maintain the party in power. The government makes them above the law as privileged and special group in society but it offered them haphazard benefits without skills training and support.

Vera's novel reflects the critical atmosphere of 2000 in Zimbabwe, "she focuses on private rather than public space, but she shows how the private lives of her characters are affected by public events" (Rae Root, 2008:2). The way she portrays her characters remember us of Djébar's female protagonists that embody particular ideas about Algerian history, socially, and politically. In fact, Vera reflects through the tragic story of her female characters Thenjiwe and Nonceba the outcome of the redistribution of land in

Zimbabwe that has not been undertaken fairly after the liberation war. The ex-soldiers of the liberation struggle were not compensated and felt themselves dispossessed. Thus, the narrator presents us Sibaso's life story, a destroyed man who has lost his humanity and was mainly disillusioned in post-independence Zimbabwe and, thus, becomes an instrument of war. "He has lived to tell many illicit versions of the war, to re-create the war" (Vera, 2003:81). The dissident soldier Sibaso in *The Stone Virgins* murders the freedom fighter Thenjiwe and rapes her sister Nonceba. He is the result of the betrayal and distorted nationalist policy after the war. Vera explains the effects of the unfair division of land by authoritarian nationalist state on individuals and its violent consequence. She presents Sibaso as being disillusioned with independence, hunted by the government forces of ZANU-PF and who chooses later the acts of murder against the two innocent sisters. Although a fiction, *The Stone Virgins* comprises stories from Zimbabwean history.

It has been so far made clear that since independence, Zimbabwe's devastating crisis has worsened. Under President Mugabe's governance, the country has been crippled by political turmoil, basic necessities have become scarce, and reports of human rights abuses have become widespread (Raftopoulos and Savage 2004:144). As regards to women, they "wanted to embrace the land and earth, the horizon, and triumph"(Vera, 2003: 51).

Women's participation in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe freed them partially from their traditional roles. They became aware of their oppression and so emerged from the anti-colonial war with high expectations for the new independent nation. However, just as in Algeria, the acceptance of women by men is a new phenomenon also in Zimbabwe. The traditional situation of women in both countries' pre-colonial societies was one of subordination to men. Like Djébar's ex-combatant Cherifa in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* is insulted and abandoned by the FLN regime, the female war veterans in *The Stone Virgins* are insulted and attacked by ZAPU government. Vera presents us the

hardship endured by Thenjiwe and Nonceba in the village Kezi. They are oppressed with no rights to equal treatment and fairness. History shows that women inclusion in war efforts and the affirmations of their contributions in the liberation war by male leaders did not put an end to female traditional subjugation to men.

Post-colonial Zimbabwe and its transition from colonial struggle to violent post-independence conflict and instability has engulfed severe damages to the whole population, more particularly, for women. A difficulty that arose from this transition was how to overcome gender differences. For women, to organise around their own concerns during the transition posed a number of difficulties because articulating their own concerns would be seen as undermining efforts at national reconstitution. In this respect, the President Robert Mugabi says:

The general principle governing relationships between men and women has, in our traditional society, always been that of superiors and inferiors [...] Before the forcible occupation of our country by the British [...] in 1980, tradition and customs recognized a patriarchal society

(Mugabi, quoted in Urdang, 1982: 102).

As it was the case with women fighters in Algeria, Zimbabwean female war-veterans were not integrated in post-colonial reintegration policy because of gender insensitive demobilisation and patriarchal discrimination. In Zimbabwe many female combatants self-demobilised in the 1980s, apparently expedite the severance of ties with a traumatising military past, a choice that carried the weight of self-reintegration in a patriarchal society that viewed them as having played unfeminine roles (Gwinyayi, 2008: 12). Yvonne Vera's female figures Thenjiwe and Nonceba, face the reintegration constraints of Zimbabwe society's misperception for their unwomanly roles in the liberation war. These two ex-combatants remind us of Djébar's female protagonists in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, who are disillusioned at the lack of community acceptance, and therefore become victims

of hostile attacks. They are despised as being too independent, ill educated and unfeminine, and also subject to discrimination through acts of murder, torture and rape.

Algeria's and Zimbabwe's demobilisation and reintegration policy after independence was not gender sensitive. The failure to promote a culture of democratisation and effective reintegration affected more women's right to equality and justice. Djébar and Vera show in their novels that women ex-combatants were not treated as integral contributors in the liberation struggle. In other words, female ex-fighters faced additional reintegration problems compared to their male counterparts. As Djébar, Vera reinforces her image of a politically courageous writer who recounts the post-war disillusion in her country. The power of their novels derive from the history of their country, by which, they are vehemently denouncing the effects of colonial and post-colonial violent effects that more particularly, fall on women.

Biographical Similarities between Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera

For Austin Warren and René Wellek, it is necessary to avoid ignoring the biography of an author while analysing his work. Their view is that:

Even when a work of art contains elements that can be surely identified as biographical, these elements will be so rearranged and transformed in a work that they lose all their specifically personal meaning and become simply concrete human material, integral elements of a work
(Warren and Wellek, 1993: 78).

Following the two critic's assumption, a literary work is produced through rearrangements of some biographical elements. Djébar's and Vera's novels include some subjective elements which are bound to the social backgrounds in which they grew up. Such an affinity in influence in both authors' texts is justified by the different cultural, historical events and familial providences which influenced their careers, and how essentially they are rendered in their reconstructed fictional narratives. In addition to the selected novels,

respectively, *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and *The Stone Virgins* (2003), we will refer to other works produced by the same authors when necessary.

One of the common features between Djébar and Vera is their maternal worlds. The similarity in family background, early childhood and their school itineraries are common features worth to be compared. Both Djébar and Vera spent their childhood in a complex cultural milieu that mixed indigenous traditions with practices imposed by the colonial rulers. They grew up to painful maturity through various life experiences of ordinary Algerian and Zimbabwean women suffering from the oppressive bonds of traditional family rules and social norms, more or less similar, in a colonial world which is set against the backdrop of Algeria's and Zimbabwe's struggle for independence. In terms of education, both feminist writers benefited from unordinary family support in patriarchal society which often excludes women to attend colonial schools and be exposed to western culture.

To begin with Assia Djébar, she was born in 1936 as Fatima-Zohra Imalayen in Cherchel, Algeria, to an Arab Algerian father and a Berber mother. She was raised in a middle-class family while her country was still under colonial rule, and witnessed the Algerian war of liberation. Her father, a teacher who taught French, ensured that she received a formal education, a privilege not accorded to many Algerian women of that time. Djébar's francophone acculturation at the French schools she attended set her apart from the other women in her family, whose education was either denied or cut short by the imposition of domestic responsibilities. In *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade's* first chapter "a little Arab girl going to school for the first time, walking hand in hand with her father" (Djébar, 1985: 3). Djébar recalls this scene in her novel because, it comes directly from her childhood. She considers her personal experience as being liberation from the female patriarchal barriers imposed on her Algerian counterparts. The narrator explores her personal journey with sensibility and subjectivity in her novel. The author

calls up that it was through the legacy of her father that she was able to attend French school and avoid the fate of many other women counterpart, to be subjugated and trapped in someone's harem. In this respect, Djébar says :

Comme si soudain la langue Française avait des yeux, et qu'elle me les ait donnés pour voir dans la liberté, comme si la langue Française aveuglait les males voyeurs de mon clan et qu'à ce prix, je puisse circuler, dégringoler toutes les rues annexer le dehors pour mes compagnes cloîtrées

(Ibid, 1995:256)

The day Djébar's father escorted her to school set her on a bilingual, bicultural, indeed an ambiguous journey that freed her from the female enclosure but sent her into a form of exile away from the majority of her sisters (Mortimer, quoted in Gale, 2002: 527). Therefore, Djébar's most distinguished references in writing today, is the use of the French language gleaned from her influence of education in the French colonial system, though she belongs to the Arab-Berber Algerian culture.

Upon completing high school, Djébar became the first Algerian woman to earn a scholarship to the elite Ecole Normal Supérieure de Sèvres in Paris. There she studied history and participated in the Algerian student's strike of 1956 during the French-Algerian war. She left her studies to write *La Soif* (1957; *The Mischief*), adopting the pen-name Djébar which means "intransigent" in Arabic to protect her family from the potential scandal that erotic elements of her work might cause. After a decade of self-imposed exile spent in Tunisia and Morocco where she collaborated with the anti-colonial FLN (National Liberation Front) newspaper *El-Moujahid* when Frantz Fanon was its editor, Djébar has conducted interviews with Algerian refugees during the liberation war and participated also in various Algerian cultural activities. This experience has helped her to be more aware of women's conditions and be engaged in feminist writings.

During her stay in Morocco, Djébar wrote her third novel, *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* (1962), a turbulent atmosphere of village life intertwined with war. She

returned to the newly independent Algeria in 1962 and worked as an assistant director on a number of productions. In 1973, she directed her own adaptation of Tom Eyen's play about Marilyn Monroe, *The White Whore and the Bit Player*. Again, Djébar went into self-exile during the bloody civil war period in Algeria. She describes herself as “a woman with a French education and an Algerian or Arabo-Berber, or even Muslim sensibility” (Djébar, quoted in Moore, 2008:56).

Like Djébar's childhood encounter with colonialism in Algeria, Yvonne Vera also was raised against the backdrop of faltering colonialism and vicious guerrilla warfare in 1970's Rhodesia, Southern Africa. Vera was born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, on September 19, 1964. Her childhood was spent watching men go off to war, many never to return, and watching women struggle to survive in a society where being a woman meant being a second-class citizen at best, ignored and abused at worst. The theme of war and its impact on women liberation fighters has always been one of her central preoccupation in her novels, especially, *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Vera was just 15 when the guerrilla armies triumphed over the colonialists, and Zimbabwe gained its independence. She belongs to a generation of Zimbabwean authors who grew up during the tumultuous years of the anti-colonial struggle (the second Chimurenga of 1966), and later witnessed the failure of decolonisation to improve the conditions under which the majority of the country were impoverished and subjugated citizens. In *The Stone Virgins*, She extends critical perspective of Zimbabwe transition from colonial occupation to the political crisis after independence. The novel represents arguably the most substantial attempt to deal with the atrocities endured by women in Matabeleland during the 1980s in a literary form to voice the silenced history of women in her country. Vera's novel, critically contests the truncated narratives of 'patriotic history' currently disseminated by ZANU-PF's third Chimurenga discourse (Kostelac, 2006: 5).

Another biographical similarity with Djebbar, reflected in Vera's *The Stone Virgins* is the privilege of education as path for liberation. As Djebbar, Vera's parents supported her education to show the promise of the future writer she would become. Vera's mother was a schoolteacher and her father, unlike many Zimbabwean men supported his daughter's education. In *The Stone Virgins* the writer states that "Nonceba has the advantage to have succeeded; there are not many people with good high school, certificate in the city because Education for everyone is being constantly interrupted by war" (Vera, 2003: 175). Vera's education in British colonial school allowed her to master the English language and has also influenced her way of writing. Vera writes exclusively in English, even though she incorporates occasional Shona or Ndebele words. For her, writing in English is not really a choice, for she considers it her primary language, yet she does feel that English can express female African experience (Rae Root, 2008:19). The language of the colonizer becomes a means of liberation because it has allowed her to occupy a place privileged to men. Although she remains ambivalent and ambiguous in her writing in the language of the 'other', she becomes an eminent writer who challenges colonial occupation and Zimbabwe social taboos exacerbating women's subjugation and discomfort.

In *Petal Thoughts: Yvonne Vera: A Biography* (2008), a book written by Yvonne Vera's mother, Ericah Gwetai shows that there is highly biographical elements in most of Yvonne Vera's literature. The book reveals that Yvonne Vera was a result of an unwanted pregnancy. Ericah Gwetai discovered by accident that she was two months pregnant. She was seventeen and the man responsible was Jerry Vera. They tried unsuccessfully to terminate the pregnancy because she wanted desperately to go for a nurse training course. A Reading of Yvonne's *Butterfly Burning* (1998) tells us that there is such an anguished woman in the novel. *Butterfly Burning* is about a girl, Phephelapi who meets an older man, Fumbatha in Bulawayo during the 1940s. Their relationship ends with unwanted pregnancy that shatters her desire to become a nurse. A resultant abortion ruins her

relationship with her man. In *Butterfly Burning* (1998), Vera connects her life experience to make a work of fiction, she scattered bits of her childhood memory to create highly self-revealing form of disguised autobiography.

Like Djébar, Vera also travelled to Europe and embraced Western art and culture. Art galleries and the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the cities impressed her. This experience motivated her to apply to York University in Toronto, Canada. There, she majored in film criticism. She also penned her first work, in 1992 *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals?* a collection of short stories and *Nehanda* (1993), a historical novel based on the Zimbabwean legendary liberation fighter Mbuya Nehanda's struggle to lead Zimbabwe out of the clutches of colonialism during the first Chimurenga, the uprising against colonial rule in 1896.

