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IDENTITY, WRITING AND SUBVERSION IN AFRICAN FICTION

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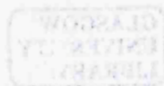

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Abstract

This thesis compares postcolonial African writing of French and English expression, and investigates the intersection of identity and writing in selected texts by focusing on the subversive strategies deployed by their authors. This study examines six North African and sub-Saharan fictional texts by Abdelkébir Khatibi, Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa and Nuruddin Farah, using postcolonialism as a theoretical framework through which to address their "double edged" critical consciousness: they are read both as in and against an emerging tradition of anticolonial writing. In my analysis of these selected texts, I examine the creative strategies used by African writers both to subvert colonial and nationalist constructions, and to articulate a sense of identity that is heterogeneous in relation to cultures, languages, ethnicities and sexualities.

The four chapters address linguistic and literary decolonisation, gender, ethnicity, cultural hybridity, and internal colonialisms, as well as the problematics of representation, in paired readings of authors and texts. Chapter One introduces key issues and debates, by drawing on a body of critical approaches to develop a framework for analysing identity in African literary texts. Chapter Two looks at the role of history and memory in shaping postcolonial identity in two novels by Abdelkébir Khatibi and Chinua Achebe. Khatibi and Achebe's treatment of the intersection between history/memory and culture provides a valuable insight into the problematics of cultural identity and representation highlighted by postmodernism and poststructuralism. Chapter Three investigates the dilemmas and contradictions of emergent nationhood in two texts by Ben Jelloun and Farah. Here, I analyse the way in which both writers explore and expose the artifice of gender construction and the formation of national identity in the new nation. Chapter Four returns to the issue of gender in two novels by Assia Djebar and Flora Nwapa, drawing in particular on the oppositional strategies used by postcolonial African women writers to interrogate the gendered basis of authority and history.

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Critical Preface

African literature of French and English expression exists as a direct result of French and British colonisation of much of North Africa and sub-Saharan areas. The emergence of this literature can be attributed to several factors, the most significant of which was the educational policy that was posited on the assumption that a small number of the indigenous inhabitants could be transformed into model French or British citizens. All the writers under consideration in this thesis belong to that generation of African children who received most of their education during the colonial period: Abdelkébir Khatibi and Tahar Ben Jelloun from Morocco, Assia Djebar from Algeria, Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa from Nigeria, and Nuruddin Farah from Somalia (in the case of Somalia, both the British and the Italians colonised the country). It is noteworthy that this historical circumstance affects in similar ways their education and later their works. The school curriculum in the colonies must be understood as one of the ways in which colonial powers such as France and Britain both asserted their cultural superiority, and undermined indigenous cultures.[1] However, it would be naive to assume that the effects of colonial education on African schoolchildren are identical, as the colonial strategies of France and Britain were radically different.[2] While both France and Britain showed a great concern with the success of education in their respective colonies, differences in colonial policy, as Bob White states, were conditioned by "the moral stances underlying colonial practice."[3] There are two important features which can be said to characterise French colonial education in Africa: first is the use and spread of the French language;[4] second is the policy of assimilation.[5] As part of the French '*mission civilisatrice*,' schools in many French colonies followed closely the French curriculum. The French policy of assimilation, as Kamal Salhi notes in the context of Algeria, "had the effect of breaking down the cultural identity of native children who entered the system."[6] The schoolchildren who attended French schools in much of French-speaking colonial Africa, as Abdou Moumouni (one of them) notes, were taught that their ancestors were the Gauls: "Nos ancêtres Gaulois [...] dans ses colonies la France traîte les indigènes comme ses fils."[7]

By contrast, the focus on religious education, as well as the collaboration between the British government and the missions, characterised British colonial education in the history of the British African colonies.[8] Another important feature which characterises British colonial education in Africa is the importance of integrating local languages and customs into the educational process. Unlike the French policy of assimilation, the decentralised approach of the British is clearly manifested in the British state policy of 'Indirect Rule.'[9] However, postcolonial critics such as Ngugi and many others criticised the British colonial education system for the ways in which it devalued indigenous African religious and cultural practices while at the same time asserting its values as the best or most true.[10] As will be seen, particularly in Chapter Two, the centrality of the French language and values to the French coloniser (Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée*) and the focus on religion in the British colonial education system (Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*) are posited as determining factors in alienating African schoolchildren from their cultures. The existing differences between the cultures of North African and sub-Saharan regions were thus exacerbated by different colonial strategies. In all cases, however, the issue of constructing an identity in the colonial and the postcolonial situation with a view to emphasising their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre is a key issue.

For many African authors, writing is an enabling factor in the sense that it allowed them to compensate for the psychologically harmful effects of colonialism - the effect on the coloniser has yet to be fully explored - by reclaiming their status as subjects. The term 'subject' in this context refers not only to the writing subject representing himself/herself in the autobiographical mode, but also to the individual who regains control over his/her historical discourse and uses it to subvert the discourse and effects of colonisation. As Edward Said writes:

> Between colonialism and its genealogical offsprings, there is thus a holding and crossing-over. Most of the postcolonial writers bear their past within them - as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a future, as urgently

> reinterpretable and redeployable experiences in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the colonialist.[11]

Why read North African and sub-Saharan postcolonial writing together? Reading texts from different literary and cultural backgrounds, a relatively recent approach, has been enabled by the growth of postcolonial studies and has made it possible to come to a new and wider understanding of postcolonial identity. One of the aims of this study is to explore the links between postcolonialism and the comparatist project. Postcolonial studies, however, as several scholars have noted, cannot be truly comparative if it continues to focus almost exclusively on texts from the British Empire, or, as Harish Trivedi puts it, to have "ears only for English."[12] Postcolonial studies, as Charles Forsdick and David Murphy argue in their volume *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*:

> must be truly comparative if it is to develop, opening itself up to, among others, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Turkish experiences. We must look beyond certain triumphalist discourses of a globalized, Anglophone uniformity in order to understand better the complexity and diversity – linguistic, cultural, political – of the world in which we live. As the rhetoric of empire seems increasingly to occupy a prominent place in public discourse, the urgency of such a project becomes ever more apparent.[13]

Postcolonial studies professes to make the balance of global power relations central to its enquiry, yet it largely focusses on Anglophone writers (African, Caribbean, and Indian) while their compatriots who write in other languages tend to be neglected. In response to this 'bias,' Forsdick and Murphy's volume calls for an active promotion of the relationship of postcolonialism to the comparatist project, a call that has been debated vigorously by various scholars in the past decade. The 1993 Bernheimer report on "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" demonstrates the decolonisation of the discipline and calls for new paradigms of comparative literature that would reflect the contributions

of postcolonial and cultural studies.[14] As the report emphasised, the "comparative" in comparative literature should include:

> comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and post-contact cultural productions of colonized peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analysis of its modes of production and circulation; and much more. (42)

In the same year, Susan Bassnett made the following statement: "Today, comparative literature is in one sense dead,"[15] a belief that was also to be shared in 2003 by Gayatri Spivak.[16] Bassnett and Spivak do not tell us that comparative literature is at an end. On the contrary, it continues to exist but under different guises such as cultural studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies, and translation studies. Bassnett rejects traditional "Eurocentric" comparative literature and argues for "a post-European model of comparative literature, one that reconsiders key questions of cultural identity, literary canons, the political implication of cultural influence, periodization and literary history and firmly rejects the ahistoricity of the American school and of the formalist approach" (41). In this respect, as she further notes, the new comparatism "opened by post-colonial theories of literary production is much more in keeping with the pluralism of the post-modernist world of the 1990s" (86). Similarly, in her critical response to the Bernheimer report, Emily Apter argues that "many of the territorial skirmishes emerging within the field [comparative literature] today have to do with the way in which postcolonial theory has, in a sense, usurped the disciplinary space that European literature and criticism had reserved for themselves."[17]

This thesis, therefore, seeks to explore the comparative dimensions of postcolonial studies, and to contribute to this process by comparing postcolonial

literatures across languages and cultures. Postcolonial African literatures in English and French, for example, are usually studied and discussed in isolation from each other. This perspective may carry with it potential pitfalls. First, it does not generally distance the critic from the process of making Europe the absent centre around which postcolonial Europhone literatures revolve, and thus perpetuates hierarchical relationships. This, in turn, reinforces the argument that contemporary African cultural issues and modern identities are massively fashioned and determined by the workings of colonialism. Of course colonialism was a very significant influence, but it is only one influence among many others. Jawaharlal Nehru's description of India as "an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been hidden previously,"[18] is relevant to many societies with a history of colonialism. The novels under consideration in this thesis all emerge out of multiple cultural inheritances. The question of the relationship of the postcolonial writer to language and culture is central to these inheritances which, in turn, lead to the creative collapsing of borders and of ideas of unitary identity. To read postcolonial literatures together then enables us to place more emphasis on the shared concerns in the postcolonial situation. The significance of a horizontal, comparative reading of postcolonial literatures written in European languages is one way of dislocating Europe as a centre. This enables us to focus on the alternatives which postcolonial writers seek out. The questioning of existing boundaries and definitions is taking place not only in postcolonial theory, but also in the fictions of many 'third world' writers, including those studied in this thesis. This comparative approach to francophone and anglophone texts together, then, is a challenge to any exclusive definition of the 'postcolonial'; it offers the means of thinking comparatively about the various representations/situations emerging from different colonial traditions, calling for an attention to the specific; and it also challenges the reluctance within the French academy to acknowledge the relevance and importance of the theoretical and political agendas associated with the term 'postcolonial.'