As Djébar's self-imposed exile in Tunisia and Morocco, Vera spent eight years in Toronto, Canada but finally returned to Zimbabwe. In 1997, she was appointed Director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo who Voices the challenges of running a gallery in her hometown. Vera has since been more preoccupied with the visual arts but, has also organised readings and concerts in the gallery. She was especially interested in offering young female artists more scope. Yvonne Vera died in Toronto, Canada, at the age of 39. Her novels are known for their strong women characters, and are firmly rooted in Zimbabwe's difficult past.

Conclusion

From our historical analysis to Algeria and Zimbabwe, the writings of Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera depict the mood in colonial and post-colonial times in both countries. Emphasis has been put on the writers' use of some historical facts and biographical elements as backgrounds of their work of fiction. They provide historical events and

mentioned names of historical places and organisations. To these cited facts, they added imaginative treatments by introducing some fictional events and characters. They communicate political truth through their novelization of historical moments.

A particular emphasis was put on women of the postcolonial nations who often find themselves marginalized both as colonized and gendered subjects. The two writers' novels concentrate on the difficulties experienced by generations of Algerian and Zimbabwean women who have been excluded from official history. Yet, above all, the physical violence experienced by women in the liberation war and the post-colonial denigration enhanced by patriarchal restrictions. Djebbar and Vera deal with colonial oppression and the discourse of post-colonial regimes in Algeria and Zimbabwe. The two writers' novels share common features: the gendered nature of the colonial discourse and the cultural nationalism of the liberation struggle. They denounce the institution of nationalism and male dominated discourses of patriarchy which preserve women to the traditional and domestic roles. They create meaningful narratives by reconstructing female characters' experiences inscribed in the temporality of women by locating their role and position in the aftermath of the upheavals of the war.

The study of their biographies has revealed the connection of some of their personal and social experiences to their novels. Both authors share common preoccupation with Algerian and Zimbabwean women. They hold the project of feminist cultural recovery with blissful return to the past and overturn of the promises of national liberation. In their novels, they seek to inscribe women in the history of Algeria and Zimbabwe. Both the past and the present are remembered, restructured on new principles of feminist empowerment of gender equality.

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Chapter Two

Assia Djebar and Yvonne Vera:

Similar Style, Language and Subalternity

Introduction

In the present chapter, we are concerned with both Djébar's and Vera's language and style. The language and style used by the two authors in their narratives negotiate the voicing of the subaltern women. As the first chapter has revealed Djébar's and Vera's writings are connected to their own worlds, their social relations and personal experiences. We have deduced that both wrote from the perspective of Third World women whose lives are so complex because of the double marginalization they have experienced as colonized and gendered subjects. We have pointed out that their colonial education enables them the mastery of the language of the colonizer which allowed them later to promote post-colonial feminist discourse.

Accordingly, we will try through this chapter to reveal how writing in the language of the colonizer implies some stylistic strategies to be deployed for the emancipation of the subaltern, in this case, women. We argue that it is through the deployment of poetic style and language that Djébar and Vera language are able to negotiate the voicing of Third World women. Our examination locates the two authors' texts within the post-colonial writings that question the ethical limitations of representing oppressed subjects in the Third World, as articulated by Gayatri Spivak, in particular.

Women of the colonial world have no means and subjectivity to the other, to express their self-being. By style, writes Roland Barthes, is an "act of historical solidarity": In what follows, it is this historical solidarity with subaltern women that we will investigate by a textual analysis of the accentuation of the foreign colonial language (English and French) that Djébar and Vera use to express the subjectivity of their subaltern sisters. Our analysis will disclose the ambiguity behind both writers' choice to use colonial language in their writing, and how their use of subjectivity is bound to collective identity of subaltern women in their country, Algeria and Zimbabwe, respectively. Djébar and Vera explore the historical, social and biographical patterns in which female subjectivity

participates in destabilizing the colonial critical thought and patriarchal codes that deny women's ability for self-expression.

To elaborate on this, we will rely on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essays *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985) and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), and refer to some other theories of gender when necessary. Such as method necessitates approaching the history of Algeria and Zimbabwe with a particular emphasis on female subject position in time and space. By locating women's position in space and time, we will discuss the issue of visibility of subaltern women through the reflection of both authors' subjectivity previously excluded from literary production and official history, and how it is rendered through linguistic creativity and stylistic techniques a source of visibility and activity for women. By doing so, we endeavour to depict the two writers' involvement, directly or indirectly in feminism, and how they are rendered in their literary creations.

Discussion

Djebar and Vera appropriate stylistic choices and specific characterization in a feminine language which reflect particular ideas about Algeria and Zimbabwe culturally, socially and politically. Writing in the languages of the colonizer framed by female characters, poetic style and complex language, through which they demonstrate how they are influenced by colonial memory and neo-colonial discourse. In their texts, female subjectivity represents the community of subaltern women to blend history and autobiography from their perspective.

To begin with Djebar, the effects of her complex life appear in the way she writes. Her text is complicated by the relationship between the written and the maternal languages. At first sight, *Fantasia, an Algerian cavalcade* may appear difficult to some readers approaching the novel for with a Euro-conception of the genre which emphasizes its representational aspects.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's post-colonial theories of the subaltern challenge the common sense assumption that clear, transparent language is the best way to represent the oppressed. The theorist suggests that the opposite is actually true. For the transparent systems of representation through which things are known and understood are also systems which control and dominate people (Morton, 2004: 5). Spivak's thought emphasises the limitations of linguistic and philosophical representations, and their potential to mask real social and political inequalities in the contemporary world (Ibid).

The role of the written word is made complex for Djebar because of the conflict between the oral maternal language and the written language of the colonizer. The conflict between these two modes of expression creates great ambiguity in her writing and identity. In this respect, she states: "You see, I'm writing, and there's no harm in it, no impropriety! It's simply a way of saying I exist, pulsating with life! Is not writing a way of telling what "I" am" (Djebar, 1985: 58). The narrator recognizes that the French language may be a

kind of liberation for women from patriarchal and social norms. In *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, she builds on her own experience and exposes in the meantime the danger of the act of writing in French:

Cette langue était autrefois sarcophage des miens; je la porte aujourd'hui comme un messenger transporterait le pli fermé ordonnant sa condamnation au silence, ou au cachot. Me mettre à nu dans cette langue me fait entretenir un danger permanent de déflagration. De l'exercice de l'autobiographie dans la langue de l'adversaire d'hier (Ibid, 1995: 300).

So, it is out of expediency that she continues the act of writing in French. In so doing, she develops a politics of collective female identity in poetic style. Referring to Spivak's assertion that the everyday lives of many Third World women are so complex and unsystematic that they cannot be known or represented in any straightforward way by the vocabularies of western critical theory, the theorist champions the voices and struggles of the oppressed in the Third World in a necessarily complex theoretical vocabulary (Morton, 2004:24).

The complexity of Djébar's text also comes from the translation Arabic to French language in the writing process. Though her texts are written in a language borrowed from the colonizers of her motherland, she speaks in defence of women's involvement in the Algerian war of liberation and their role in the struggle against the colonial occupation. She portrays the Algerian women in terms of bravery and strength in the accomplishment of wartime activities:

The *goumier* threatened me: 'Why did you go and complain to Lieutenant Coste? Who d'you think you are?...And the *fellaheen*, your brothers, they're no better than rats hiding in holes!'. In the face of this insult, I couldn't contain myself: 'Come closer, if you dare! You call us rats, so let's see if we're rats or lions!' (Djébar, 1985:138).

Moreover, Djébar asserts that if women are skipped from history and literature, it is because they are not given the advantage of education, and so, are not able to write their own history. In this respect, she writes "Alas! We can't read or write. We don't leave any

accounts of what we lived through and all we suffered!...You'll see other people who spent their time crouching in holes and who, afterwards, told what they've told!"(Ibid: 148).

The role and contribution of women to the liberation struggle are often neglected in historical accounts of heroism because of historical historiography. Women are traditionally represented by male institutions inscribing them within domestic and passive roles in both Algerian annals and French official accounts. Heroism is the domain of man rather than women. Djebbar's reconstruction of the Algerian history through colonial language and elusive writing considerably disrupts the patriarchal histories of colonization. Her novel is shaped with textual violence that mirrors the brutal history of colonization and nationalism. In this respect, she says:

Le verbe français qui hier était clamé, ne l'était trop souvent qu'en prétoire, par des juges et des condamnés. Mots de revendication, de procédure, de violence, voici la source orale de ce français des colonisés [...]. Pour ma part, tandis que j'inscris la plus banale des phrases, aussitôt la guerre ancienne entre deux peuples 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—a la formulation d'un amour contradictoire, équivoque (Ibid, 1995: PP.300-301).

Djebbar's writing is often nuanced and ambivalent because of the use of poetic language and elusive style. The above quotation is an illustration of how the poetic structure of Djebbar's text covers sensitive issues, like the accounts of many painful stories of ordinary women, very similar in many ways to stories of resistance. The narrator reinforces our understanding of the hardships endured by women in the war of independence, and brings to attention the everyday lives of thousands of Algerian women in an attempt to release the enclosure in subaltern speech. The narrator states: "Writing has brought me to the cries of the women silently rebelling in my youth, to my own true origins. Writing does not silence the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters" (Ibid, 1985: 204). Writing for an ex-colonized woman like Djebbar is

necessarily “speakerly” in the sense it carries the voice of resistance to both the colonizers and the patriarchs.

Spivak proposes a postcolonial critique and textual analysis in which “the work of the subaltern studies group offers a theory of change [...] and the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the ‘subaltern’ ” (Spivak, 1987: 197). The ability of Djébar to write, paying considerable attention to the cultivation of feminine language characterized by sensuality and musicality of the poetic style brings voice to women voice. The coming into voice by the power of poetic words allows her to reconstruct Algerian history as it should have been told. It forges a new and emancipatory discursive space for subaltern women. She creates a new female space in a new reconstructed history which fosters an effective agency for women’s liberation as well as their tribute in the forgotten history.

Through a poetic style, Djébar presents us with images from living tradition to resuscitate the voice of her subaltern sisters from the forgotten past. The aim of the narrator, however, is not only to give the floor to these women, but also to allow them to express themselves through the recuperation of their stories. Spivak asserts that within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the division of labour, for both there is “evidence.” It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant (Ibid, 1988: 287).

Djébar gives political expression in poetic form by re-reading and re-writing historical accounts. She seeks to recover the lost history of Algeria and especially that of the subaltern women literary excluded from official history. Her project of the emancipation of subaltern women is made through the use of female subjectivity experienced by woman’s consciousness that overturns the silencing mechanism of Algerian women. In this respect, she writes:

I was conscious of the mystery: the matriarch was normally the only one of the women who never complained; she condescended to mouth the formulas of submission disdainfully [...]. The 'revolution' began and ended in my home, as every *douar* in these mountains can bear witness
(Djebar, 1985: PP.145-146).

Women in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* are rendered conscious of their important role they played in the struggle. They write their own history in order to establish agency and to impose themselves as recognizable agents in Algeria. Djebar uses Arab-Berber language and French language to locate the oral histories of Algerian peasant women in order to disjoin the colonial and patriarchal representations of Algerian women. Her writing is steeped in Algerian women's oral histories. These histories are recorded in dialogues that blend of poetry, prose and critical thinking. It conveys the intricacies of being a female postcolonial writer through a revision of the autobiographic genre that creates a space to challenge traditional notions of subjectivity (Saloman,2009:62). The narrator joins her voice to Algerian women's voices and experiences constructing a collective memory to recapture a female subjectivity that is excluded from colonial and patriarchal representations in literary production and annals of history. She says: "Twenty years later I report the scene to you, you widows, so that you can see it in your turn" (Djebar, 1985:211).

According to Debra Kelly, in the work of writers linked to independence movements in north Africa during the 1950s, there is certainly the will to 'represent', in both meanings of the word: to portray and to speak on behalf of the experience of their colonized peoples, while simultaneously forging a process through which an independent subjectivity could come into being after being denied by the colonizing forces. In so doing, these writers contribute to the analysis of the effects of colonization and of resistance to that oppression on the identity of the individual and of the nation (Debra, 2005:23). It is from this perspective that Djebar evokes the presence of her protagonists in

her novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*. She speaks out their experiences in the war of liberation and gives tribute to their bravery in the battlefield through the use of the individual voice 'I' which marks women's independent subjectivity within a large feminine community:

Cherifa! I wanted to re-create your flight: there, in the isolated field, the tree appears before you when you are scared of the jackals. Next you are driven through the villages, surrounded by guards, taken to the prison camp where every year more prisoners arrive...I have captured your voice; disguised it with my French without clothing it. I barely brush the shadow of your footsteps!

(Djebar, 1985: 142).

In *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, the writer uses the individual voice 'I' that masks the collective voice 'We'. The writer is given a position to speak on behalf of her subaltern sisters in a community that has often been deprived of a voice. Judith Butler argues that the practical task that women face in trying to establish subjectivity through speech depends on their collective ability to cast off the reifications of sex imposed on them which deform them as partial or relative beings. Since this discarding follows upon the exercise of a full invocation of "I," women *speak* their way out of their gender. The "I" assumes the totality of language and, hence, speaks potentially from all positions (Butler, 2002: PP.149-150).

Spivak's autobiographical style when theorizing subaltern is perceived as a technique to deconstruct notions of identity because her texts often imply the opposite of what the style is taken to show. Therefore, Djebar's use of the individual voice 'I' imposes women's self-consciousness. Being self-conscious indicates the presence of women and access to the human fold. "This principle of equal access, however, is itself grounded in an ontological presumption of the unity of speaking beings in a being that is prior to sexed being" (Ibid:150).

Djebar's foregrounding subjectivity is also marked by an intersubjectivity that summons Algerian women in their historical, social, and cultural context. The emphasis on

subjectivity is a way of understanding and expressing consciousness of oppression which is a practical tool in feminist scholarship because it allows women to engage with one another in a collective action that provides space for the articulation of individual experiences and processes of subjectivity (Saloman, Sandra, 2009:12).

Moreover, the author's subjectivity in the text articulates on the principle of solidarity between the Algerian women. The narrator links herself with the elapsed testimonies of many Algerian war veterans. Such representation is performed through figurative language in which poetry plays a pre-eminent visual role to articulate women's consciousness in the narrative, especially when she aligns herself with the forgotten women in the Algerian history in the name of gender-solidarity.

Djebar's global message favoring feminine intellectual thought promotes feminine community (Orlando, 1997:92). She tends to reestablish feminine communicative agency which generates women's solidarity because it grants a space of commonality for feminine subjectivity in the history of Algeria. The writer, therefore, relies on the principle of solidarity between the Algerian women. She tries to establish a strong community of women in which she is personally participating to break out the incarceration of her subaltern sisters. In this respect, she says:

I do not claim here to be either a story-teller or a scribe. On the territory of dispossession, I would that I could sing. I would cast off my childhood memories and advance naked, bearing offerings, hands outstretched to whom? –to the lords of yesterday's war, or to the young girls who lay in hiding and who now inhabit the silence that succeeds the battles ...And what are my offerings? Only handfuls of husks, culled from my memory, what do I seek? Maybe the brook where wounding words are drowned
(Djebar, 1985: 142).

Djebar attempts also to locate the subjectivity of women in the history of Algeria. The narrator selects important events in the history of Algeria, located in the same time and space in which women take part as important agents in the liberation war in a way that makes them able to develop an understanding of their own subjectivity or identity as

women. Djébar says : “I lived in so many different places in those times, so many...Finally, when I was let out of prison, I preferred to return to my farm” (Ibid: 149). The narrator provides us with examples of women who through their subjectivity, their consciousness creates the ways for them to look at themselves and their role, and how they see that role as contributing factor to their identity formation.

Upon closer examination, large selections of Djébar’s text are historical accounts of poetic nature. In Djébar’s novel, two inter-linked histories are used. First, she shed lights on the often ignored sufferings of women like those caught in the fumigation of the tribes in the Dahra caves and the anonymous women whose hands and feet were severed for their jewels. Secondly, she uses the story of the naked bride of Mazuna who resists both Algerian patriarchal strictures and French colonial abuses. Through these stories, she frames the tragedy of women that takes the reader from the colonisation of Algeria in 1830 onwards based on archival research, to the post war period, based on the oral testimonies of women from the ‘Chenoua’ region who participated in the struggle.

In *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), Spivak asserts that when “A historian confronts a text of counterinsurgency or gendering where the subaltern has been represented, he unravels the text to assign a new subject-position to the subaltern, gendered or otherwise” (Spivak, 1987: 241). Similarly, Djébar’s takes on the official records of the French colonial conquest of Algeria with the purpose of rewriting historical facts from the perspective of the colonized subject. In considering the re-writing of the historical discourses, part of the writing strategy in Djébar’s *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* consists in the production of metaphorical discourse of great complexity and variety. According to Debra Kelly, the palimpsest-like structure which is elaborated through the re-reading of the French male accounts of the colonisation of Algeria is in itself one large, all-encompassing metaphor (Debra, 2005: 22).

Djebar elaborates the history of Algeria through the use of some accounts told by French colonial officers and women oral testimonies. The figurative Language suggests the meanings of words in her text are beyond the literal. The act of writing in colonial language itself is a metaphor for the colonial history of Algeria and the acknowledgement of female role in that history. She writes a work of fiction with particular use of historical accounts rewritten in poetic language often in a sad mood of writing especially when narrating violence against women. For instance, Djebar's vigorous account of the French military officer Pélissier recounting the asphyxiation of the Ouled Riah tribes in the caves of Dahra mountain region:

The dead woman found lying beneath the body of the man who was protecting her from the bellowing ox. Because of his remorse, Pélissier keeps this corpse from dying in the sun, and these Islamic dead, deprived of the ritual ceremonies, are preserved from oblivion by the words of his routine report [...]. Pélissier, speaking on behalf of this long drawn-out agony, on behalf of fifteen hundred corpses buried beneath El-Kantara, with their flocks unceasingly bleating at death, hands me his report and I accept this palimpsest on which I now inscribe the charred passion of my ancestors
(Djebar,1985:PP.75- 79).

However, writing the history of Algeria from a point of view of women through a cultivated feminine language privileges their position in history. The poetic style awakens the voices of Algerian women's lived-experiences and inscribes their roles in the official history. The narrator depicts the first confrontation of Algeria against the French invasion in 1830, as a crucial moment in which the city of Algiers is viewed as a female subject. It is viewed as a fragile woman raped by the colonizer: "The first confrontation. The city, a vista of crenelated roofs and pastel hues, makes her first appearance in the role of 'Oriental Woman', motionless, mysterious" (Djebar, 1985: 6). The conquest is rendered in a sexualized register.

Djebar's use of elusive style and feminist language is made to feminize Algeria and to totalize gestures of women. The implication of feminizing Algeria in Djebar's account of the capture of the city represents socio-political events and lived-experiences that illustrate the subjugation of a nation, especially women who are inseparable part of the history of Algeria.

The account of the events accruing in Algeria's colonial past is exposed with great poetic creativity and sensitivity in a form of metaphors and personifications endowing lifeless objects with human characteristics, especially the female body that we will discuss later in the third chapter. Through the use of repetition, musicality, ellipsis and metaphor, the narrator develops poetics of female identity.

The elaboration of feminine and poetic language in the signs and symbols chosen to depict the capture of the city of Algiers represent also the violation of the women of Algeria. Djebar states that "The Impregnable City confronts them [colonizers] with its many invisible eyes. Although they had been prepared for its skyline – here a dome reflected in the water, there the silhouette of a fortress or the tip of a minaret – nevertheless the dazzling white panorama freezes before them in its disturbing proximity" (Ibid:7).

The narrator presents the personal experience of being a woman confronted with the first Algerian encounter of the French conquest. The narrator calls attention to the ways in which the creativity of poetic structure of her text though written in colonial language shapes and represents the Algerian women's resistance.

The personification of the city of Algiers is constructed by the narrator with the language of the former colonizer but articulates her belonging to collective identity of Algerian women which is often deprived of the freedom of self-expression. In this respect, she writes: "Torch-words which light up my women-companions, my accomplices; these words divide me from them once and for all. And weigh me down as I leave my native land" (P.142).

The politics of the poetic language used by the narrator is not a barrier which may set her apart from Algerian female collective identity. The French language is perceived by Djébar as an extremely powerful means for the denunciation of colonial practices. She expresses the personal experience of being a woman at critical periods of Algerian history starting with the Algerian encounter of the French conquest. Djébar writes against the patriarchal histories that keep males dominant in Algeria through the revision of a postcolonial historiography that also denies and excludes women's role in the progress of history.

Her narrative is written in different situations, transiting from colonial oppression to post-colonial deception, where she is resisting and challenging the historically imposed image of female being in order to construct post-colonial feminine subjectivity previously denied. In a way or another, the constructed feminine language and poetic style serve as a deconstructing strategy of the male sexual domination and unequal gender power relations.

Like Djébar, Vera also writes in the language of the colonizer, that is English, even though she sometimes includes some Shona and Ndebele words. For Vera, writing in English can express female Zimbabwean experience. In an interview with Eva Hunter, she asserts:

Yes it [English] arrived in my country as an act of violence that was enforced, as it was in many other countries. But English is a very adaptable language, flexible and embracing. Perhaps that's why it was such a successful language in colonizing people. But it also can absorb such different worlds

(Vera.Quoted in Rae Root, 2008:19).

Though she expresses her concerns in the language of the colonizer, that does not affect negatively her worldview. Far from being a "prison house", English is rather a window that opens out on Zimbabwean female experience. Vera's writing is similar to that of Djébar, because it is framed by the same poetic style and complex language. In this perspective, Ranka Primorak describes Yvonne Vera as the most difficult Zimbabwean

writer since Dambuzdo Marechera, and the scholarly disagreement over what actually happens in the novels is an indication of this difficulty (Primorak. quoted in Falk, 2007: 99).

The difficulty in Vera's *The Stone Virgins* is not only related to her use of the oral maternal language and the written word of the colonizer, it is also linked to the use of a poetic and elusive style and shifting points of view. Zimbabwe traumatic events are rendered in metaphors that are filled with meanings denouncing colonial occupation and women's subjugation. The quote below is representative of Vera's style:

The women want to take the day into their own arms and embrace it, but how? To embrace the land and earth, the horizon, and triumph? To forget the hesitant moment, death, the years of deafness and struggle? The women want to take the time of resignation, of throbbing fears, and declare this to a vanished day, but how? And take the memory of departed sons, and bury it. But how? To end the unsure sunsets, the solitary loveliness of the hills?
(Vera, 2003:51).

Vera's use of elusive style and fluid points of view in poetic structure is made to suit the contents dealing mostly with women's subjugation during the traumatic events that Zimbabwe went through. Many criticisms of Vera's work tend to focus on her choice of taboo-breaking subject-matter and the use of a female narrative perspective. In parallel to Djébar's complex and sophisticated writing in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, Vera's *The Stone Virgins* is also written in complex language and deploys a system of images. The purpose of which is to overturn the silence of the gendered subaltern.

In *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Spivak is concerned with subaltern criticism and commentary on the ethical dilemmas presented by the disempowered and voiceless subjects of the Third World. The theorist seeks to develop a critical vocabulary capable of enunciating the experiences of brutalised minorities in the Third World, whose histories have been effaced in dominant historiography (Morton, 2004:45).

The Stone Virgins goes further than any of Vera's previous novels in denouncing colonial occupation and ZAPU policy of national reconstruction after the liberation war, in the sake of revealing the double torment of Zimbabwe's subaltern. She describes her

subaltern heroines using sensual and romantic language to underscore her marginalized and subaltern status. This is a sample of this romantic language as it comes in the mouth of Nonceba:

Often the ground decays, the plants dead from the stillness in the air.
Mbelele has its own seasons. Closed, sound does not travel out of it. We
were safe in that immobile air. We heard nothing outside our own
suppressed voices; we were not heard (Vera, 2003: 100).

The power of Vera's poetic style is the result of repetition, musicality, ellipsis and metaphorisation, techniques similar to the ones that Djébar uses. With this style, she reveals particular women experiences of subjugation and trauma silenced by colonialism and authoritarian nationalism. Her texts are full of complex metaphorical configurations, and various elements of her aesthetic are refined to handle the complex questions of language, voice and subjectivity in increasingly subtle ways (Kostelac, 2006:42).

Spivak links disparate histories, places and methodologies in ways that often refuse to adhere to the systematic conventions of western critical thoughts (Morton, 2004:6). We argue that such a refusal to be systematic is explored by postcolonial writers as Vera as a conscious rhetorical strategy calculated to engage a female subjectivity in literary texts that do not confirm to the genetic convention prevalent in Eurocentric criticism and literary theory.

As subjectivity needs the presence of consciousness to manifest the existence and the experience of being, Vera seeks to describe women in the personal, historical and political meanings of being female. She looks at the ways that may recover and present a female independent subjectivity. To reach this purpose, Vera, just as Djébar contributes to the analysis of the effects of colonization and of independence, and how they are experienced particularly by women's subjectivity. In many instances her novel is comparable to that of Djébar especially, in the way her female characters reflect their

thought and experience through the stream of consciousness to denounce their subjugation and oppression in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe.

To that effect, Vera's novel contains aesthetic power of passages representing acts of violence of remarkable power and complexity. She endeavours to imagine the emotional and psychological lives of Zimbabwean individuals and to disclose the histories of violation and brutality responsible for women silences. In *The Stone Virgins*, the narrator extensively explores the rapist-killer's psyche Sibaso who has been caught up in war for years and returns in the village Kezi. Sibaso decapitates Thenjiwe, then rapes Nonceba, after which he slices off her lips. In the following passage, Vera describes Sibaso torturing Nonceba:

He turns steadily, with the movements of a hunter who kills not because he is hungry but because his stomach is full, therefore, he can hunt with grace... He thinks of scars inflicted before dying, betrayals before a war, after a war, during a war. Him. Sibaso. He considers the woman in his arms. He sees her dancing heels, her hands chaste dead bone, porous thin, painted on a rock. Her neck is leaning upon a raised arrow, her mind pierced by the sun. She is a woman from very far, from long ago, from the naked caves in the hills of Gulati. She does not belong here. She bears the single solitude of a flame, the shape and form of a painted memory. He thrusts the body to the ground: a dead past. Nonceba falls

(Vera, 2003:pp.77-78).