The second reason for reading North African and Sub-Saharan, Francophone and Anglophone writing together is consistent with the crossing and the transgression of borders: the crossing of the Sahara desert which is traditionally used in literary discourses

as the cultural and geographical border between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. The socio-economic, political and cultural implications of colonialism have been the concern of Arab, Berber and Jewish writers in North Africa, just as they have been the concern of sub-Saharan African writers. Regarding the separation of Africa into Africa north of the Sahara to which Khatibi, Djebar and Ben Jelloun belong, and Africa south of the Sahara to which Achebe, Nwapa and Farah belong, it would be misleading not to admit the existence of cultural differences. Indeed, the Arabo-Berber reality of North Africa is reflected in the traditions, the customs and the cultural life of the people. The geographical position of North Africa adds to this difference by being a crossroads of Mediterranean, Arab and African cultures. But these differences are not specific to North Africa because many countries south of the Sahara also have strong Arab and Islamic cultures such as Mali, Sudan, Mauritania, Somalia and even partly Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Kenya. Moreover, complexity and differences in the cultural mode of being exist in what is called 'Black Africa.' It would be naive to assume that West African cultural life is similar to the East African, as Achebe argues:

> Those who in talking about African literature want to exclude North Africa because it belongs to a different tradition surely do not suggest that Black Africa is anything like homogenous. What does Shabaan Robert have in common with Christopher Okigbo or Awoonor-Williams? Dr Mongo Beti of Cameroun and Paris with Nzekwu of Nigeria.[19]

In this regard, I hope that this study will not only situate North African fiction within the context of African literature, but will also bring together into one integrated study the literary production of the North African world and that of countries lying south of the Sahara.

What is the basis for comparison of literatures from north and south of the Sahara? On the one hand, the spirit of resistance to both external and internal control, from the advent of the European invasion to the present, as well as the strategies for the achievement of autonomy at the social, cultural, political and economic levels, are factors which logically link North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. A shared experience of

Empire, along with a consciousness of relative powerlessness within the North-South, West-East, relations, compels North and sub-Saharan Africa to seek common or near-identical solutions to the problems which plague the entity dubbed the 'Third World.' A commonality exists between North and sub-Saharan Africa as regions with cultural links and a common experience of Empire, without erasing or minimising their differences. What is the nature of these similarities and differences? Do the differences and similarities generate any dynamics of tradition, transition, and transformation that illuminate our understanding of social change and continuity? Would a sustained crossing back and forth between North African and sub-Saharan literatures open up a space for critical self-reflexivity within which identity, the self, and knowledge can begin to yield insights into strategies for the construction of a viable postcolonial identity? This thesis sets out to explore points of links between postcolonial literatures from North and south of the Sahara, and to examine salient issues in the process of decolonisation and national formation as a moment rich in conflict, desire, contradiction, and, above all, affirmation of difference.

North, West and East African Literatures have not, of course, been formed contemporaneously. The most fundamental problem has to do with the very delimitation of the 'literary,' and with ascertaining or justifying what passes for African literature. From what constituency or constituencies does it arise? Chronology is also a problem; when or where does the category of the 'modem' begin? How is it defined? What is the reverse side of the 'modem'? Are the two mutually exclusive?

Literary 'modernism' in Africa is often traced from the end of World War Two. This 'definition', however, ignores writing in African languages such as Kiswahili, Gikuyu and Arabic which already had a stable tradition and were read and disseminated over an extensive area. The systematic denigration of the history and culture of the subordinated world has been responsible for the ludicrous practice of recognising as literature or valuable cultural texts only those written in European languages. Clearly, then, a meaningful chronology of African literature, to the extent that it is felt necessary to have one, is one that takes into account not only written texts in indigenous and European languages, but 'texts' also of the oral tradition, which continue to inform a considerable body of literature from both North and sub-Saharan Africa, to say nothing of

its existence as a daily mode of communication and cultural creation. According to Abiola Irele, the paradigm of orality "stands as the fundamental reference of discourse and of the imaginative mode in Africa."[20] The literary works of many African writers, including those studied in this thesis, clearly demonstrate the interdependence of the oral and the written (Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* (1968), Jean-Marie Adiaffi's *La carte d'identité* (1980), Ahamadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* (1968), Syl Cheney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990), Obinkaram Echewa's *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire* (1992), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), Driss Chraïbi's *Naissance à l'aube* (1986), and many others). The literatures of North and sub-Saharan Africa would be much poorer without the salutary effect of the epics and other traditional narratives by which they are informed stylistically and thematically. While many African writers, particularly the ones discussed in this thesis, recognise and celebrate the significant role of their respective oral cultures, they do not, however, deify those cultures. They seem mindful of an important point made by Eileen Julien about the relationship between orality and the written literatures of Africa:

> To exalt orality and oral traditions, then, is as ultimately sterile and blinding as to malign them. The exaggerated dichotomy between the orality of Africa and the writing of Europe took in the past a different form (orality as primitive/writing as evolved) which we have long dismissed. But it nevertheless reproduces itself as the object of literary criticism in the propensity to elevate the oral mode and world above the literate/technological one.[21]

From the point of view of many African writers and critics, the novel is the predominant genre in Africa today, even though it is a relatively new creative form in relation to poetry and drama. Generally speaking, then, 'modern' African literature begins to emerge massively after World War Two, the heyday of decolonisation, and contemporaneously with the nationalist spirit then pervading the colonised world. The novel, as Eileen Julien has perceptively argued in her recent essay "Reading 'orality' in French-language novels from sub-Saharan Africa" (2003):

Was seen and is still seen as the quintessential literary genre of modernity. Like the nation state, development, democracy, the multi-party system, free speech, technology - all those institutions and forms associated with Western modernity, which most of us (Western, African or other) have come to view as the only modernity - the novel would have to be emulated in newly independent African, Asian, and American nations. Thus the novel became one of several yardsticks that could attest to African modernity.[22]

The historical dominance of Empire in Africa has produced a form of cultural identity which can be defined by its relationship to the metropolitan centre. However, although the concept of Empire is crucial to understanding some (not all) aspects of African cultures and literatures, the critic/reader must not assume that postcolonial literary texts written in European languages are representative of the nation as a whole. In his critique of the ways in which Indian literature in English is often read as a typical illustration of the Indian nation, Aijaz Ahmad points out that this reading creates a situation where "only the literary document produced in English is a *national* document; all else is regional, hence minor and forgettable, so that English emerges in this imagination not as *one* of the Indian languages, which undoubtedly it is, but as *the* language of national integration and bourgeois civility" (italics in original).[23] I agree with Ahmad's argument that there are many different languages in Africa or Asia with their own narratives and values; and that, in order to allow a more coherent understanding of these societies to emerge, we need to look beyond European-language literary texts written by authors from an English/French-speaking minority in such societies. In Ahmad's view European languages continue to serve the interests of a small elite and not the people as a whole. Ahmad, however, does not recognise that the former colonial languages are no longer the possession of the former colonisers alone: some European-language writers indigenise them (Achebe); others use them in subversive ways (Khatibi). Nor does he offer any account of European-language authors' determination to go beyond Empire in examining subalternity and political representation in their respective societies. Many postcolonial writers, including the ones considered in this

thesis, are linked by this determination. The presence of shared themes and structural patterns is no accident. They echo the shared psychic and historical conditions across the differences distinguishing one region from another: alienation, literary and linguistic decolonisation, cultural hybridity, internal colonialisms, issues of gender and ethnicity as well as the problematics of representation. This does present the possibility of reading African literary texts against and across one another.

Why read these particular authors and not others? Why select their respective literary texts and not others? What connects these writers is the ways in which they represent themselves and imagine their respective nations. They may all be read both as in and against an emerging tradition of anticolonial writing. For those of us who are natives of the so-called 'Third World' in the postcolonial situation, colonial subjugation and disempowerment of a people is not radically different from other forms of oppression based on gender, race, and class. My choice of these texts and their authors stems from my interest in the way in which they seek to end facile oppositional practices or sterile denunciations and disavowals, by suggesting new paradigms of identity, both sexual and cultural, which go beyond oppressive definitions. In particular, I want to examine those texts that emerge from what Bhabha calls the "in-between space" of cultural hybridity.[24] It has become imperative to understand and participate fully in the articulation of new concepts that allow formerly colonised people to think 'otherwise.' Hybridity is a concept and a practice: the 'in-between space' provides "the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity" (*The Location of Culture* 1). It is a site of transformation where identities lose their fixed boundaries to assume new forms and modes of being. The issue is one of crossing and of dissolving boundaries.

Bhabha's new ways of thinking about postcolonial identity undercut both colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self, and also warn us against interpreting cultural difference in absolute terms. However, hybridity has been subject to critique on the part of critics such as Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, Neil Lazarus, John Mcleod, Ella Shohat, and others. Dirlik, for instance, collapses the work of all postcolonial theorists with poststructuralist thinkers, and suggests that conditions of hybridity cannot be understood without reference to the ideological and institutional structures in which they

are housed.[25] Dirlik goes on to condemn postcolonial intellectuals for their total complicity with global capitalism "of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries" (353). As for Aijaz Ahmad, the postcolonial hybrid in the work of Bhabha and like-minded critics is undifferentiated by gender, class and political location.[26] Like Dirlik, Ahmad dismisses all postcolonial criticism as "postmodernism's wedge to colonize literatures outside Europe and its North American offshoots" (1). Ahmad's and Dirlik's commitment to an undifferentiating (Marxist) disavowal of postcolonial criticism is "deeply misconceived,"[27] as Neil Lazarus and Crystal Bartolovich state in their introduction to *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*:

> Among many other things, such repudiations make impossible any balanced consideration of the field's genuine intellectual (and ideological) achievements. It seems to us that Marxist theorists can and should engage *with* postcolonial studies in mutual sites of concern, and concede to the field the authentic insights and advances that have been generated within it. (11)