The above paragraph reminds us of Djébar's vigorous description of the suffocation of Algerian tribes in the caves of Dahra mountain. The way Vera describes the oppressed women in her narrative bear a resemblance to Djébar's style and writing. It is nuanced and ambiguous. Her writing is shaped by a sad mood of writing in the description of frustrated women and evocative language to depict colonial atrocities committed against the Algerians.

The perspective offered by Vera in *The Stone Virgins* is analogous with Djébar's standpoint in *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* towards the emancipation of subaltern women. Vera's aim is to provide a discursive space for the enunciation of subaltern histories, which have been silenced in dominant socio-political discourse in Zimbabwe like

her protagonists Thenjiwe and Nonceba. In this respect, Sofia Lucy Kostelac asserts that Vera's work embodies the effort to clear a space for potential communication between subaltern groups and the dominant systems which exclude them or, as Vera herself has phrased it, to [mediate] between people who are unable to speak, like women, and people who should be listening (Kostelac, 2006: 41).

As it is the case with Djébar, the deployment of the poetic language in Vera's text is also given a certain feminine elegance which empowers women. The subversive style in her narrative creates and forms a space of agency for the colonized women to negate western critical thought and male-dominated society that claim their inability to develop an understanding of their own subjectivity or identity as women. In this respect, Spivak argues:

Can men theorise feminism, can whites theorise racism, can the bourgeois theorise revolution, and so on. It is only when the former groups theorise that the situation is politically intolerable. Therefore it is crucial that the members of these groups are kept vigilant about their assigned subject positions.
(Spivak, 1987:253)

Vera keeps vigilant when she locates gendered and sexual subjects in her narrative. She destabilizes the traditional model that keeps the male dominant. Her technique is based on the careful expression of a female subjectivity experienced through consciousness expressed in a poetic language that speaks to women rather than men. By positing subjectivity while simultaneously disclosing its unstable and heterogeneous qualities, poetic language is strategically placed to negotiate the otherwise inscrutable condition of subalternity (Kostelac, 2006:38).

The power of poetic words gives women the possibility to intercept their erased subjectivity for a substantial re-inscription into history. Like in Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, subjectivity is experienced and expressed through self-consciousness. In Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, women's self-consciousness expresses their experienced

subjectivity. In its turn, this experienced subjectivity is marked by textual voice speaking of the effects of colonial violence and nationalist oppressive authoritarianism.

Just as Djebbar's heroine Cherifa, Vera's protagonist Nonceba is aware of colonial oppression and postcolonial injustice. She is aware of the criminality of Sibaso's acts. Vera makes of her female characters women whose silenced subjectivity moves from passivity and invisibility to activity. Women become able to view themselves and perceive their values and meanings in the external world.

Female subjectivity in Vera's *The Stone Virgins* is experienced through powerful language. It enables them to voice their understanding of the tyranny exerted over them by the oppressive government of ZAPU, and powerfully acknowledges their self-being, completely independent from gender discrimination.

Referring to Judith Butler's assertion, the use of the individual voice 'I' expresses the unity of being based on the principle of equal access. In this respect, Butler states:

The practical task that women face in trying to establish subjectivity through speech depends on their collective ability to cast off the reifications of sex imposed on them which deform them as partial or relative beings. Since this discarding follows upon the exercise of a full invocation of "I," women *speaking* their way out of their gender [...]. In speaking, the "I" assumes the totality of language and, hence, speaks potentially from all positions [...] Here the coherent assertion of the "I" presupposes not only the totality of language, but the unity of being.

(Butler, 2002: PP.149-150).

Yvonne Vera employs individual subjectivity which in its turn reflects the collective ability of Zimbabwean women to experience and express their subjectivity and identity. The writer joins her individual voice to Zimbabwe peasant women who fought in the liberation war to create a collective voice which speaks out the silencing mechanism of male domination in a way that they may be heard, and therefore, regain their position effaced in the official history.

She forges a unity of being in her articulation of the individual voice 'I' in her narrative. This unity of being is independent and procures equal rights for Zimbabwean

women to live out of the discriminating mechanism of colonial oppression and nationalist subjugation. Through Vera's self-subjectivity, solidarity within feminine community is established. Women's solidarity contributes to social, historical, and political dynamics of Zimbabwe collective identity. As Vera writes:

This is the end of creation, the beginning of war [...] Time's shadow: life's residue. I blow life's remains off my hand like a prediction. On my hand is a dark melody, shapes that curl and twist into thin marks, like tiny words on a page, a handwritten pamphlet, some spilled ink on ancient rock. I wipe my palm clean. Our country needs this kind of hero [Sibaso] who has a balm for his own wounds carried between lip and tongue, between thumb and forefinger, between the earth and the soles of his feet

(Vera, 2003: pp. 83-84).

The above paragraph sends us back to a similar one in Djébar's compassion and solidarity for her protagonist Cherifa when saying "Cherifa! I wanted to recreate your flight: there, in the isolated field" (Djébar, 1985:142). In her turn, Vera generates a powerful solidarity in the community of women through the narrator's subjectivity. In her text, solidarity is created with a poetic style, full of complex metaphorical configurations, sensual tone and beautiful language. This solidarity powerfully exhibits the brutality of women's subjugation and merely enhances their unity.

She draws on the common experience that Zimbabwean women share in both colonial and post-independence times. The particularity of this common shared experience is that it is shaped by sexual violence and murder. In her novel, the elaborated scenes of sexual violence are voiced through women's consciousness. Vera describes the terror of Nonceba when Sibaso rapes her sister Thenjiwe:

I am waiting. I am alive, now, a companion to his every thought. I am breathing. My temples, beating. She closes her eyes and her body listens as his movements pursue each of her thoughts. She breathes. Harm. He [Sibaso] enters her body like a vacuum. She can do nothing to save herself [...] He holds her body like a bent stem. He draws her waist into the curve of his arm. She is molded into the shape of his waiting arm—a tendril on a hard rock

(Vera, 2003:68).

Another similarity with Djébar is Vera's feminine language. The specificity of this kind of language is that it expresses and strengthens women's revolt. Nonceba says "I am waiting, I am alive, now" (Ibid). For the writer, if Nonceba subverts her silenced subjectivity, she comes to voice, and therefore, gains her place in history. Nonceba's conscious evolution follows the same pattern as Djébar's protagonist Cherifa. Vera's female characters also move from silence to action through the power of the words by which their consciousness is expressed. Throughout the novel, Vera as Djébar proceeds in the liberation of women through the coming to voice. She marks their presence as independent beings from sexual and gendered practices. Vera writes:

During the brief cease-fire, I lived with four thousand soldiers in one camp. I could tell the difference between each man, whose fear was the greatest. Four thousand soldiers with their ammunition laid down. I did not surrender. I did not fight to please another (Ibid: 141).

As Djébar links Algerian women to the colonial memory and post-colonial transition in her country, so does Vera express the sense of women's being in relation to Zimbabwean history. The ways in which her language in the text shapes subjectivities represents the positions of women in transition from colonialism and resistance to postcolonial tyranny. Subjectivity intervenes to form a site of experience for the female being, where women confront the colonial regime and patriarchal social structures and institutions. Emphasis is laid on the difficulty of representing the female subject position in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Vera emphasizes the conceptions of Zimbabwean identity with the singular voice "I" which works to explore the interaction between the ways of conceiving the writer's subjectivity and the collective identity of Zimbabwean women. The latter are continually caught in the process of renegotiating their relations with social imperatives. Rather than remaining blind to male dominating patterns.

In *The Stone Virgins*, female characters are not portrayed from the outside. They are taken inside their minds by the technique of stream of consciousness marked by dialogue with self in expressive vocabulary. The mode of expressing subjectivities as the individual voice 'I' invokes the collective being of the female community, a sisterhood freed from sexual differentiation.

Spivak states that "the work of the subaltern studies group offers a theory of change [...] and the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the 'subaltern' " (Spivak, 1987: 197). Vera's poetic language elaborated with imagery of women constructs a new conception of postcolonial female subject resistance. This new conception is forged to privilege female agency by. Vera's lyricism brings out a solid and visible conception of a new female subject, positioned in harmonious relation with the social and traditional modes in Zimbabwe that determine Zimbabwean identity.

As the reinstatement of the female subject position within the post-colonial nation in Algeria is at the centre of preoccupation of Djébar in her novel, so does Vera reintegrate women as full citizens in the new independent Zimbabwe. The reconstruction of a new female subject requires the confrontations of colonialism and neocolonial impositions. The first point of view of narration is not restricted to a singular character but to a plurality of female characters who show agency in the past history and present time in Zimbabwe. We find in the concluding pages of Vera's novel the invention of a new female subject who speaks from a commonality of gender interests. Nonceba, though harmed by the nationalist postcolonial reconstruction policy is conceiving a new way and sense of life in which she becomes free by her powerful desire to accept reconciliation.

Unlike Djébar's novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* which ends with women's cries and revolts, Vera's *The Stone Virgins* ends with reconciliation. Reconciliation with Zimbabwe is necessary for Vera because women as gendered subjects can reintegrate their place in the community. They can live in harmony with the external societal world. The

depiction of Nonceba walking free in the city of Bulawayo is a new conception of female postcolonial subject. Though “her pain is higher than the hills. This she knows. Her grief. This she accepts” (Vera, 2003:140). The case is different with Djébar who features characters who do not seem to have done with revolt.

Though Djébar and Vera inscribe new position for women in their novels with the elaboration of creative language and poetic style intertwined with subjectivity, both have a different conception of inscribing female subjects in the post-independent nation. Reconciliation is necessary for the new reconstructed position asserted to Vera’s female character in postcolonial Zimbabwe whereas for Djébar women are still in state of revolt in the process of post-war reintegration policy.

Ultimately, Vera uses the colonial language to project a powerful female subjectivity, generating in her text the possibility of a new situation for women in the concluding pages of her novel. Vera says: “I return to the bush. I want to risk my mind, to be implicated in my own actions, having taken a personal resolve against a personal harm” (Ibid). The power of these words in her texts creates a new atmosphere full of desire to live in a new nation free from ethnic discrimination and sexual differentiation. The rehabilitation of Zimbabwean women’s active roles in Zimbabwean history climaxes with a hopeful change in the future.

However, as it is argued in this chapter, though Djébar’s and Vera’s novels end differently, their texts are located within theoretical debates of postcolonial modes of subjectivation which question the ethical limitations of representing oppressed subjects in the Third World, especially the status and the position of the female subject. Moreover, *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, just as *The Stone Virgins* stand as models for Spivak’s insistence to go beyond clear transparent language in the representation of the subaltern. Djébar’s and Vera’s sophisticated writing provides possible transition toward the registration of subalterns’ stories and particularly the re-appropriation of feminine agency.

Their writings intervene in the fields of feminist postcolonial fiction by suggesting a critique of written history, marked by the grand male narratives of patriarchy and colonialism.

Conclusion

The novels of Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera set out the importance of words in rebellion against male and colonial domination. Through Spivak's discussion concerning the predicaments involved in representing subalternity, we have shown that the complex ways in which Djébar and Vera use their language are part and parcel of a negotiating dynamics caused by the discursive dilemma posed by the subaltern subject-position. Their poetic writing is involved in a process of opening a discursive space for subalternity, which acknowledges its complex subject-positions.

We have also tried to show that the poetic language though complex and sophisticated is able to unsettle the silencing mechanisms of hegemonic discourse. In both writers' novels, there is a deep concern with the cultivation of language in ways that can overturn the silencing mechanisms of patriarchy, colonialism and authoritarian nationalism. The two feminist writers seek to develop a critical vocabulary capable of enunciating the experiences of brutalised minorities in the Third World, whose histories have been effaced in dominant historiography. They employ poetic narrative strategy blending historical accounts, autobiography and the lives and experiences of ordinary Algerian and Zimbabwean women. They seek the transformation of silence into language and action.

The study has revealed that the deployment of complex and ambivalent language by the two authors is tied mostly to their use of the language of the colonizer. However, their mastery of colonial language is engaged, in a way or another, with postcolonial feminist discourse that denounces colonial occupation and patriarchal domination. The writers use the language of the oppressor as a means of improvement for their female counterparts.

The linguistic reconstruction of female subject position undertaken by Djébar and Vera in their texts subverts female subjectivity to resist the colonial occupation and neo-colonial domination. Hence, their subjectivity is involved as an expressive site of their female experience. The feminine language promoted in a poetic style in their texts is used to cover sensitive issues. It unravels the painful stories of ordinary women located within some historical accounts in the history of Zimbabwe and Algeria. To reach feminine essence, female subjectivity is used in both authors' texts to reinforce the reader's understanding of the colonial and social oppression endured by women in colonial and post-colonial times through a specific cultivation of elegant feminine language bladed by sensuality and musicality to bring subaltern women into voice.

In similar ways, Djébar's and Vera's literary techniques and use of colonial language in their writings empower the voicing of the subaltern suppressed in the historical accounts of the liberation war. Language for the two feminist writers is a means of emancipation for the disempowered and silenced women. It is effective in the sense that it holds a powerful subversion of colonial and patriarchal subjugation of women.