Ahmad and Dirlik, like other materialist critics, claim that hybridity within postcolonial theory works to downplay and misrepresent the dynamics of anti-colonial/nationalist struggle and discourse. The problem with this criticism is that postcolonial theory does not seek to replace other forms of resistance. Rather, as Robert Young points out, it "provides a significant framework for that other work by emphasising that all perspectives on colonialism share and have to deal with a common discursive medium which was also that of colonialism itself."[28] Young also draws our attention to Bhabha's notion of hybridity as a different model for resistance, locating this in its conscious and politically motivated concern with the intentional disruption of homogeneity. In his discussion of Bhabha's central thesis of a disjunctive cultural hybridity, inspired by Bakhtin's account of 'intentional' linguistic hybridity, Young states:

> Bakhtin's intentional hybrid has been transformed by Bhabha into an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant colonial power [...] depriving the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has

for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even of its own claims to authenticity. (23)

Other critics such as John Mcleod and Ella Shohat express a general dissatisfaction with the notion of hybridity which has been seen as part of the tendency of colonial discourse theory to generalise and, as McLeod puts it, "to decontextualise the experiences of different times and places" (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 222). This is a fair criticism because the colonialist presence was felt differently by various countries with a history of colonialism. As Ella Shohat suggests, we need to "discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence."[29] Hybridity as advocated by Bhabha, it should be noted, is not definitive of all postcolonial writing/theory. However, as will be seen in the texts studied in this thesis, hybridity takes many forms (linguistic, cultural, political, and social) and is the defining characteristic of the postcolonial identity of the authors under consideration. The point in this analysis, then, is not only to peg the hybrid postcolonial engendered by colonial rule to specific histories and locations, but also to link texts through notions of hybridity.

Hybridity, in one form or other, is articulated by all the selected authors and their respective literary texts. As men and women at the border between two cultures, whose relationship has historically been marked by traumatic encounters, these postcolonial writers, each in his/her creative response, traverse and transgress cultural, linguistic, literary, and even geographical borders. These borders represent the legacies of colonialism, such as the identity and language of the colonising power, or the political entities left behind as the empires receded into history. The dilemma that faces these writers, therefore, is the need to negotiate a difficult path between competing pressures. On the one hand, there is the urgent task to interrogate existing boundaries and definitions; on the other hand, there is the need to construct a viable postcolonial identity.

The selected texts range from autobiographical fictions, *La Mémoire tatouée* (1971) by Abdelkébir Khatibi and *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1986) by Assia Djebar; realist fictions, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe, *One is Enough* (1981) by Flora

Nwapa; to 'post-realist' or postmodern fictions, *L'Enfant de sable* (1985) by Tahar Ben Jelloun, and *Maps* (1986) by Nuruddin Farah. Within the framework of my problematic, namely, the relationship of marginalised identities and writing, the chosen texts will highlight the radical developments that have taken place in the African realist, autobiographical and postmodern texts, by focusing on the subversive strategies deployed by their authors: subversion is a shared tendency in these postcolonial texts. An examination of these subversive strategies will reveal the creative responses of the authors to the postcolonial condition. My concern is to analyse how these writers negotiate the tensions of their identities as men and women in different postcolonial societies, and the problems of writing in the language of the coloniser. My concern is also to analyse the relationship of cultural identity to sexual identity, and the ways in which different forms of oppression based on race, gender, and class are structurally related.

As is now widely accepted, identity is coded by gender, ethnicity, class, race, and sexual orientation. It can be seen as a sum of a number of identities that operate in a specific culture. Identity in this sense has significance to societies as well as individuals within societies. It enables the consideration of sexism, racism, cultural exclusivism and homophobia not merely as the products of personal prejudice, but as effects of social and political structures. It is evident that there is a growing awareness that nationality is also a form of subjectivity that requires analysis. As in the case of all identities, that of the nation is pieced together within a complex, intertwined fabric of discourse. Yet, the nation-state comes into being at a more closely defined historical moment than say gender, class, or race. Whether operating as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic undertaking, the construction of national identities can be associated with particular struggles and interests. Literary texts participate in the making of national subjects and thus are imbricated in the politics of the nation.

In today's world the nation-state is the ubiquitous form of political organisation. Nearly everyone can be identified as a citizen of a nation-state and associated with a particular national culture, although nation states themselves are relatively recent inventions. The African nations represented in this thesis attained formal independence only after World War Two: Morocco in 1956, Algeria in 1962, Nigeria and Somalia in 1960. Imperialism spread European languages, cultures, and political forms

across the globe and colonial rule produced significant political, social and cultural resistance. This resistance found expression in anti-colonial movements. The critical question of how individuals in different locations and historical periods came to assume identities as national subjects was not, however, addressed by the development and dissemination of the nation-state system. To answer this question, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the selected texts, requires that we look into the complex ways in which the 'national people' are identified in the colonial and postcolonial context.

The examination of identity and subversion through texts requires a theoretical framework suited to the close readings of individual representations as well as one sensitive to the wider political and social contexts in which such material is produced. The current approach that lends itself to these demands and which can also provide a framework of comparison between North African and sub-Saharan writing is postcolonial theory. Consistent with postcolonial writing discussed in this thesis, postcolonial theorists - from colonial margins themselves such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and others - as Robert Young points out, asked "awkward questions about Western history and the implicit assumptions of Western knowledges,"[30] and urged the need to recognise and examine the serious political, cultural and social issues facing postcolonial theory and intellectuals. Postcolonial theory suggests an alternative mode of perception; it is useful in its focus on looking backward in critique and forward in resolution. In their definition of postcolonialism, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin state that "postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction."[31] The link between postcolonialism and resistance relies on the notion that creative writing (among other kinds of writing) from once colonised societies are capable of resistance and disruptive content. In light of this definition, fictions written in the colonial period, such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), are as postcolonial as those written in the post-independence period.

Unlike Anglophone writing, Francophone writing in general, and North African Francophone writing in particular, have received very little attention from postcolonial critics. The explosion of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s saw the publication of key texts in the field such as *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) and *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), among others, whose focus is entirely on postcolonial

writing in English, and whose primary interest is on "the impact of postcolonial literatures and criticism on the current shape of English studies" (*The Post-Colonial Studies* 4). This border between the study of Francophone and Anglophone literature is puzzling when one considers the reliance of postcolonial studies on poststructuralist and feminist literary theory written originally in French by theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, as well as theorists of colonialism such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi. The centrality of these critics to much of postcolonial theory is undeniable. As Robert Young has recently pointed out, Anglophone postcolonial discourse is "a franglais mixture" (*Postcolonialism* 18). This thesis, therefore, seeks to traverse this divide by making more links between the study of Anglophone and Francophone literature as well as engaging postcolonial theorists from the North African and sub-Saharan Francophone worlds, who are perhaps not very well known to Anglophone postcolonial critics.

While there exists a new discipline called 'Francophone postcolonial studies,' and, among others, journals such as *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* (previously ASCALF) within the British academy, and the same within the American academy, there is, as Belinda Jack points out, "no comparable francophone academy within which a comparable francophone discipline might emerge" in France (*Francophone Literatures* 3). As Jean-Marc Moura notes in his paper to the Society For Francophone Postcolonial Studies conference in London (2002), the term 'postcolonial' is resisted:

> Il est en effet possible que 'l'empire contre-attaque' avec les littératures postcoloniales, mais pour l'heure, le champ intellectuel français fait de la résistance. C'est que le postcolonialisme cumule certains éléments difficilement assimilables par les études littéraires françaises. Outre son caractère multiculturel et son ouverture à la globalisation, la critique postcoloniale se confronte à des questions parmi les plus brûlantes du monde contemporain: dialectique du droit des 'minorités' et des exigences de cohésion nationale, problèmes identitaires, relation de l'Occident aux pays pauvres, sort des 'subalternes', hommes et femmes du 'tiers monde', d'où la nécéssité d'un

> sens politique de la recherche et d'une interdisciplinarité qui ne sont pas toujours bien accueillies.[32]

"Les études littéraires françaises" subsume all Francophone texts and apply the same techniques of textual analysis: the focus is on text, not on context. Textual analysis can of course provide significant clues to the meaning of texts, and is an enabling factor in this thesis. But it would be wrong to restrict postcolonial texts only to textual analysis. One cannot understand French literary critics' reluctance to engage with postcolonial theory, particularly when 'Francophonie' could benefit from one of the most interesting aspects of postcolonialism, that is, the recognition of regional and territorial specificity of each 'Francophone' literature. One possible explanation can be found in the literary histories of France and the 'Francophone' world: 'Francophone' literatures are generally treated, analysed and taught as an extension of French literature that does not need to be situated to be understood. Insisting on the specificity of and situating postcolonial texts linguistically, anthropologically, sociologically and economically before even analysing them is a prerequisite in postcolonial criticism. France, unlike Britain and the USA, is still sadly obsessed with its colonising and outdated assimilationist model, that is, the ignorance of the existing cultural specificities in the so-called 'Francophonie.' "La Francophonie," as Guy Midiohouan notes, is a purely ideological space, an immense mythic territory encompassing all the corners of the world where the French language is in usage, "assemblés dans une soi-disant communauté de culture qui n'est en réalité qu'une vaste et subtile manigance ayant pour but de défendre, préserver et étendre la place et l'influence du français dans le monde en vue de soutenir les intérêts économiques et politiques de la France."[33] Within the problematic of my work, it becomes clear that postcolonial theory, as well as its comparative perspective, can offer challenging readings of texts created in colonial and postcolonial situations, and enable us to be more aware of the systems of representation that operate on the postcolonial writer as he/she addresses and struggles with the legacies of the colonial systems.

This thesis aims to work through these struggles. It will consider the complexities of colonial and postcolonial subjects and identities. How does the colonial encounter restructure ideologies of racial, cultural and sexual difference? In what ways

are patriarchal oppression and colonial domination conceptually and historically connected to one another? How can we understand the concept of hybridity in the light of these issues? The work of individual critics is located within specific debates and will be used in different chapters or sections. The chapter divisions and the issues discussed within them also do not indicate watertight compartments, so that the issue of alterity for example, or the intersection of gender, colonialism and patriarchy, is dealt with throughout the thesis. As a means to contextual understanding, every chapter will provide social, political, cultural and intellectual contexts of the paired authors as and when necessary.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapters Two, Three and Four are further subdivided into two sections, each of which focuses on an author and his or her text. The emphasis throughout is on paired readings of authors. The approach is thus comparative in the broadest sense, aiming to combine close readings of individual authors and texts with careful framings in terms of history and politics. In this way, a sense of dialogue and difference, of shared concerns and local distinctions, is drawn out and discussed in the conclusion to the chapter. Chapter One is an introductory overview in which I consider the history of critical approaches to African cultural identity and the crucial debates they engender about authenticity and hybridity, the nation, ethnicity, language and national literatures. Theories of pan-nationalism and nationalism, as well as the complexities within ex-colonised countries, are then considered, and how nationalism is fractured by gender and ideological divides. I will refer to this body of critical approaches for the purpose of a paradigmatic reading of the radical developments that have taken place in the texts under consideration.

In Chapter Two I undertake a comparative analysis of two works, *La Mémoire tatouée* by Abdelkébir Khatibi, and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, in order to look at the role of history and memory in shaping postcolonial cultural identity. One of the most vexed questions in postcolonial studies is the agency of the colonised subject, or 'subaltern,' and whether it can be recovered and represented by postcolonial intellectuals. Khatibi and Achebe's treatment of the intersection between history and culture provides a valuable insight into the problematics of cultural identity and representation highlighted by postmodernism and poststructuralism. As both writers are literary critics and

representatives of the prevailing critical and literary theories in their respective regions, this extended chapter will address their theories on the function of writing, the language issue, decolonisation and minority discourses. These are issues that will crop up in the other chapters as they preoccupy the other postcolonial writers in this study.

Chapter Three looks at how margins contain their own centres. Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Farah's *Maps* are sites of the dilemmas and contradictions of emergent nationhood. They both challenge the nation, explore and expose the artifice of gender construction and the formation of national identity in the new nation by interrogating the essentialising subject positions inherent in imperialism and nationalism. Both authors are explicitly engaged in the process of a nomadic hybridisation, a process which underscores their shared 'postmodem' affinities. This chapter will draw attention to the multiple ways in which the categories of race, culture, gender, colonialism and nation can be approached.

Chapter Four returns to the question of gender, voice and writing in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*. Like Khatibi and Achebe in Chapter One, Djebar's autobiographical fiction and Nwapa's realist and urban novel are used to interrogate the gendered basis of authority and history. As two postcolonial women writers, they share the experience of being constructed as the sexual and cultural other. While the concerns in their fictions present complementary voices, the focus and the choice of alternatives in their writing can be seen to mark the different cultural, historical, political, and intellectual experience of women in their respective nations.

Notes

[1] In his discussion of colonial education in the colonies, John McLeod argues that "Colonialism uses educational institutions to augment the perceived legitimacy and propriety of itself, as well as providing the means by which colonial power can be maintained." In John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 140.

[2] We need to discriminate adequately between different experiences of colonialism, even when those experiences are linked to the same colonial power. As Belinda Jack points out in her discussion of North African colonies, indigenous cultures of Morocco and Tunisia, for example, "were less systematically undermined or destroyed than those of Algeria under French rule." In Belinda Jack, *Francophone Literatures: An introductory survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) (185). Thus, as Ferhat Abbas notes in the context of Algeria: "Le colonialisme français n'a pas ménagé ses efforts pour asservir les Algériens, désislamiser et désarabiser l'Algérie. Tous les efforts entrepris durant le siècle de colonisation l'ont été dans ce sens [...] L'Algérie en 1830 a été déclarée terre vacante et l'Algérie musulmane inexistante." In Ferhat Abbas, *La Nuit coloniale* (Paris: Julliard, 1962) 23.

[3] Bob White, "Talk about School: Education and the Colonial Project in French and British Africa (1860-1960)," *Comparative Education* 32 (March 1996) 9.

[4] The use of 'indigenous' languages as a medium of education was rejected in many French colonies. In the eyes of the colonisers, learning the French language is itself the education. This is precisely what Brevie, Governor General of French West Africa (1930), implied when he wrote that "the native's mind can become disciplined by the mastery of spoken French." Quoted in Bob White, "Talk about School" 14.

[5] Assimilation, a key principle of French colonial policy, means that French civilisation is universally applicable, and implies that education will bring Africans to a higher level of civilisation. As Bob White states:

> The French model corresponds more closely to the idea of cultural universalism. The French 'mission civilisatrice' sought to bring all dependents

together under one roof and unify them through the French language and culture. The stated policy of assimilation (and later association) and the metaphor of the French family are good examples of the universalist trend in French policy. ("Talk about School" 21)

[6] Kamal Salhi, ed, *Francophone Voices* (Exeter: Elm Bank Publications, 1999) 44.

[7] Abdou Moumouni, *L'Education en Afrique* (Paris: Maspero, 1964) 56. Similarly, Frantz Fanon notes that this absurd situation obtained in the West Indies too, emphasising that the colonised is psychologically trained to think that the White is good and superior, that the White is the master. In Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952) 147.

[8] *African Education* (1953), a joint study produced by the British Colonial Office and the Nuffield Foundation, reflects a strong belief in a Christian-based system of education in the British colonies: "there is a deeper confidence that the spread of enlightenment, which is the aim of education, is the surest means of leading a people to the truth." In Nuffield Foundation and the Colonial Office, *African Education: A Study of Educational Policy and Practice in British Tropical Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) 44.

[9] It can be argued, however, as Bob White notes, that "a heightened awareness of cultural differences is itself a form of racism. The highly segregated social spheres in the British colonies are often given as an example" ("Talk about School" 24). Many British colonies had segregated schools. There were schools for whites and selected African students (academic institutions), and schools for the 'masses' where, in the opinion of the Nuffield Foundation, the "whole of the curriculum should be integrated with agriculture and other work in it" (*African Education* 11).

[10] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann, 1972) 14.

[11] Edward Said, "Intellectuals in the Post-colonial World," *Salmagundi* 70-71 (1986) 55.

[12] Harish Trivedi, "The Postcolonial or the Transcolonial? Location and Language," *Interventions* 1.2 (1999) 272.

[13] Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003) 14.

[14] Reprinted in Charles Bernheimer, ed, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 39-48.

[15] Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 47.

[16] Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003)

[17] Emily apter, "Comparative Exile: Competing Margins in the History of Comparative Literature," in Bernheimer, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, 86.

[18] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The discovery of India*, quoted by Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997) 169.

[19] Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1975) 94.

[20] Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 11.

[21] Eileen Julien, *African Novels and The Question of Orality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 23.

[22] Eileen Julien, "Reading 'orality' in French-language novels from sub-Saharan Africa," in Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction*, 125.

[23] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992) 75.

[24] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 7.

[25] Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994) 342.

[26] Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality" *Race and Class*, 36. 3 (1995) 13.

[27] Neil Lazarus and Crystal Bartolovich, eds, *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 10.

[28] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995) 163.

[29] Ella Shohat, "Notes on the "Post-colonial", " *Social Text* 31-32 (1993) 110.

[30] Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2001) 62.

[31] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 2.

[32] Jean-Marc Moura, "Sur l'étude postcoloniale des lettres francophones en France," *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* 1.1 (Spring/Summer 2003) 64.

[33] Guy Ossito Midiohouan, *L'idéologie dans la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française* (Paris: Editions L'harmattan, 1986) 22.

Chapter One

African Nations: History, Culture and Identity

It is a truism that the institutional history of knowledge in the Western academy in the period of classical colonialism corresponded to European and U.S. colonial expansion. Theory is implicated in the long history of colonialism and domination insofar as it determines the conditions of the constitution of knowledge as well as the terms of the practice of knowledge, even beyond the academic institution. Anti-imperial nationalisms, 'the winds of change' that Harold Macmillan saw blowing across the then colonised world, resulted in the decline of the formal empires of Europe which were later to be reconstituted into spheres of domination by US-led imperialism and neo-colonialism - we have hardly seen the end of it: the United States is presently (2003) occupying Iraq and controlling the fate of the Middle East. The Western epistemological interpretation and perception of the rest of the world were in response to the exercise of power and the manipulation of marginalised peoples and histories. Current attempts to address questions of value, coherence, unity and intelligibility are occasioned in part by progressive trends in the West itself but mainly by political challenges presented by the West's 'Others,' and by a solidarity forged by and among the 'Others' within the West and outside of it. The most unsettling act of deconstruction of Western preeminence consists precisely in the discrediting of the certitude ascribed to the configuration centre-periphery. There is no centre, and so-called dominant culture is but a construct:

> Directly and indirectly, in Salman Rushdie's phrase, the 'Empire writes back' to the imperial 'centre', not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery [...] not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based.[1]

In contemporary mainstream European or American discourse, however, nationalism is often regarded as an exclusively 'Third World' phenomenon. Even in the works of some radical Western academics, there is a reductive tendency to equate nationalism with the "Third World." In a 1986 article entitled "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson takes issue with what he construes as "an obsessive return of the national situation" to the debate of "third-world intellectuals," but suggests that "a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world" where "the telling of the individual story, the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself."[2] Jameson's theoretical and political underpinings of the term 'Third World' were challenged by Aijaz Ahmad.[3] Chief among Ahmad's criticisms is Jameson's term 'Third World' which homogenises situations more remarkable for their diversity than their commonality, and denies difference within as well as similarities between them; Jameson's reduction of all "third world" literature (not literatures) to that available in translation in European languages; Jameson's insistence on a neatly-arranged (and presumably well-defined) 'First-World,' 'Second World' defined in terms of their systems of production, and the 'Third World' which is defined in terms of its experience of colonialism. By dividing the globe into distinct 'worlds,' the three world model has the effect of distancing the 'Other' and unifying the 'Self.' Moreover, Jameson assumes that the concept of the nation from which he derives the adjective 'national' is in itself a fixed, stable and an easily definable entity.