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Chapter Three

Writing the Postcolonial Female Body:

Women and the Discourse of History

Introduction

In the first chapter, we have examined the contexts in which Assia Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* have been produced. Emphasis has been put on the writers' use of some historical facts and biographical elements as backgrounds of their work of fiction. We have said that these historical events and names of historical places and organisations are signposts. To these cited facts, they added imaginative treatments by introducing some fictional events and characters. We have demonstrated that Vera and Djébar communicate political truth through their romancing of historical moments. In the second chapter, we have investigated the authors' deployment of complex language and poetic style to reflect on their life experiences and at the same time voice the subaltern stories.

In the present chapter, we shall analyse Assia Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* with reference to the female body as a site of inscription of gendered alternative history. We argue that there exists a common theme in the works of Djébar and Vera which, is the theme of the female body, tortured by the colonizer and marked by the language of the ex-colonizer in postcolonial context. The question of women's bodies and women's sexuality is a highly loaded one. Reading the works of the two postcolonial feminists, the exploration of the female body as a site of territory for a contesting history will be done from a postcolonial perspective developed by Spivak.

Our primary concern is to trace the effect of politics of body in Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Vera's *The Stone Virgins*. The study focuses on historical and political ideas communicated through the construction of women's physicality. Djébar and Vera communicate the history of Zimbabwe and Algeria through women's body with which they may speak and reinscribe themselves in the history of their countries. Both writers address the issue of violence done to the body of woman in colonial and

postcolonial times. They reclaim women's history, unseen by the official discourses through the technique of "writing the body". Our analysis of Djébar's and Vera's novels relies on exploring Spivak's essays of *Can the Subaltern Speak?*(1985) and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), which unravels the disempowered and silenced voices of the past, effaced from the official history that both Djébar and Vera project to recover by the construction of female body in their selected narratives.

Discussion

Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera unite the discourses of history and land with the female body. These discourses are expressed through details of sexual violence and other types of oppression that the women of the colonized nation had endured. The two authors communicate the history of Zimbabwe and Algeria through women's body as a site of women's oppression and resistance with which they may speak and reconstruct the history of their countries. They focus on the historical and political ideas communicated through the metaphoric construction of women's body to privilege women's status.

To begin with, Djébar strives to inscribe Algerian women and to make them visible through their body. This body, which is unknowable, is at the very centre of concern with women's presence and appearance. It is often overprotected, and denied from any visible corporeity in public space, and often controlled by the male gaze.

Djébar takes political themes and personalizes them through telling the different stories of resistance and the physical attacks against the female body. Spivak asserts in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* that "within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced [...]. In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, 1988, 287). Djébar's novel presents the Algerian women as doubly

marginalized through the presentation of female body experiencing subjugation by the colonial invader and the patriarchal regime in the post-war reintegration policy. The female body in its various parts emerges from the shadow of man's predominant presence.

The narrator contradicts colonial production which excludes women from the official history of national independence by validating their corporality. She reveals what was formerly silenced and excluded from representation; the participation of Algerian women in resistance struggles against the French colonization of Algeria through women's body resisting colonial abuse. Furthermore, the author politicizes the Algerian women's body to present us an alternative reading of Algeria's past. In this respect, she says: "the haughty matron's voice and body gave me a glimpse of the source of all our sorrows: like half-obliterated signs which we spend the rest of our lives trying to decipher" (Djebar, 1985: 145). The narrator in this case becomes a decipherer and interpreter of a long-forgotten language. Her reading is an archeological reading.

The narrator of *Fantasia* assumes the role of a historian studying the lives of her subaltern counterparts. She gives records of peasant women who fought in the Algerian resistance and have been silenced by male domination in a way that they may regain presence, a presence erased from the official history. Spivak asserts that "the production of historical accounts is the discursive narrativation of the events", and "A historian confronts a text of counterinsurgency or gendering where the subaltern has been represented. He unravels the text to assign a new subject-position to the subaltern, gendered or otherwise" (Spivak, 1987: 241). *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* is also archeological research into the narratives of women's political prison experience and torture that the author undertakes to expose the amorality of the colonial forces (Grace, 2007: 79). The narrator's versions of women's historiography in several contexts are rewritten to include women's role in the war of 1830s and the bloody struggle of

independence in the 1950s, perceived and revealed through women's body. The narrator's focus is on the common experience of women and solidarity between them, through the enduring harm done to their bodies caused by colonial oppression. Djébar states:

Cherifa's voice embraces bygone days. Tracing the fear, the defiance, the intoxication in that forgotten place. Outbursts of a recalcitrant prisoner in the sun-seared camp. The voice recounts? Scarcely that. It digs out the old revolt [...] Strange little sister, whom henceforth I leave veiled or whose story I now transcribe in a foreign tongue. Her body and her face are once more engulfed in shadow as she whispers her story— a butterfly displayed on a pin with the dust from its crushed wing staining one's finger

(Djébar,1985:141).

The narrator in *Fantasia* tells the story of Cherifa put under the veil. She recounts the French colonial atrocities of physical attacks against the female body in the 1950s war of independence from a woman's point of view. Her body was unveiled and veiled again against her will. She represents her community bent on preserving, as her name suggests, her honour. Abandoning her family and education, Cherifa joins the men fighting in the mountains at the early age of 13, working as a nurse and as agent of liaison to the FLN in the war of liberation. She is captured by the French, imprisoned and tortured. Her body which experienced this torture was put under the veil in order not to dirty tribal honour. In the name of honour, Charaf in Arabic, Algerian men justified the veiling of her raped body, excluding her in this way from history.

The heroine challenges the colonial authority preferring captivity to the betrayal of her fellow freedom fighters. Djébar gives an instance of women's heavy sacrifices in the national struggle through the resistance with her body against colonial physical and moral violence. Cherifa shows her scars and wounds. She is not afraid to speak out the violence done to her body. To the French torturers who are interrogating her, she responds:

'Why were you fighting?'. 'For what I believe in, for my ideas'. 'And now, seeing you're a prisoner?', so what?'[...] 'What have you gained?'. 'I've

gained the respect of my compatriots and my own self-respect! [...]. My conscience is clear!' (Ibid:140).

The reconstruction of the female body presents an interesting examination of colonial and post-colonial ideas about land and history. Cherifa's testimony of torture by the French illustrates the case of all Algerian women who suffered in their own bodies the colonial physical violence. Her body carries the marks proving women's presence as active agents in the liberation process. The novel validates women's role and active participation through female corporality located in the different historical events in Algeria. Violation of women's bodies does not stop at independence since those same bodies were put in prison again in the form of obligatory veiling in order to protect men's honour.

In the context of Algerian society, the presence of woman in the public space is often unacceptable without the veil. Djébar elaborates the concept of wearing the veil for women in the Algerian society. The veil is the symbolic representation of Algerian women's body, which is viewed differently by many writers. In a discussion of the veil, Amira Jarmakani, in her book *Imagining Arab Womanhood* (2008) asserts that contemporary representations of veiled women cast them as categorically oppressed, metaphorically implying the brutal patriarchal system under which they supposedly live (Jarmakani, 2008: 8).

In this sense, the Algerian veiled women expose and insert a great dilemma for the presentation of the female body. The veiled body of Arab woman often seems doomed to be represented as the appearance of a ghost, that is to say, that her body is present, but it is supposed to remain invisible to men. The presence of the veiled women is simultaneously anonymous and concealed. It is at the very centre of contradiction; it is often relegated to representation as a ghost without any corporeal reality (Rocca, 2003: VII). In this respect, Assia Djébar, writes:

Yes, there is a difference between the veiled women, a difference that the eye of the foreigner can't discern; he thinks them all identical—phantoms roaming the streets, staring, examining, surveying all about them; but they possess an inherent streak of inequality (Djebar, 1985:203).

The representation of the veiled women as a ghost as it is quoted in the above passage, suggests the idea of lack of corporality. In the name of protection from the man's gaze, the veil reduces the woman's presence into a spirit and a phantom. For Frantz Fanon,

The veil covers the body and disciplines it, tempers it, at the very time when it experiences its phase of greatest effervescence. The veil protects, reassures, isolates. One must have heard the Algerian women or have analyzed the dream content of certain recently unveiled women to appreciate the importance of the veil for the body of the women

(Fanon, 1965:59).

The body of Algerian women experiences a great difficulty where it is unveiled, because it is not accustomed to involvement with the external world. On the one hand, the veiled body symbolizes women's patriotism since it protects them from the French colonizer's gaze that reduces Algeria to its women. Veiled women are the upholders of the traditional standards of the nation whose honour consists in not being seen. On the other hand, the veiled body brings women under male control, subjugates them, by making them invisible.

The Algerian women who participated and aligned themselves with the nationalists in the colonial time against the French conquest of their country find themselves imprisoned within the patriarchal codes which attribute to them domestic roles and passive functions in the post-war reintegration policy.

Spivak asserts that feminism needs to use the material histories and the experiences of 'Third World' women in its description of women's struggle against oppression "for it marks the subject's empty place in that process without a subject which is history and political economy" (Spivak, 1988: 276). Djebar depicts the experience of growing up female in traditional Arab society. When a girl reaches the age of puberty, she wears the

veil and loses her freedom. She is often restricted to home tasks because of the exigency to safeguard her chastity and the family honour.

The aim of the feminist writer is to explore Arab women's ways of life, current traditions, and Algerian cultural thought. She offers a rich cultural encounter in which the complex world of Arab women, as seen by some of these women themselves is unveiled. As we have already stated in the previous chapter, Djébar escaped from being trapped by the wear of veil as her sisters' counterparts. However, in her novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, she asserts that she did not realize by this assumption she was putting on a symbolic veil and had passed the age of puberty without being buried in the harem like her girl cousins (Djébar, 1985:127).

To such a point, Djébar's writing is highly autobiographical and is focused on personal struggle against the invisibility of women in the context of being veiled, and re-proving, thus, the socio-cultural environments (Moore, 2008: 4). Djébar's mastery of the colonial language enables her emancipation from domestic domains counting her body's release. She escapes from being veiled through the act of writing and was allowed to occupy a prestigious place reserved to male space. But she remains veiled by conventions that inscribe Algerian women within the socio-cultural traditions that exclude them from self-expression and restrict their freedom. In her novel, love letters received in French, for example, are described as a "dagger threatening" her (Djébar, 1985:126).

However, the veiled Female body in Djébar's novel inscribes also resistance for women. It is a site of resistance to the colonial dismantling of national culture because it safeguards and keeps the proper Algerian traditional and cultural traits. The narrator shows the role of the veiled body when women confronts the foreign other. She depicts the power of the veiled women to resist and their ability to react with the eyes of the outsider. Djébar says:

Should a man venture to describe my eyes, my laughter or my hands, should I hear him speak of me in this way, I risked losing my composure; then I immediately felt I had to shut him out

(Ibid).

The narrator makes women move from passive to active invisibility with the body expression of their reaction. According to Spivak, this is made to “establish conditions where the prisoners themselves would be able to speak” (Spivak, 1988: 274). The feminist writer makes women’s bodies active, able to express their desire and feelings. By, doing so, Djebbar surrounds her female characters with conditions that enable them to move from silence to speech. With their body desire, women are active, have a voice and are able to challenge the French historiography’s attempts to ignore the revolutionary acts of Algerian women.

Djebbar narrates the past-colonial events from Algerian prospects in which women are rendered active agents with their bodies reacting against colonial occlusion. She also, breaks the traditional views about women’s passivity to create a new space for female expression in which women can be released from male gaze and express themselves without patriarchal restrictions, as her heroine in the novel *Cherifa* has converted.

Moreover, Djebbar uses the female body and ties it to the imperial charge. The novel begins with the re-creation of the French landing in Algiers in 1830. Djebbar uses figurative language intermingled with history in order to construct an erotic female body for the city of Algiers located in the same time and space of colonial conquest. By doing so, she positions women warriors struggling against colonization. The narrator compares the city of Algiers to a veiled woman. The veil functions as a barrier between the female body and the colonizer’s gaze. In this respect, she writes:

As the majestic fleet rends the horizon the impregnable City sheds her veils and emerges, a wraith-like apparition, through the blue-grey haze

(Djebbar, 1985: 6).

Algiers is feminized, humanized and represented as irresistible and vulnerable woman. The city becomes a woman exposed to danger and conquest by colonial invaders. Djébar cites a feminized Algeria as an object for colonial desire. She inscribes the first confrontation of the colonial conquest to Algerian women. She contrasts the historical accounts which deny their role in the Algerian resistance. According to the gendered discourse of colonialism, the colonized country is viewed as a woman, **an available female body**, and women of the colonized land symbolically represent the country (Lutsyshyna, 2006: 27).

The writer in *Fantasia* sexualizes the country of Algeria, seeing it as eroticized and violated woman. The country is seen as a “woman”, and Algerian women were viewed as available objects. She states: “The first confrontation. The city, a vista of crenelated roofs and pastel hues, makes her first appearance in the role of ‘Oriental Woman’, motionless, mysterious” (Djébar. 1985: 6).

The imagery used to describe Algiers suggests the colonisers’ desire for sexual domination. The colonial conquest of the city of Algeria is figured as the metaphorical rape of woman. Spivak argues that “when the woman’s body is used as a metaphor for a nation (or anything else) feminists correctly object to the effacement of the materiality of that body” (Spivak, 1987:257).

Thus, Djébar’s description of the city of Algiers as an erotic female body has an implicit meaning. On the one hand, the act of “writing the body” for Djébar becomes a way of conceptualising the history of Algerian woman whose participation is effaced in the colonial annals. On the other hand, it speaks out the violence done to their bodies to challenge the domestic patriarchy inscribed by traditional Muslim society that restricts women’s status.

The Algerian first confrontation with the French conquest is attributed to women. Djébar privileges them and shows their capacity for resistance by opposing the viewing of the colonizer. The returning gaze of the Algerian woman from the French colonizer is a

kind of resistance for Algerians. Women become agents who resist and confront the colonial conquest. The narrator establishes the capacity for resistance “to the cavalcade of screams and carnage which fill the ensuing decades” (Djebar, 1985: 8). In this respect, she writes:

But who are to be the performers? On which side shall we find the audience? [...] Thousands of watchful eyes there are doubtless estimating the number of vessels. Who will pass on the number? Who will write of it? Which of all these silent spectators will live to tell the tale when the encounter is over? Amable Matterer is at his post[...] he gazes at the city which returns his gaze [...] I, in my turn, write, using his language [...]. I wonder, just as the general staff of the fleet must have done, whether the Dey Hussein has gone up on to the terrace of his Kasbah, telescope in hand

(Ibid,PP.6-7).

For Djebar, the gaze plays a crucial role in women’s confrontation with the colonizer. Jenny Murray states that Djebar seems to share the same view articulated by the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha according to whom the refusal to look at one’s captor is to refuse to acknowledge his existence (Murray, 2008: 59). In Djebar’s novel, the colonizer “gazes at the city which returns his gaze” (Djebar, 1985: 7). The gaze of the colonialist represents a desire to possess the ‘other’ and the city returning her gaze is a reaffirmation of women’s resistance during the colonial conquest. The confrontation of the French conquest is marked by the female body rejecting the colonial gaze. This rejection comes from Djebar’s desire to recover the memory of women’s bravery and resistance skipped from history and literature.

The narrator gives voice and sets conditions for her gendered subaltern to resist colonial oppression. Women are not passive; they regard the viewers just as the foreign viewer regards them. Djebar asserts that “the Impregnable City confronts them [colonizers] with its many invisible eyes” (Ibid). The articulation of the different parts of the female body in Djebar’s novel is made to voice women’s experience in the colonial time. Her female characters resist through their body reactions, and at the same time,

break the silence in a way that makes them free from colonial and patriarchal representations of gender.

For Yvonne Vera, the theme of the body is also one of the central ones in her novel *The Stone Virgins*. Traditionally, women in Zimbabwe have been discouraged from discovering their bodies and writing about them. Just as Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, Vera's *The Stone Virgins* begins in colonial time. The female body is also represented as a site of struggle and desire for freedom. In this respect, Vera writes:

These women are the freest women on earth [...]. They have no desire to be owned, hedged in, claimed, but to be appreciated, to be loved till an entire sun sets, to be adored like doves[...]. They want to know an absolute joy with men who carry that lost look in their eyes
(Vera, 2003: 54).

By Thenjiwe's sexual desire for her lover Cephas, the narrator figures the sexual experience that takes place in the colonial time as the incessant desire of Zimbabwean women to speak and express themselves. Through the figure of lovers, women experience their freedom physically in the first section of the novel during the 1950s. However, Vera inscribes death, rape, and mutilation in the second section set in the late 1980's. The corporal body emerges as a site of oppression and violence.

Vera's representation of the female body as a debased image of a destroyed women resembles to Djébar's depiction of Cherifa's terrorised body in her novel *Fantasia*. In a similar way, Vera as Djébar politicizes personal stories of physical damage of the female characters to communicate the history of her country. Individuals in her work reflect broader problems in Zimbabwe; they are sites of colonial oppression, subjugation, and in state of war. The historical impact of these problems on women in particular draws her focus on the silencing of women through physical attacks against the female body (Rae Root, 2008: II).

As Djebbar retrieves the female body and intertwines it with the discourse of history in her novel. Vera also retrieves women's corporality and links it to the colonial past of Zimbabwe. Through details of sexual violence and woman's damaged body, she also elucidates how colonial oppression has prompted a new crisis for the post-independent nation, especially for the reintegration of women in Zimbabwean society. In this respect, Paul Zeleza, points out that Vera's novels are deeply embedded in the ravaged history of Zimbabwe. They explore how narratives of the past can lead to destructive exclusions and violent repercussions in the present. With a particular focus on the historically entrenched tendency to allegorise the female body as native land (Zeleza, 2007:9).

According to the analysis made in the first chapter, Zimbabwean women are doubly marginalized as the history of women and the history of the colonized. Even in the post-colonial period, when the country embraced its independence, women were included in the historical accounts of Zimbabwe's liberation war as domestic and passive agents in the struggle for independence. Zimbabwean nation has ignored women as active actors in the liberation process and inseparable part of its history. Spivak's examination of subaltern women in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1985) is :“within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the tract of sexual difference is doubly effaced. [...] as object of colonialist historiography and as subject insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” (Spivak, 1988: 287). The theorist makes the case of India and concludes that the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read because the voice and agency of subaltern women are so embedded in Hindu patriarchal codes of moral conduct and the British colonial representation of subaltern women as victims of a barbaric Hindu culture that they are impossible to recover (Morton, 2004:64).

Like Djebbar, Vera also expresses the double marginalization women have experienced as gendered and colonized subjects. Women in their novels endure the double marginalisation that Spivak has argued about Indian women. Vera's *The Stone Virgins* is

full of detailed violence and rape committed against women's bodies. Metaphorically, the damaged body of women marks the terror of racism, colonial possession of native land and the great deception of postcolonial nationalist's reconstruction. In this respect, Vera writes:

The women who return from the bush arrive with a superior claim of their own. They define the world differently. They are fighters, simply, who pulled down every barrier and entered the bush, yes, like men. But then they were women and said so, and spoke so. They made admissions that resembled denials (Vera, 2003:56).

The Subaltern in Vera's work is women, they have fought just like men in the colonial struggle for independence, and they want to be recognized equally for their efforts in the Zimbabwe war of independence. Vera's protagonists resemble to that of Djubar because they are traumatized, violated and often controlled by the male gaze. Vera says: "A man rests his folded arms on the table. His fingers taper down, his hands slack; the floor is near. His gaze on this woman, on this skirt, and these knees, is solid" (Ibid: 9). She makes of their body an allegory of the deceived Zimbabwe which continues to suffer from the authoritarian nationalist discourse.

The narrator uses metaphors of the body of female characters, in particular to show the continuity of women's oppression after of the liberation struggle. Thenjiwe and Nonceba are not privileged to speak in their society. They are silenced by tribal restrictions and victims of sexual violence during the Zimbabwe civil war in 1980's. Spivak asserts that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, 1988: 287). Nonceba says "closed, sound does not travel out [...]. We heard nothing outside our own suppressed voices; we were not heard" (Vera, 2003: 100). She describes her heroines as being under the same circumstances argued by Spivak for "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak" (Spivak, 1988:307).

To understand Vera's conception of female body, we should refer to Spivak's analysis of the female body in her essay *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*

(1987). In her analysis, she refers to the Bengali language writer Mahasweta Devi's short story of the *Breast Giver*. Spivak offers a portrayal of a subaltern woman's through the abused and sick body of Jashoda in Devi's short story. Her body stands as a painful reminder of the class and gender inequalities that continue to divide India, despite the emancipatory promises made by the ruling political elite in the name of decolonization and democracy. Spivak asserts that Jashoda's cancerous breast is signifier of the oppression of the gendered subaltern (Spivak, 1987:267). Devi's story articulates the history of subaltern women. The decay of Jashoda's brutalised maternal body highlights the failure of Indian nationalism to emancipate lower-class and subaltern women (Morton, 2004: 8).

Vera makes of *The Stone Virgins* a story relevant in many ways to that of Mahasweta Devi's *The Breast Giver* version. She reveals the unspeakable events in the turbulent times before and after the liberation war in Zimbabwe. The story is set in Bulawayo in the village Kezi. It tells about two sisters, Thenjiwe and Noceba, two female guerrillas who fought in the liberation war of 1980's, and witnessed the aftermath of postcolonial disorder. The first of whom is murdered and the second raped and mutilated by the ex-guerrilla combatant, Sibaso. In Kezi, ZAPU soldiers burn the Thandabantu Store. They kill the village civilian and the store keeper in the pretext of supporting the dissidents. The image of the destroyed body of Vera's protagonists is analogous with Djbar's Cherifa. Women's damaged bodies signify in both novels the oppression of the gendered subaltern.

According to Spivak, "Mahasweta's text might show in many ways how the narratives of nationalism have been and remain irrelevant to the life of the subordinate. The elite culture of nationalism participated and participates with the colonizer in various ways" (Ibid: 245). In this sense, one may consider Vera's story, though a fiction, as a faithful representation of the ZANU dominated government rule that the novel associates with killings, rapes, torture, and the burnings of villages. These charged images of the

newly betrayed Zimbabwe are presented through the figurative imagery of Thenjiwe's and Nonceba's destroyed body.

As our study in the first chapter has revealed the nationalist defective campaign after independence, now effaced from the contemporary history of Zimbabwe, Vera's novel is taboo-breaking story. The post-colonial oppressive rule of ZAPU is revealed through women's bodies. Grace Musila argues that the body is often absent from discussions on dismantling oppressive structures; the irony here being in the way the body, which is often the experiential site of both oppression and acts of resistance, has its experiences elided in discourses attempting to emancipate it (Musila, 2007: 50).

Devi's protagonist Jashoba is parable of India after decolonization, the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her (Spivak, 1987: 244). Vera's text is full of horrific events inspired by Zimbabwean history especially, the acts of violence and murder committed against women. The narrator recovers the history of her country by the metaphor of woman's body. Like Djébar, Vera comes from a generation which incorporated in her literary imaginations disdain for colonialism and distrust of nationalism. She tackles Zimbabwe taboos, violence of rape, and the terror of racism.

Vera's protagonists in the novel, Nonceba and Thenjiwe are traumatized, assaulted in Kezi, and always enduring the trauma of gender discrimination. They fight to reach freedom which they often realize in the finality of death. In Spivak's explanation of Mahasweta Devi's story, the tragic narrative of Jashoda, a subaltern woman whose body stands as a metaphor for the new indigenous bureaucracy abuses and exploitations exhorted by the Indian nationalists after decolonisation (Ibid:257). Vera's fiction personifies historical events, and presents women's bodies enduring the post-colonial violence. In *The Stone Virgins*, the exploitation and abuse of the body of Nonceba and Thenjiwe by Sibaso stand as a painful reminder of gender discrimination in Zimbabwe

despite the supposed social and political assurances made by the post-colonial government in the name of decolonisation and democracy. In this respect, Vera writes:

He thinks of scars inflicted before dying, betrayals before a war, after a war, during a war. Sibaso. He considers the woman in his arms [...]. She is a woman from very far, from long ago [...]. She bears the single solitude of a flame, the shape and form of a painted memory. He thrusts the body to the ground: a dead past. Nonceba falls (Vera, 2003: 78).

In parallel with Djébar's view of the city of Algiers as a woman and an available female body comes Vera's vision in *The Stone Virgins* to inscribe the relations between woman's body and geographical locations intertwined with Zimbabwean history. As she writes: "The corner of a building is felt with the fingers, rough, chipped cement. You approach a corner; you make a turn. This movement defines the body, shapes it in a sudden and miraculous way" (Ibid:11). The writer also asserts that "the body vanishes, from inside out, the inside pouring like powdered dust, the legs a fossil. This is the end of creation, the beginning of war (P. 83).

In Vera's novel spatial bodies, gendered bodies are betrayed by the discourse post-colonial regime. Her novel does the cultural work of fostering memory, constructing a body of memory in the service of realizing a more critical mode of post-coloniality (Baker, 2010: 8). The murder of Thenjiwe and the rape and mutilation of Nonceba are narrated to reveal the extreme hostility that happens in Zimbabwe land. Metaphorically, the personification of Bulawayo city and the village Kezi serves as a mirroring site in the novel. It assigns the aspects of violence that foregrounds both the white colonial conquest and black national enterprise. Vera says that "home is Bulawayo. This side of the city, not the other, their own side separated" (Vera, 2003: 6).

The Stone Virgins focuses on Matabeleland as a region either in Kezi (the village) or Bulawayo (the city). The village Kezi and the city of Bulawayo play major roles in the novel. They are always at some level reflecting colonial conquest, or women's

subjugation. For instance, Vera's description of the village Kezi in which Thenjiwe is murdered and Nonceba mutilated as "a naked cemetery", [...]. "Is this not what everyone is calling Kezi, a naked cemetery where no one is buried and everyone is betrayed? There is no certainty of life, only death" (P. 159). The narrator personalizes the Village Kezi to create a metaphor for Thenjiwe's body raped and mutilated by the dissident guerrilla Sibaso. Kezi to which Vera refers as a 'naked cemetery' is a metaphor of fragile and stripped women, subjugated and betrayed by the nationalist oppressive regime after the liberation war.