Both the concrete and symbolic implications of Jameson's rhetoric above are profoundly disturbing for someone who subscribes neither to the absolutist ideology of a West which invents itself the better to overrun the rest of the world nor to a 'Third Worldism' defining itself on the deterministic logic of the West. On this question I stand with Abdelkébir Khatibi in responding to the absolutist ideology of the West and a 'Third Worldism' coming from various parts of the 'Third World' with the aim of turning the West "contre son autosuffisance et son ethnocentrisme."[4] The "Third World", says Khatibi, can take "une tierce voie:" "ni la raison ni la déraison telles que les a pensées l'Occident dans son tout, mais une subversion en quelque sorte double, qui, se donnant le

pouvoir de parole et d'action, se met en oeuvre dans une différence intraitable. Se décoloniser serait l'autre nom de cette pensée-autre." (*Maghreb pluriel* 50-51).

My aim in this chapter is to reflect on two critical moments in African literary and cultural discourses: nationalism as resistance and resistance to nationalism (to use Christopher Miller's terms),[5] and literature's close association with both moments. Some attempts to articulate a sense of Africa before and since independence have been tinged with a search for 'essence' (*Négritude*). For a number of critics and writers, as will be discussed below, this process of 'oneness' is necessary but is doomed to failure. Concepts such as national and cultural identity which played a critical role in anticolonial and postcolonial discourses have also been subjected to a process of questioning as they do not recognise difference within the new nation: the national boundaries (the districts of European imperialism) often do not correlate even with precolonial, or even colonial cultural, linguistic or ethnic divisions. The question of nation thus becomes central to the concerns of history, culture and identity which preoccupy both African writers and critics.

Creative writing (among other kinds of writing) from Africa, in both the colonial and postcolonial periods, has endeavoured to create a space for the colonised or oppressed person who is consistently left out of account, or reduced to the status of flora and fauna in those colonial texts which precede or are simultaneous with the 'discovery' and exploration/exploitation of the continent. In the North African context, in the literature written by the French settlers or 'écrivains touristes' who created literary movements such as 'les Algérianistes' under Louis Bertrand, and 'l'Ecole d'Alger' under Gabriel Audisio, rephrased by Albert Camus as 'l'Ecole Nord Africaine des Lettres,' indigenous North Africans were hardly represented. In fact that literature creates a Mediterranean and Latin sensibility from which indigenous people are excluded, as Cruise Conor O'Brien notes in *Camus*. Commenting on *La Peste* he writes that "the Arabs of Oran absolutely cease to exist."[6] If they appear at all they are denigrated, portrayed as sex-objects as in André Gide's novels *Les Nourritures Terrestres* or *L'immoraliste*, or as murderers like 'l'Arabe' in Camus's *L'Etranger*.[7] At the close of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, the English District Commissioner-cum-anthropologist decides he is going to write a book in which he will articulate his

impressions of the world of the 'primitive' with its strange customs and the 'infernal darkness' that the European imagination attributes to Africa:

> As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a chapter on him. Perhaps not a chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.*[8]

The protagonist of Achebe's story, Okonkwo, as well as the entire Igbo society, will be allocated a mere paragraph in what is otherwise a narrative of the European experience in Africa told from the point of view of the active, causative subject whose activities enhance and extol the European project of the 'pacification' of 'primitive' peoples. The writing of a text, a record of colonial enterprise, is co-terminous with the founding of empire: the text inscribes, confirms and ultimately fixes the *fait accompli* of the conquest. The world 'discovered' by Europe is rhetorically transformed into a 'blank' page where Europe will inscribe its desire. The bodies inhabiting this space will immediately be harnessed to a system of production whose *raison d'être* is articulated via the colonial epic, the tale constructed as a juridical-theological excuse for violent plunder and occupation.

In the colonial textual production, the 'native' is of interest only as an exotic Other, or as an accessory in the production of material goods. In the colonial administration's text above, the 'native' whose story "would make interesting reading," is tentatively allocated almost a whole chapter, but is finally graciously allowed "a reasonable paragraph" because "there was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details." In the colonial text, the 'native' is both raw material and part of the natural background against which the story takes place. S/he may not, however, be dismissed altogether for, as Prospero is quick to remind Miranda, " [Caliban] does make our fire, /Fetch in our wood; and serves in offices/That profit us."[9]

The form and content of the colonised world were presented through description, as indeed they are today when its description (which specifies a locus of meaning, constructs an object of knowledge) and definition correspond to the desire to fix a meaning, to constitute a knowledge forever bound by that act of descriptive construction. However, human beings everywhere demonstrate a remarkable capacity for transcending what is given or determined 'from outside.' The practice of imposing a 'culture of silence,' expressed through prescription and proscription, is consistently challenged on the same terrain on which it attempts to overdetermine its victims, that is, to condition and define the horizon of meanings for its victims - education and ideology. The initial encounter between Europe and the rest of the world - the invasion, immigration and settlement of the latter by the former - becomes encoded as the 'discovery.' The so-called discovery makes known/knowable, reveals, describes, classifies and makes available for appropriation the landscapes, the people, the flora and fauna of the 'new' lands 'discovered' by Europeans. Tzvetan Todorov comments on Christopher Colunbus's invention of some pre-existing "authoritative knowledge" (which could legitimise the appropriation of the Americas by Spain), and he remarks that Columbus was eager to write a text which, read after the voyages of 'discovery,' would have the appearance of predating the *Chilam Balam*: "he could not rest until he had produced a *Book of Prophecies*, a collection of formulas extracted from (or attributed to) the Sacred Books, which were supposed to predict his own expedition, and its consequences."[10] Thus the peoples and the cultures of the 'Third World' are reified within the text, ceasing, from the point of view of the authors of the one-sided texts, to be the agents of their own history and their destiny.

European colonisation of Africa has as one of its multiple effects the depreciation of the African image in popular European imagination. According to Soyinka, "The quest for and the consequent assertion of the black cultural psyche began as a result of the deliberate propagation of untruths by others, both for racist motives and to disguise their incapacity to penetrate the complex verities of black existence."[11] The political and economic control of Africa was buttressed by the devaluation of African culture. The loss of political control by Africans resulted in a loss of cultural confidence as well, a loss fostered in great measure by theories of evolutionary anthropology which

placed African culture at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder and European culture at the top. The measurements of this cultural relativism were based on factors of Western civilisation, and the 'primitive' status of Africa legitimated the *mission civilisatrice* of Europe, ushering in the 'white man's burden' with its baggage of colonial possession and the westernisation of a native elite through various forms of assimilation.

Négritude is in large measure a reaction to the farce of imposed assimilation, as in Senghor's famous phrase "assimiler, ne pas être assimilé." *Négritude*'s rejection of imposed assimilation is self-affirmation. The vision of *négritude*, according to Soyinka, "was that of the restitution and re-engineering of a racial psyche, the establishment of a distinct human entity and the glorification of its long-suppressed attributes," as well as being, on a long-term basis, a "universal alliance with the world's dispossessed" (*Myth* 126). While Soyinka recognises the importance of *Négritude*'s 'revolutionary' vision, he argues that it is an over-simplified vision of Africa and African cultures. Soyinka's argument is founded on assertions made by Senghor himself: "L'émotion est nègre, comme la raison hellène."[12] Soyinka criticises Senghor for being essentialist or complicit with Eurocentric attitudes (Africans are more intuitive, while Europeans are rational) and argues that:

> Négritude trapped itself in what was primarily a defensive role, even though its accents were strident, its syntax hyperbolic and its strategy aggressive. It accepted one of the commonplace blasphemies of racism, that the black man has nothing between his ears, and proceeded to subvert the power to poetry to glorify this fabricated justification of European cultural domination [...] The fundamental error was one of procedure: Négritude stayed within a pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis, both of man and society, and tried to re-define the African and his society in those externalized terms. (*Myth* 129)

Négritude, notwithstanding its shortcomings, played no small part in the coming-to-consciousness that was the motive power to nationalism in a large part of Africa and the Caribbean zone.

It may seem slightly odd to describe a theory of the similarities of all black cultures as a form of nationalism, but many have argued that as an enabling step in the search for independence in African colonies, *négritude*, despite its limitations, did indeed function as a form of nationalism. *Négritude*'s emphasis on reclaiming and re-valorising an African past is crucial in understanding it as a form of nationalism. *Négritude* must be understood first and foremost as a means of remembering a past that the European has sought to eradicate. As a literary movement, it is perhaps the best example of the felt importance of the need to remember an African past, especially for those who, having been schooled in the European system, were taught that their past does not exist. If the African student was to learn any history, as Moumouni remembered above, it was by the now infamous phrase 'Nos ancêtres, les gaulois.' Albert Memmi posits this denial of the colonised's history as one of the main processes of colonialism: "La carence la plus grave subie par le colonisé est d'être placé *hors de l'histoire* et *hors de la cité*."[13] In his effort to make the colonised less than human, the coloniser, says Memmi, must strip the colonised of all the qualities that define his common humanity until he is "à peine encore un être humain" (107). The denial of a meaningful history is part of the process reducing the colonised. Memmi writes, "Loin de vouloir saisir le colonisé dans sa réalité, il est préoccupé de lui faire subir cette indispensable transformation. Et le mécanisme de ce repétrissage du colonisé est lui-même éclairant. Il consiste [...] en une série de négations" (105). The negation of the colonised's history is also a negation of his or her humanity. Mudimbe makes a similar assertion in his threefold explanation of colonialism: "the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the western perspective."[14] It is under the aegis of this need of the coloniser to reform 'native' minds (the natives who have been educated) that the African has been denied his/her own history. For Mudimbe, colonial discourse is constrained by an episteme (an intellectual atmosphere or a hegemonic mode of conceptualisation) that recognises only the things that are valued in European civilisation. When subjected to this type of episteme the African is described to himself as only lack or perversion. What Mudimbe points to is the need for finding new ways for the African to think him/herself. This is arguably the main goal of *négritude*. As conceived by Senghor and other francophone black intellectuals, *négritude* was a response to these

aspects of colonialism. It was an effort to remember a past that would allow the African subject to establish him/herself as a fully human and therefore political subject. In its effort to reclaim the historical and political African subject, *négritude* functioned as a form of nationalism: it was a claim to the right of self-definition.

When one considers the importance of history to nationalism, as theorised in Europe (Hans Kohn, Benedict Anderson and Ernest Renan), it becomes obvious that the colonialist denial of any indigenous history represents serious problems for the African nationalist. There is no slight irony in the fact that what Memmi describes as the main goal of the coloniser is the exact opposite of the dynamic that Benedict Anderson posits as necessary for the emergence of nationalism: a sense of community based on a perceived shared history. Under colonialism, the colonised is denied not only a sense of self, but, as Mudimbe and Memmi point out, he/she is also denied any frame of reference. Memmi writes that as a result of the social and historical mutilation of colonialism, "le colonisé ne fait presque jamais l'expérience de la nationalité et de la citoyenneté" (*Portrait* 117). However, to say that this denial of history represents a big problem for African nationalism is to assume that African nationalism does indeed buy into European theories of nationalism. *Négritude* here provides a cautionary case. In its construction of a continental or even racially based identity, *négritude* seems to be very different from European notions of the sound basis for the formation of a national identity. As Hans Kohn shows, European theorists of nationalism variously saw "common descent, language, territory, political entity, customs and traditions or religion" as the basis for nationalism, all stressing local particular forms.[15] The practitioners of *négritude* saw their ideology as both wider than nationalism and at the same time essential to nationalism in all countries with a black majority (It should be noted, however, that ethnicity and trade unions, as well as Islam in Muslim societies, were the main mobilising factors in various African countries). Senghor describes *négritude*'s project as "looking for ways of reinventing a sociohistoric foundation for independent African societies."[16] Thus it seeks to provide a basis for imagining the community as beyond the colonised condition in whatever locality. As a movement of liberation from global European hegemony, it sought to provide the tools for local claims of self-definition within a new system.

While *négritude* provides an argument that European notions of nationhood were not accepted wholesale by African nationalists, it points to the fact that, despite its differences, *négritude* still accepted most of the main tenets of European nationalism, especially the emphasis on history as legitimacy (not to mention its acceptance of the European legislated borders). In his book, *African Politics: Crises and Challenges*, the Africanist scholar Gus Liebenow discusses the difficulties faced by the nationalist movements in Africa. He describes the nationalist leader's mandate in a way that closely allies the conceptions of the challenges facing African leaders and the tenets of European nationalism. Liebenow writes:

> the leadership must create and sustain social myths of common origin and destiny, as well as engage in the designation of national heroes, events and places of ritualistic significance in terms of the survival of the national political community. The symbolism must be strong enough in its appeal and believability to be able to compete effectively with the more parochial or localized symbols of those previously independent or autonomous societies which are included in the new state. (49)

The similarities of this passage purporting to describe the peculiar problems of nation building in Africa, with the writings of Ernest Renan or Hans Kohn are undeniable. In describing nationalism's task in Africa, Liebenow accepts the main tenets of European nationalism as did most African intellectuals. This, however, leaves *négritude* in an uncomfortable position or even a type of catch- 22: it must try to remember a past that unifies while forgetting a past that threatens to magnify differences. When 'educated' to believe that this history does not exist in any form, this is not an easy task, and *négritude* struggled with it on many fronts.

It has now become a truism to say that *négritude* played a major role in the early development of many strands of sub-Saharan nationalism. As a literary and even political coming to consciousness of the African and diaspora students of the 1930s, it hastened the process of liberation in many African countries. The question that interests me here is not so much what *négritude* or similar forms of nationalism enabled during the

era of the fall of colonialism, but rather what it can or cannot enable in the era of post-independence nation building. As argued above, ***négritude*** as it was practised by Senghor does not always fit comfortably with the needs of new nations in terms of constructing a national and cultural identity. Its return to an authentic past in a search for identity relies on a version of history that may not stand up to the divergent claims in present-day African society. As will be discussed below, the literary establishment of Africa (whether or not it has escaped the influence of ***négritude*** or similar forms of nationalism) has added to the national or continental debates about the construction of an identity through engaging, critiquing and offering alternatives to the formulations put forward by other speakers in the national/continental arena.

In order to read this literature fruitfully, one must understand the intertextual relation between literature and other parts of African discourse. I am drawing here on the critical tradition of looking at African literature as an 'engaged' literature, a literature that actively participates in contemporary political debates. African literature in this sense corresponds to Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of literature in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*: "La littérature vous jette dans la bataille; écrire c'est une certaine façon de vouloir la liberté; si vous avez commencé, de gré ou de force vous êtes engagé."[17] The authors in question in this thesis have all used their fiction to interrogate the representations of history and identity offered by political leaders. They have in turn offered their own ways of imagining community and identity in an on-going dialogue between literature and politics that has marked the evolution of a national identity in many African countries. The authors and critics discussed challenge political traditions and rhetorics through their literature and critical works by reformulating the concepts of nation and identity in order better to reflect their specific contexts. If African literature is part and parcel of issues surrounding identity, how concerned is it about its own literary identity? Could it be said to be African or national? What is the nature of the noun 'Africa' or 'nation' from which the adjective 'African' or 'national' derives? What is the response of postcolonial writers, critics and politicians to the identities left behind by colonialism, and to the discourses of nationalism?

Francophone sub-Saharan debate

Perhaps most emblematic of the debate over national literatures in the African context is the now famous exchange between Adrien Huannou and Guy Midiohouan. In 1982 Midiohouan published an article in the journal *Peuples Noirs/Peuples Africains* in which he attacked the developing trend of nationally oriented critical approaches as intellectually bankrupt.[18] Huannou responded with a 100 page booklet entitled *La Question des littératures nationales en Afrique noire*.[19] As overstated as each piece is, they stand as markers of the two basic positions taken about this debate. As such they deserve attention.

Midiohouan starts his article, "Le phénomène des littératures nationales en Afrique," with a history of the French "possessions" in Africa which he describes as two big blocs, the AOF and the AEF (Midiohouan does not mention North Africa!). These blocks formed the basis of the French colonial administration from the beginning of the century onward, and were broken up only in 1956. Midiohouan attributes this re-organisation to France's fear of a unified African consciousness. They feared, he argues, that the African subjects might view themselves "comme participant du même ensemble géographique, relevant de la même autorité politique et administrative avec tout ce que cette situation de fait pouvait entraîner comme consequence pour la conscience collective."[20] This, he says, is the reason for the separate nations that exist today. This balkanisation of Africa, brought about through the machinations of the French, was mourned by the masses, he claims, and has led to horrendous political circumstances. The results have been tribalism, micro-nationalism, and a form of patriotism that he qualifies as "mesquin et carnivalesque de tirailleur inculte et analphabète promu chef d'état" that tolerates no dissent.

Midiohouan, with a certain amount of nostalgia, claims that until the 1970s literature from Africa was seen as part of a corpus of 'littérature négro-africaine' judged as such and written by authors who considered themselves as such. They shared a consciousness of all being black Africans. While many critics contend that this unity reflects only a desire to attract the same audience of Europeans, Midiohouan responds by pointing to the inward turn of today's fiction (that is, in 1982) as a function of state

bureaucracies looking to re-affirm their right to exist in a dictatorial fashion by exploiting literature and exiling dissidents.

Midiohouan goes on to say that many critics are playing into the hands of the states in their reinforcing of the idea of national literature. The arguments used to make these claims of nationality are consistently weak and mystifying. He points to Roger and Arlette Chemain's *Panorama critique de la littérature congolaise* as having a suspiciously vague definition of national literatures which in the end boils down to tribalism. This approach, he says, sounds derivative of the determinism always apparent in European ways of describing Africa where a person's village of origin inevitably defines his or her world-view and take on literature.

Furthermore, Midiohouan says, this type of project has nothing to do with literature and everything to do with ambitions to make a name for one's self. Why all this looking for differences, he asks? Critics should be more interested in what draws different African writers together. An author's allegiances should be judged by the "conscience d'appartenance qu'il manifeste dans son oeuvre et qui constitue l'horizon où les particularités identifiables de celle-ci acquièrent leur pleine signification" (69). Where in the past the fight against colonialism united African authors, now it is their common struggle against neo-colonialism. According to Midiohouan, this is the only meaningful context for interpretation. Nationalism is a dangerous diversion and it could lead to feelings of national superiority/inferiority and to war.