The materiality of the city is made through detailed description of its surroundings, corners and buildings. Bulawayo city generates human subjects and is personified. Vera says that the corner of building is felt with the fingers, rough, chipped cement. You approach a corner; you make a turn. This movement defines the body, shapes it in a sudden and miraculous way" (Ibid: 11). The personification of the city buildings as it is figured in Vera's text articulates the different parts of woman's body. The city is a space which embodies women as subjects and defines their body. Vera says that "the movement of their bodies, the memory of their bones, of the places they have been" (P. 91).

The Stone Virgins begins with a panoramic view of the city of Bulawayo. The narrator describes the urban cityscape of the city in intense and specific details. The novel lists the different streets named after prominent colonial figures. Vera offers several human reflexions of the landscape and the city. The first chapter of the novel is solely devoted to Bulawayo. The city mirrors the colonial subjugation of the people of Zimbabwe. Vera says:

You cannot meet inside any of the buildings because this city is divided; entry is forbidden to black men and women; you meet outside buildings, not at doorways, entries, foyers, not beneath arched windows, not under graceful colonnades (P.11).

Vera confines women's bodies to bear the imprint of the triple debilitating structures of traditional patriarchy, the colonial state, and oppositional nationalism (Gunner and Kortenaar, 2007:7). The depiction of the city of Bulawayo in the novel is often personified with the different parts of the female body. The personification of the city serves as a mirror image of colonialism, the politics of nationalist and their traditional ideas of matrimony and control over the female body and its fertility.

Vera makes an implicit association between her female protagonists' damaged bodies and Zimbabwe landscape to show the violent impacts of the war. On the one hand, she offers many hints about the effects of male and female subjugation to colonial authority forms through Nonceba's raped body which is a signifier of colonial conquest of Zimbabwe land. On the other hand, Thenjiwe's decapitated body stands as reminder of the postcolonial annihilation of Matabeleland villagers in 1983 by ZAPU government. The violent sexual scenes in the novel construct an important part in Vera's denunciation of women's oppression. The scene in which Thenjiwe is killed in sight of her sister Nonceba by the dissident war-veteran Sibaso is voiced by Nonceba as follows:

His head is behind Thenjiwe, where Thenjiwe was before, floating in her body; he is in her body. He is floating like a flash of lightning. Thenjiwe's body remains upright while this man's head emerges behind hers, inside it, replacing each of her moments, taking her position in the azure of the sky. He is absorbing Thenjiwe's motions into his own body, existing where Thenjiwe was, moving into the spaces she has occupied (Vera, 2003:73).

As Djébar depicts Algiers as a place of rape and violence, so does Vera inscribe the same depiction to Matabeleland through the sexual violence committed against her female protagonists in Bulawayo. She too genders the landscape as a woman, under the male desiring gaze. The city of Bulawayo in Matabeleland is seen as a woman under colonial subjugation, controlled by the gaze of the colonial master.

The land space is recorded as a female object of masculine desire in which Thenjiwe and Nonceba disapprove Sibaso's presence in it. Referring again to Spivak's assertion that "when the woman's body is used only as a metaphor for a nation (or everything else) feminists correctly object to the effacement of the materiality of that body" (Spivak, 1987: 257). Vera makes significant the nature of the relationship between male abusers and female victims. In fact, Thenjiwe's and Noceba's expression of unwanted desire for Sibaso may be understood as a silent resistance against the atrocities exerted on the Zimbabwe land and a rejection of the rules governing matrimony. Furthermore, this rejection of social rules makes Thenjiwe to allow a strange man to follow her home without hesitation, having no desire for commitment with matrimonial subjection because "all she wants, a man touching her knees and telling her his own pursuit, no matter what it is" (Vera, 2003: 36). Thenjiwe stands in opposition to history, habit, and traditions. Her body desire allows her to disobey the patriarchal codes governing social relations in Zimbabwe by giving "instructions with her body" (Ibid: 40).

As Djébar's novel *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* is tied to the traumatic history of Algeria, Vera's novel also is deeply attached to the ravaged history of Zimbabwe. Vera shows how colonial past has resulted to violent repercussions in post-independent Zimbabwe. In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera makes allusion to Nehanda, the legendary liberation fighter whose bones rising after her death, are figured to denote the continued struggle against the post-colonial administration. Significantly, "Nehanda's bones rising" is a promise that is symbolically dead and represents the betrayal of the idealistic hope that had initially made the liberation war efforts (Gagiango, 2007: 70).

Spivak asserts that "Jashoda is a signifier for subalternity as such, as well a metaphor for the predicament of the decolonized nation-state" (Spivak, 1987: 257). Vera's metaphor of Nehanda is made to rearticulate the significance of independence not as a moment of release, but as a moment of anticipation and instead installs 1981, when the war

begins again, as a defining moment in the national narrative (Bull-Christiansen, 2004:90). The writer says that “the war begins. A curfew is declared. A state of emergency. No movement is allowed. The cease-fire ceases. The bones rising. Rising. Every road out of Bulawayo is covered with soldiers and police, teeming like ants. Roadblocks. Bombs[...]. Memory is lost. Independence ends. Guns rise. Rising anew. In 1981” (Vera, 2003: 65).

It becomes evident that the writer denotes the continuing crisis in her country. In *The Stone Virgins*, the relations between female body and geographical locations are intertwined with Zimbabwean history, particularly from women’s perspective. For Vera, writing the female body is a means for acknowledging women’s experiences and recording their history, as well as validating their position.

Another similarity between Djébar’s and Vera’s novels is that they point to women the rights to live as full citizens by validating their corporality in the texts. Vera frames the corporality of her female protagonists moving through geographical spaces of colonialism to confront the post-colonial crisis in Zimbabwe. She depicts the dissident Sibaso who mutilates Thenjiwe insight of her sister Nonceba. Mutilation and murder are depicted in extreme atrocity in the village Kezi to realize how Zimbabwe is transformed into a place of betrayal and to “a naked cemetery where no one is buried” and “no certainty of life, only death” (Ibid: 159).

Women's bodies in Djébar’s and Vera’s novels are rendered space of harm and damage to denote the continuous subjugation of women that prevents them from getting equal opportunities. Both feminist writers impose the physicality of the body and intertwine it within the contexts of colonialism, nationalist ideologies, and feminist discourses. For this reason, the writers’ centrality of the body and bodily practices are serving as a metaphor in the novel. Female bodies have been deployed as a reflexion of various discourses, as colonialism, the post-colonial Algerian and Zimbabwean nationalism and feminism.

However, Vera goes further than Djébar in her novel when she investigates the healing necessary for the survival of the Zimbabwean post-colonial subject. She tries to reconfigure a national unity free from restrictions and racial discrimination. She relies on the passion that Zimbabwean people feel for their country as her protagonist Nonceba in the novel does by healing her damaged body.

It becomes for the writer significant that women will be given a new chance in the city of Bulawayo. By Nonceba's face re-constructed through plastic surgery, the writer proposes new possibilities for successful reconstruction of a new Zimbabwe by overcoming the past harms interposing Zimbabwean national unity. The reconstruction of Nonceba's female body embodies the healing process which must occur for the restoration of the country and the recovery of its history. Vera says that "time is a necessary for remembering as it is for forgetting" (P.36).

Spivak describes Jashoda's cancerous body in Mahasweta's story *The Breast Giver* as "the sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes"(Mahasweta, quoted in Spivak, 1987: 260). The materiality of Jashoda's cancerous maternal body is thus seen to mock and deform the bourgeois nationalist metaphor of mother India (Morton, 2004:84). What is more, Jashoda's revolting and cancerous maternal body offers a powerful and situated counterpoint to the universal valorization of the clitoral orgasm as a space for women's embodied resistance and political struggle (Ibid).

Vera too makes the city of Bulawayo offer the possibility to transform a violent past that has left its scars on the female body to be healed and corrected. Thus, the corporeal body emerges in the final sections of *The Stone Virgins*, set in post-independence Zimbabwe as being free and optimistic to a point that hope and reconciliation can be embraced. According to Requel Baker "for Vera, the "truth" of postcolonial nationalism is marked by betrayal but a more attentive and caring reading is able to see how much she

loves Zimbabwe, how much she desires for it to live up to the dreams that her generation had for national liberation” (Baker, 2010: 5).

Therefore, to reach reconciliation with the colonial past and gender resistance, Vera ends her novel with the sheltered relationship between Nonceba and Cephas. Sibaso who raped Nonceba represents the nationalist oppressive authoritarianism, and becomes a metaphor of the deceived post-colonial Zimbabwe. When Vera offers a shelter for Nonceba who learns to live and feel protected with the historian Cephas, the writer endeavours to restore the relationships within the nation and makes it possible with Nonceba’s and Cephas’s harmonious cohabitation. She depicts Cephas as the one who restores the history of the harmful past. She states:

He [Cephas] should stick to restorations of ancient kingdoms, circular structures, beehive huts, stone knives, broken pottery, herringbone walls, the vanished pillars in an old world. A new nation needs to restore the past

(Vera, 2003:184)

Cephas and Nonceba’s cohabitation may be interpreted as a metaphor of the national healing process, which is marked not by forgetting the violent past, but by learning to live with hurtful memories. The process of healing the nation continues in Vera’s novel to the point that her female protagonists feel free from subjugation and patriarchal restrictions. Nonceba, the mutilated woman in the concluding pages of the novel is a woman walking freely through the city of Bulawayo.

Vera offers a contrasting view to that of Djebbar in the concluding pages of her novel. Whereas Djebbar’s novel ends with the question of the predicament concerning the reintegration of the Algerian women in the post-war society, Vera puts forward a new vision of the postcolonial female subject as it should be incorporated in the new Zimbabwean nation. This contrasting view is expressed by Nonceba’s autonomy, experienced through the freedom of her body. Having her body free she is liberated and no more subject to the domination of the male gaze. Nonceba is no more afraid of Sibaso, and

“she does not look at him. Her face is turned from him. She is silent, without worth, with nothing precious but time” (Ibid: 69).

The Bulawayo we encounter at the end of *The Stone Virgins* is no longer a place of oppression and discrimination. Although women before filled city space, the city continued to exclude women as there is no place for them. The new Bulawayo becomes that place made for women to live in, and share its celebration after the independence. Nonceba, the survivor of the colonial struggle and the post-independence civil-conflict lives together with Cephas, the lover of her murdered sister to face the wounds of the past. *The Stone Virgins* in its concluding pages locates the post-colonial present in Zimbabwe with the possibility of bringing into realization a united nation through the emancipation of woman’s body.

The conception of post-colonial convalescence through the protagonist’s process of healing is made to cure the Matabeleland Genocide, and the overcoming of the violent colonial past and the post-colonial harms. Unlike Djebbar who focuses only on the presentation of female body as a site of colonial and postcolonial oppression, Vera’s other dimension in the presentation of the female body by connecting it in the final sections of the novel with harmonious relations with the land and nation realize the possibility of reconciliation within Zimbabwean nation.

Cephas’s consolation for Nonceba is made possible through the time. Cephas takes her away from the village Kezi which has become ‘a naked cemetery’ where they can help each other to live and forget their loss of Thenjiwe. Vera says that “time is necessary for remembering as it is for forgetting. Even the smallest embrace of pain needs time larger than a pause; the greatest pause requires an eternity, the greatest hurt a lifetime. A lifetime is longer than eternity” (P.36). For Vera time is necessary to achieve reconciliation. This reconciliation is made by bringing together women and male agency. She uses the shared hopeful desire of man and woman for a new Zimbabwe free from tyranny and fear.

To reach reconciliation, the narrator again depicts Zimbabwean landscape as a feminine erotic woman in different circumstances. Erik Falk asserts that Vera had a particular focus on the historically entrenched tendency to allegorise the female body as native “land,” she schematises both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of the fracturing of the subject (Falk, 2007:9).

Nonceba is figured as a fragile woman in need of Cephass’s protection. Parallel to the village Kezi, it is depicted as such a fragile object which requires a new reconstruction because of the colonial destruction and post-colonial devastation. Vera’s message in the healing Nonceba is to heal Zimbabwe. The narrator articulates on what war does as hurts to men, and thus, is transmitted to women. To understand the reasons going behind Sibaso’s criminal behaviour, Vera depicts Sibaso’s individual experiences in the war. He is a victim of colonial traumatism who later, was refuted in the reintegration of the post-independence civilian life. “He knows how to sleep in the midst of any reality, of several realities. He can inflict harm as easily as he can retrieve it.” (Vera, 2003:81).

Vera provides explanations for the criminal actions of a destroyed man who has lost his humanity and was mainly disillusioned in the post-independence Zimbabwean reintegration policy, and thus, becomes an instrument of war. She wants to facilitate communication within Zimbabwe nation by providing a better understanding of her country’s degeneration and therefore accept reconciliation in the present time.

To facilitate her project of convalescence, Vera in *The Stone Virgins* develops and extends two perceptions of history intertwined with the discourse of female body in the story. According to Erik Falk, Sibaso and Cephass embody two different and oppositional approaches to history. The former, is identified with a history that includes the first *Chimurenga*, the foundational moment of Zimbabwean national identity that is constantly invoked in nationalist rhetoric and historiography. For the latter, history is a way of negotiating a painful past. As a historian, Cephass works in the public sphere to reconstruct

a past that in its inclusiveness differs radically from “patriotic history” (Falk, 2007: PP.90-91).