Huannou answers Midiohouan and others of his camp in a long essay, "La Question des littératures nationales en Afrique noire." Huannou avoids Midiohouan's main question by beginning with the premise that nations exist in Africa with politically distinct lives and thus the question of national literature depends on two points: are African states nations? And are their respective corpuses national literatures? The traditional response to these questions has been negative: because African states are defined by artificial colonial borders, they are therefore not really nations (Midiohouan), national literatures must be in vernaculars (Ngugi),[21] and the fact that African states (especially francophone) are very similar means that their literature is best described as negro-african (***négritude***). In the face of these more or less accepted critical postures, Huannou proposes a different way of looking at literature from Africa. African states, he

argues, are nations and their literatures should be approached as such, not as part of a continental tradition. Huannou goes on to offer a fairly broad definition of a national literature as the *ensemble* of all literary productions, oral or written, no matter what language, from citizens of a certain state. These texts will share a common nationality of author and therefore necessarily "elles expriment un vécu politique, économique, social et culturel propre à ce pays" (Huannou 13). In order to answer the question of whether African states constitute nations, Huannou puts forth two definitions of 'nation.' The first he takes from Ernest Renan's definition of the nation which he summarizes as a people with a common cultural heritage and a common desire to build a future together. Huannou attributes his second definition only to a vague consensus, saying that a nation also means a group of people forming a political community in a definite territory over which they have sovereign authority. With these definitions, Huannou points to both the cultural and the geographical components of nationhood. Based on these definitions, Huannou claims that African states are nations, albeit in formation. This formation, he says, is an ongoing process that one can see in the attitudes of citizens and the increasing integration of the nation-states of Africa on many levels: political, economic, cultural and juridical. Furthermore, he writes, both the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations treat African states as full nations. Huannou admits that African states may still have to work at national consciousness, but then asks which nation is perfectly integrated. Since the 1960s, he says, there has been an increasing move away from Pan-Africanism; people consider themselves first as nationals, and second as Africans.[22] Huannou claims that this same shift in focus has been visible in the critical literature as well and tries to explain this shift through two factors: the limitations of the Pan-Africanist criticism and the advantages of nationalist criticism. He cites as the limits of the Pan-Africanist approach the falsely homogenising image that it projects of the literature in question. Pan-Africanist critics, in their insistence on similarities, choose to ignore very real differences in political, social, and cultural contexts, differences that are becoming more and more evident with the separate evolution of nations since independence.

On the other hand, the national approach calls for thoroughness in its greater attention to detail. Huannou defines the national approach as one that constructs literary histories that recognise all the variables: influence of oral traditions, publishing

conditions, education etc... In this way, literary history is seen as part of the entire socio-political history of the nation. As for the question of whether or not the literatures of Africa constitute national literatures, Huannou uses a similar *fait accompli* argument. He presents an exhaustive survey of anthologies of African literature that have addressed the problem of national literatures. These monographs, he claims, show the widespread acceptance of the idea of national literatures even if they use some bizarre theories about nationalism. He goes on to cite at least nine issues of the journal *Notre Librairie* that focused on various national literatures. Huannou spends the rest of his extended essay trying to answer the most common objections to dividing up African literature according to nation. These critics, he says, have three main fears (as outlined by Midiohouan); that national governments will try to control literature for reasons of propaganda, that distinctions between nations will lead to hierarchies and isolationist tendencies, and that national literatures are quite simply a bid by certain critics for fame and fortune based on ever-increasing specialisation.

He responds to the fears of government manipulation by saying that government repression occurs on many levels, and will go on with or without literary critics and their ideas. A far more serious objection, put forward by many well-known intellectuals such as Midiohouan and Olympe Bhely-Quenum, is the fear that the concept of national literatures will act as a divisive concept in the African context, weakening Africa in its ongoing struggle against neo-colonialism. Huannou responds by pointing out that distinctions between African countries do exist due to different experiences of decolonisation and independence, but goes on to say that these differences should by no means militate against political and economic unity. He goes on to say that Midiohouan's fears that national literatures may in the end lead to war gives entirely too much credit to literary criticism. As for the charge that this is simply a case of academics run amok in their search to carve out ever smaller fields of specialisation, Huannou says that this can only benefit the study of African literature. The generalised approach leads to sloppy and shallow work, whereas approaching literature from a national framework forces a researcher to go into much more depth. Huannou concludes by saying that in order to really know literature, the national approach is necessary. National literatures express a

lived political, economic and cultural reality proper to their nations and the best readings recognise this.

Much of what Huannou argues relies on Frantz Fanon's discussion of the possibility for national cultures in Africa as laid out in his chapter "Sur la culture nationale" from *Les Damnés de la terre*.[23] Fanon offers a three step description of the route (across generations of African writers) that most African intellectuals in colonised Africa have pursued in their relations to a national culture. The first stage, he says, was a period of attempted assimilation into European culture. However, as nationalist movements gain momentum, the intellectuals respond by trying to escape western culture through reforging their links with the peoples and customs of their homelands. In the colonial context, says Fanon, the claims of the native intellectual are not a luxury but a necessity (268-69). This step in much of Africa took the form of *négritude*, a literary philosophy that Fanon considers understandable but dangerous. *Négritude* arose out of the desire to redress the insults thrown at Africans as "nègres", but there is a danger in this type of response. *Négritude*, writes Fanon, "trouvait donc sa première limite dans les phénomènes qui rendent compte de l'historisation des hommes" (262). In becoming a-historical, *négritude* quickly becomes exoticist. In looking for a continental or racial culture, he explains, critics remove culture from the everyday. This separation from real life is what leads to exoticism: "Imaginer qu'on fera de la culture noire" he writes, "c'est oublier singulièrement que les nègres sont en train de disparaître" (282). In the third phase, which Fanon characterises as the "fighting phase," the native intellectual goes beyond national consensus against Empire and "se transforme en réveilleur de peuple" (268). Fanon argues that true national consciousness is expressed only in a living, changing culture. He defines national culture as "l'ensemble des efforts faits par un peuple sur le plan de la pensée pour décrire, justifier et chanter l'action à travers laquelle le peuple s'est constitué et s'est maintenu" (281). This then is where the intellectual must position himself/herself in order that his/her literature may play a meaningful role in the national culture, he/she must be a part of the struggle that defines the nation.

Huannou's debt to Fanon is obvious when he accepts the idea that the most obvious and politically efficacious approach to culture is national. He, like Fanon, points to the tendency of the racial viewpoint to echo or depend on European notions of what it

means to be African. Also like Fanon, he sees the establishment of separate African nations as imperative and believes that their respective cultures and intellectuals have a role to play in this process. Huannou and Fanon diverge, however, on one very important point: the nature of the nation. For Fanon the nation is expressed and defined through struggle, an active and wilful process of claiming a land that in turn creates a shared identity. Huannou, despite his inclusion of the cultural as part of the definition of the nation, finds himself falling back on the geographical 'fact' of nationhood as his ultimate justification. Where Fanon saw the possibility of unity through struggle, Huannou can say only that this unity is already a psychological factor that emerges more and more strongly with the increasing centralisation of African states.

The Midiohouan-huannou debate exemplifies the problems not only of literature's relationship to nationalism in general, but also African intellectuals' ambiguous feelings about both written literature and European conceptions of nationalism. Both critics exhibit a tension between a desire to see African literature as a collection of discrete traditions or as a unified whole. While they argue about whether or not national literatures exist, they do not argue about the meaning of nationality. In doing so, these Francophone critics take the European notion of nation for granted (this point will be amplified in the Anglophone debate).

Anglophone sub-Saharan debate

While most of what I have reviewed above has taken place in the Francophone African context, the Anglophone African literary establishment has also wrestled with these questions under arguably much more severe circumstances. One of the most pointed examples of literature working towards a self-conscious nationalism is in the writings that surrounded the Biafran War. Nigeria has enjoyed one of the most prolific literary scenes in Anglophone Africa but also one of the most bitter post-independence wars of secession. Biafra, Nigeria and the writers who aligned themselves with either entity, provide a compelling case study of how Anglophone Africa has sought to use the tradition of nationalism in literature.

The two best known writers from Nigeria are Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. During the Biafran War, Achebe, who comes from the Igbo area, was very vocal in his support for the Biafran cause. Soyinka, on the other hand, hailing from the North of the country, found himself uncomfortable with the positions of both the Biafrans in the South and the main government of the Central and Northern districts. His response took the form of the Third Movement, so-called because of its efforts to find a solution to the problem that included neither secession of the South nor submission to an obviously unfit central government. Both Achebe and Soyinka let their views be known during the war, and both were heavily invested in their version of nationalism. In an article entitled "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause," Chinua Achebe wrote:

> Biafra stands in opposition to the murder and rape of Africa by whites and blacks alike because she has tasted both and found them equally bitter. [...] Biafran writers are committed to the revolutionary struggle of their people for freedom and true independence. [...] I believe our cause is right and just. And this is what literature in Africa should be about today - right and just causes. (*Morning* 83-84)

Achebe here stresses that literature should indeed be about "right and just causes," a phrase he uses in this passage to describe the Biafran War. The unit to be preserved here is Biafra and not Nigeria, and, as a unit, Biafra in Achebe's eyes has the right to govern itself, and a claim to a group of authors who will write on its behalf. In doing so, according to Achebe, these writers will be participating in an African imperative.

Soyinka, on the other hand, saw his duty as a writer as one of encouraging the preservation of Nigeria. As a member of the Third Movement, Soyinka sought to achieve this through the replacement of the old government that had actively participated in the slaughter of Igbos, but also through the preservation of the Nigerian Federal system, including Biafra. The Third Movement agreed with Biafra's grievances, but thought that secession was not the right answer. While they denounced the Government, they sought to mediate between Biafra and government. In 1966, Soyinka was thrown in jail for

participating in the hijacking of the national radio station for one morning. Soyinka says of the third movement:

> [It] tried to break away from the secessionist principle and at the same time repudiate the Central Government in Lagos which was, whether you like it or not, founded on a certain genocidal event. [...] the Third Movement tried to find a more ideological basis for reconstructing the entire society and obliterating the tribalistic lines which formed the original context of that war.[24]

The difference between Achebe and Soyinka's ideas of nationalism is no more obvious than it is in this passage where Soyinka calls for a national society based on the "entire" society which he then opposes to the "tribalistic lines" which in his view caused the war. Where Achebe believed that Biafra was a legitimate unit for self-rule, Soyinka was much more invested in preserving a nation-state of much greater size, and in his definition, multi-ethnic. In seeing the nation as necessarily large and multi-ethnic, Soyinka denies the definition of ethnicity as nationality to which many anglophone Africans turn (this will be elaborated below).