In this sense, Sibaso reincarnates the period which straightened the fierce ravaged revolt of the Zimbabwe nationalists against the colonial invader inscribed in Vera’s novel on women’s bodies. He also embodies the bloody days that marks Zimbabwe’s post-colonial reconstruction that affected more women as Vera shows them having their body tortured and decapitated. Sibaso is the reproduction of the colonial defective violence in the war of liberation and the result of the unsuccessful nationalist’s post-war reintegration policy. “He has lived to tell many illicit versions of the war, to re-create the war” (Vera, 2003:81).

For Cephas, history requires the necessity of negotiating the colonial past and the post-colonial degeneration in Zimbabwe. He helps Nonceba to heal her damaged body. The debased image of healing Nonceba’s body is parallel with his function as a historian who recollects the past memory of patriotic history because “a new nation needs to restore the past” (Ibid: 184). The concept of curing women’s body is attributed to Cephas. “ His task is to learn to re-create the manner in which the tenderest branches bend, meet, and dry, the way grass folds smoothly over this frame and weaves a nest, the way it protects the cool, liveable places within–deliverance” (Ibid).

Through Vera’s different conception of individuals, she discusses colonial violence and its atrocious impact on Zimbabwean nation inscribed in the female body, and proposes the possibility of building a new nation free from tyranny in the present Zimbabwe with body healing. To this effect, individuals in the novel work as sites of colonial frustration and at the same time as resisting subjects in the new independent country.

Conclusion

Through this chapter we have dealt with Assia Djebar's and Yvonne Vera's common themes as they are embedded in their novels. Both feminist writers share common preoccupation with the presentation of the female body, Land and history which reappear explicitly or implicitly in both texts. In each case, Djebar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Vera's *The Stone Virgins* display a thematic affinity between the two writers. This affinity is shared through the imaginative exploration of history and memory of the past in regard to women's body especially.

We have analyzed the novels of both authors and the way they retrieve the body and its experiences, yet still intertwined with the discourse of history. The female protagonists as pointed out in *The Stone Virgins* and *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* are examples of women sacrificed to male domination. They claim and look to the violence experienced by women, in particular within the grand narratives of liberation.

Through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theories: *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985) and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), we have shown that Djebar's and Vera's novels investigate the corporeal body as an ambivalent site of both oppression and agency. Both of them claim to posit women in the grand narratives of history in their country, Algeria and Zimbabwe, respectively, by metaphorizing the body, as they did in their novels. They impose the materiality of the body and experience it within the contexts of colonialism, oppositional nationalism, and feminist discourses. Women's corporality reflects historical and political ideas through the stories of their individual characters.

The analysis has revealed that female body which serves as a metaphor or allegory in both authors' texts is a site of recovery for Algeria's and Zimbabwe's historical memory. The political becomes personal in the work of Djebar and Vera. In other words, both feminist writers return to the physical body as corporeal objects as the land and history were two of the referring. Such a metaphor of a raped Africa who has long

suffered from colonial and nationalist post-war enterprise, or conversely, a debased image of a fallen woman as Africa betrayed.

We have also deduced that Djébar's and Vera's novels offer two different approaches for the embodiment of female corporality. In the former, the centrality of the body and bodily practices are serving as a metaphor and as a reflexion of various discourses as colonialism, the post-colonial oppression and women's resistance. Whereas in the latter, the centrality of the body and bodily practices are not only figured as sites of colonial and post-colonial oppression and resistance, but also as sites of female post-colonial recovery and reconciliation.

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General Conclusion

General Conclusion

Feminism has interdisciplinary dimension in the sense that all academic disciplines are involved in reading texts, historical or literary, from feminist points of view. The purpose is to reestablish women as actors in the different social, economic, political fields, from which they are traditionally excluded, mostly from male historians, novelists, sociologists and so on. As our study has shown, Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera have participated in this feminist movement by giving voice to women by summoning them from historical oblivion. This historical rehabilitation of women's participation in the resistance against colonial and post-colonial violence is accomplished through the metaphor of the body of women and the body of the text. Text and abused sex are interwoven and speak about the violence that colonizer first and then male post-independent patriarchy exercised over them. The imaginative rehabilitation of history and memory of women in regard to Djébar's and Vera's texts is inscribed in women's body.

The fragmentation of the female body bore the metaphorical weight of women, the nation-building and land as subjects. They are mutually constituted and reconfigured in the texts through the textual representations of women's corporality formed under severe strain, in often violent historical and personal circumstances. The narratives' texts provide an overview of a nation's turbulent history from the perspective of the disinherited subalterns to interrupt the patriotic history currently disseminated by the official history and the neo-nationalist discourse in an attempt to re-inscribe their place in the new nation they have helped to build, furthermore, they are literary responses to former colonial centers.

The texts in Assia Djébar's *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* unite the discourse of female body with temporality of women. The experience unacknowledged before is expressed through details of sexual violence and other types of oppression that the women of the colonized nation had suffered and endured.

Both writers appropriate specific characterization with the female body which, in a way or another, portrays particular ideas about Algeria and Zimbabwe culturally, socially, and politically. The two feminist authors communicate historical and political ideas through the construction of women's corporality. They communicate the history of Zimbabwe and Algeria through women's body with which they may speak and reconstruct the history of their countries. They particularly, address the issue of violence done to the body of woman in the colonial and postcolonial times. They reclaim women's history, unseen by the official discourses through the technique of "writing the body". The construction of female body gives voice to the dissident war narratives. It is a site of colonial violence done to women, as well as a site of resistance to patriarchal subjugation.

The presentation of the female body is investigated by Djébar and Vera through feminine language and poetic style. We have shown that Language and style used in their texts deconstruct the traditional representation of oppressed subjects in the Third World. In exploring the question of literary techniques deployed in the texts, our examination has revealed the capacity of both authors to move the subaltern into hegemony, especially women. We have articulated on the complex, feminine language and poetic style which creates a new position for the subaltern subject located in the discursive dilemma posed by colonial domination and patriarchal subjugation of women. The study has revealed that the deployment of complex feminine language by the two authors is tied mostly to their use of the language of the ex-colonizer. Their mastery of colonial language is engaged, in a way or another, with postcolonial feminist discourse that denounces colonial occupation and patriarchal domination.

We have discussed the sensual and musical characteristics of the poetic style which awaken the suppressed voices of Algerian and Zimbabwean women to express their colonial experience in order to reinstate their active roles in the official history. The fictional narratives of Djébar and Vera chart the geographical, social and historical

subjectivity that moulds their identity from individual voice that speaks out intimately to merge with the collective stories and voices of Algerian and Zimbabwean women revolutionaries, replacing silence and the colonizer's version of history with a celebration of female experience and expression. Through creative language and collective voice, female subjectivity allows women to move from unconsciousness to consciousness and therefore, express their female body experience in the oppressive pathologies of colonialism and the abusive practices of the postcolonial state. The narrative strategies employed in the texts including complex feminine language and poetic style articulate the use of both authors' subjectivity which negotiates the voicing of Third World women. Therefore, Women in their texts move from passivity and invisibility to activity.

The conclusion drawn from this dissertation is that both Assia Djébar and Yvonne Vera promote postcolonial feminist discourse in their writings. The specificity of this discourse is that it is written in a feminine language which vehemently challenges the masculine bias of literary canons, and seeks the rehabilitation of women's literature. In many similar ways, the two feminist writers seek path to final liberation of women in their texts and the transformation of silence into language and action. They have the belief that women, purely and simply because they are women, should be treated equitably within a society which grants privileges to male viewpoints and concerns.

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ولدت الرواية الإفريقية كظاهرة تاريخية واجتماعية تسعى إلى أن تكون تصويرا للواقع وانعكاسا لتجارب عاشها الإنسان في ماضٍ تاريخي ثقيل، يطبعه زمن استعماري ماضٍ وحاضر تطرح فيه مسألة الاستقلال، حيث إن الواقع الأليم الذي صنعته مخلفات الاستعمار من جهة، وخيبة ما بعد الاستقلال من جهة ثانية، قد هيأت الظروف لنشأة نوع من الكتابة النسوية المتميزة ببعض الأفكار المشتركة التي تلتقي عندها النساء الكاتبات، وتكمن خصوصية هذا النوع من الكتابة في تميزها في الخطاب، بمعنى أنها موجهة إلى جمهور نسوي، ثم إنها تنتقد القيم الاجتماعية السائدة في إفريقيا، وخاصة تلك السياسة الاستبدادية التي فرضها القوميون سعيا منهم على تقزيم مكانة المرأة وإخضاعها لسلطة الرجل بالاعتماد على خطاب يحصر مهمتها في نقل القيم التاريخية للأجيال ويجعلها مجرد وسيلة لتحقيق الاستقرار الاجتماعي.

هنا يأتي هذا البحث المتواضع ليقترح دراسة مقارنة بين كاتبتين تنتميان كلاهما إلى القارة الإفريقية هما: الكاتبة الجزائرية باللغة الفرنسية "أسيا جبار"، والزمبابوية الكاتبة بالإنجليزية "أيفون فيرا" وهي دراسة مبينة على البحث في القاسم المشترك الذي يكشف تأثير الكاتبتين بالعديد من القوى التاريخية، الاجتماعية، بالخطابات، والتقاليد السائدة.

هاتان المرأتان الإفريقيتان المنتميتان إلى جيل ما بعد الاستقلال متميزتان بطريقة أو بأخرى، حيث أن كل منهما برهان على قوة الأنوثة رغم اختلافهما من حيث التقاليد والأعراف، وتعبير آخر فإن "جبار" و"فيرا" تصفان في كتابيهما جذورهما الإفريقية فضلا عن تجاربهما الأنثوية، فمن الناحية السردية وفي بعض أعمالهما مثل: "الحب، الفنتازيا" لأسيا جبار، و"عذارى الحصى" لإيفون فيرا، نجد الكاتبتين تتحدثان في خطابهما عن الجسد الأنثوي تصويرا عن الأمة الإفريقية وتاريخها فتكشفان عن تجربة قاسية عاشتها المرأة و لم يكن معترفا بها من قبل، وذلك من خلال تقديم تفصيلات عن مظاهر الاغتصاب التي تعرضت لها وكابدت مرارتها نساء المستعمرات .

تعمدت الكاتبتان اختيار أسلوب وطريقة في الوصف قادرة على تجسيد أفكار اجتماعية، سياسية وثقافية في كل من الجزائر وزيمبابوي من أجل تحقيق سرد مقنع قادر على إيقاظ الضمائر، وتعبئة الناس للدفاع عن حقوق المرأة.

لقد أثبت التحليل وجود موضوعات مشتركة، بل وجود عناصر مشتركة من السيرة الذاتية في فضاء الكتابة بسبب اشتراك الكاتبتين في الخلفية الاستعمارية، حيث استطاعت أسيا جبار وإيفون فيرا بفضل الأدب أن تشقا طريقا للحركة والفعل، إذ إن كتاباتهما تمثل عملية تجديد تاريخي، بل محاولة لتقديم شيء أصعب وأعمق بكثير، إنهما تستحضران دعاية الأزمنة المؤلمة، وتنتقدان الغزو الاستعماري، والقومية الاستبدادية مع الاحتفاظ لنفسيهما بالحق في مقاومة ذلك الظلم والقوة لمواجهته.

Résumé

Cette modeste dissertation propose une étude comparative de deux romans appartenant à deux femmes écrivaines affiliées au continent Africain : ***L'Amour, la Fantasia*** (1985) d'Assia Djébar, et ***les Vierges de Pierre*** (2002) d'Yvonne Vera. Elle démontre les affinités que partagent Assia Djébar, l'écrivaine algérienne d'expression française et Yvonne Vera, l'écrivaine zimbabwéenne d'expression anglaise.

Cette étude dévoile que ces deux femmes africaines de la période post-coloniale étaient sous l'influence de facteurs historiques et sociaux. Dans leurs romans respectifs, Djébar et Vera réinscrivent les expériences des femmes algériennes et zimbabwéennes au temps colonial et après l'indépendance par le discours du corps féminin. L'expérience des femmes non reconnue et ignorée par le régime colonial et des nationalistes à l'indépendance est exprimée par les détails de violence et de viol que les femmes des deux nations colonisées (l'Algérie et le Zimbabwe) ont subi. Dans l'espace de l'écriture, les deux auteurs se rapportent au choix des stratégies stylistiques qui décrivent sous un mode de fiction des idées sociales, politiques et culturelles, toutes particulières à l'Algérie et au Zimbabwe.

L'analyse aussi fournit des thèmes communs qui existent dans leurs romans à cause de leur passé colonial et la politique autoritaire instaurée par les nationalistes en Algérie et au Zimbabwe. Par la littérature, Assia Djébar et Yvonne Vera dénoncent les expériences tragiques des femmes algériennes et zimbabwéennes pendant le colonialisme et incitent à la résistance contre les normes sociales qui dominent les femmes d'Afrique.