Having said that, it is interesting to note that before the Biafran secessionist movement, Achebe proclaimed a definition of nationalism similar to Soyinka's in that he believed that a nation is wider than ethnicity. Achebe's change in emphasis may be the result of the actions of the Nigerian central government. As he says in the quotation above, literature must serve a purpose that is "right and just." In his eyes the legitimate cause is the one of the oppressed. After the secession had been brought to an end, Achebe returns to Nigeria as the nation, but is careful to point out that this is a contractual and therefore somewhat artificial body. Achebe explicitly states that the nation of Nigeria is a gathering of different ethnicities and not an ending to their separate identities. When asked to define African literature in 1964, Achebe responded:

> I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units- in fact the sum total of all the *national* and *ethnic* literatures of Africa. A

> national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory. In other words a literature that is written in the *national* language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation. (*Morning* 56)

This definition of African, national and ethnic literatures, offered before the crisis, follows a clear hierarchical structure which places the nation somewhere between the continent and the ethnic group. After the Biafran War, Achebe points to the political implications of this structure during a lecture at the university of Washington in 1973. Once again, he addressed the question of the meaning of 'national:'

> What does a country like Nigeria do for a national language? And this is not simply a literary question; it is perhaps even more a political question. As I was saying this afternoon to another group I don't really mind what we do. We could decide for instance to repudiate the last hundred years in Africa and say 'No, we just don't recognize anything that happened - the Berlin conference of 1884 and all that. We repudiate the boundaries that were created for us by the French and the Portuguese and the others, and we return to the state of Africa before all this happened.' Well, that will raise more problems than it solves. (Morell 34)

In response to a question as to whether it was good for people to prefer "tribe" to nation, Achebe responds:

> I don't think that 'nation' is good and 'tribe' is bad. That's an oversimplification. Nation is good, modern, European; tribe is primitive, bad reactionary. I don't think it is true. They are just different forms of political organizations, and if you create out of a number of what you call tribes another unit which you might call state or nation, then what you should do is to think about what you should put into it so that all these people that you have drawn into the new unit have a stake in it. (Morell 52.)

This answer emphasises Achebe's own position as a member of a once-disadvantaged group within the nation. In recognising the tensions that exist between nation and ethnicity in some cases, Achebe tries to rectify some of the seeming carelessness in a statement like Soyinka's which posits the ethnic as a necessary hindrance to the nation.

This same kind of tension between nation and ethnicity occurs between two of Kenya's most famous writers, Jomo Kenyatta and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Like the Biafran partisans and the Achebe of 1968, Ngugi believes that the primary nationality of any person was co-equal with his/her ethnicity. In a plea for greater translation between African language literatures, Ngugi writes, "Thus there would be a real dialogue between the literatures, languages and cultures of the different nationalities within any one country." (*Decolonising the mind* 85). Throughout *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi refers to the multi-national states of Africa, drawing a clear line between the state of Kenya and what Ngugi considers his true nationality, Gikuyu. In defining national as ethnic, Ngugi implicitly, and later explicitly, denied the authority of the Kenyan government as a national government saying that it was out of touch with the people and ruled by European interests. Kenyatta, who was in power at the time, had Ngugi jailed as a threat to national security, in this case accurately assessing Ngugi's intentions. What Kenyatta defined as the nation was very much the state that arose from the ex-colonial structures. In a 1964 statement, Kenyatta tried to justify the One-Party state by saying that nation-states are already unified bodies: "At no time did the African tribes, or groups of tribes, see the State in the same way as the Greek City-States. At no time did African tribes see themselves as tinpot 'nations'."[25] He goes on to stress that these semi-autonomous, self-governing groups had a history of interaction especially in times of trouble, pointing to the fight against colonialism. For Kenyatta then, the nation-state is a logical continuation of the historical relations between the people living in Kenya. He explicitly rejects the ethnic as national, believing instead that the ethnic was to be subsumed in the state.

As can be seen from these often internecine struggles, Anglophone Africa seems to have a much looser understanding of what it means to have a national literature or identity. Where in Francophone Africa the term 'national' is almost always understood to mean the multi-ethnic states of Africa inherited from colonialism, in Anglophone

spheres the discussion ranges anywhere from the ethnic as national to Africa as nation(al). Where the Francophone theorists and writers take the European notion of nation for granted (i.e. national literatures exist), Anglophone Africans have endlessly redefined it to suit their own purposes. In fact, in Anglophone Africa the argument more often than not has been how to define national literature rather than whether or not it is necessarily a good thing.

Just as the debate about national literatures in Francophone Africa was eventually distilled in the pages of *Notre Librairie*, the Anglophone debates were similarly encapsulated in a collection of essays called *Literature and National Consciousness* (papers from the 1987 University of Calabar International conference on African Literature). This collection of nineteen articles shows the breadth of the Anglophone debate over how to define 'national' literature. In an article entitled "Epistemological Issues in the Determination of a National Literature: The Example of African Literature," Damian Opata argues that though Africa can not really be considered a nation, the issue of national literatures is a useful approach for trying to determine what makes African literature African. He takes issue with the camp that calls for a recognition of African literature as a corpus, arguing that the notion of Africa as a unit is no more meaningful than seeing the nation as a unit. After reviewing the confusion surrounding the issue, Opata concludes that the notion of national literatures is ultimately reductive and unhelpful. Literature, he says, should be used to explore "other parts of the world, not navel-gazing."[26]

Another theorist, Clement Okafor, takes a similar position to Ngugi in an article entitled, "Oral Literature and National Consciousness." Okafor calls for literature to draw nations together but defines this need for unity as a need to draw together the "various ethnic nationalities that comprise the Nigerian state" (104). Thus, like Ngugi, he places the definition of nationality within the ethnic group. On the other hand, Kofi Anyidoho, in an article about Ayi Kwei Armah, celebrates the passage that reads: " 'You didn't say what country you were from. Were you ashamed?' 'It is not shame. I just think of our small states as colonial things. I am an African.'" Anyidoho points to this as an example of "Armah's concept of Black people wherever they are today as one people and as one nation" (118-19). Anyidoho here defines Africa as nation, as did Opata, but

finds in this definition something uplifting and like Armah, something that carries a measure of truth where Opata found only a confusion that, in his thinking, points to an ultimate bankruptcy of the idea itself.

These writers, gathered together as they are in one collection of essays, point to the widely-varying definitions of nationality that Anglophone African writers have used to support their particular visions of how African literature should be classified and studied. Like their Francophone colleagues, they exhibit a tension between a desire to see African literature as a unified whole or as a collection of discrete traditions. However, unlike their Francophone colleagues, they do not find themselves arguing about whether or not national literatures exist (with the exception of Opata), rather, they argue about the meaning of nationality itself.

Francophone North African debate

In the North African postcolonial context, the issues of national, cultural and literary identity were subjected to a process of unravelling. Postcolonial North African writers and intellectuals recognised the major role that Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism or Pan-Africanism played in anticolonial discourses by local nationalist movements. The need to consolidate national identity, first in mobilising opposition to colonialism, later in constructing an independent nation, is undeniable. After independence, however, most North African intellectuals, writers and critics argued, as Khatibi puts it echoing Fanon's challenge, that "Le jeu européen est définitivement terminé, il faut trouver autre chose."[27] Nationalism for them is a necessary stage (of a process leading to independence) but it is doomed to failure. For nationalistic cultural politics is synonymous with pure origin and homogeneity, and operates by excluding those who do not speak and write the same language (cultural and linguistic). North Africa's particularities of diglossia (standard Arabic, spoken Arabic, Berber, French), bilingualism, mixed ethnic groups (Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Africans), multiple cultural inheritances (Western, African and Arabo-Islamic), are issues that are thought to require a radical conception of identity, a sense of identity that is plural in nature. Accordingly, North African writing in French, born at the border between French colonialism and Arabo-Islamic as well as African tradition, can

no longer be defined in terms of a unitary sense of literary or national identity in postcolonial North Africa. Plural identity is, in Deleuzean terms, a form of deterritorialisation from geographic, cultural and ethnic borders. The postcolonial North African writer thus has no regard for linguistic and cultural positions or borders. This deterritorialisation is the objective of Khatibi's *Maghreb pluriel* and a collection of essays on the cultural politics of the Maghreb by such authors as Abdelkébir Khatibi, Abdellah Bounfour, Abdelwahab Meddeb, Hédi Bouraoui, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Nabil Farès, and Mouloud Mammeri, in a special number of *Les Temps Modernes* (October 1977): "Tel écart tourné vers la pensée de la différence, nommons-le Maghreb."[28]

Abdellah Bounfour warns us against cultural practices such as the notions of One and the Same, saying that " toute problématique culturelle qui ne remet pas en question la notion d'unité est une problématique ethnocentriste et par conséquent oppressive de tout ce qui est hors d'elle ou à son horizon (421). In questioning hegemonic definitions of the anticolonial and postcolonial nation as a unified entity, these writers and critics have investigated the borderlines within the nation, emphasising the significance of fragmentary discourses and of those who are on the fringe because: "[...] une pensée qui ne s'inspire pas de sa pauvreté est toujours élaborée pour dominer et humilier: une pensée qui ne soit pas *minoritaire*, *marginale*, *fragmentaire*, et *inachevée*, est toujours une pensée de l'ethnocide." (*Maghreb pluriel* 18)

North African writing in French transcends the notion of national literature because it is too restrictive for those who are located in or among several languages and cultures. To be bilingual, for example, as Deleuze and Guattari note, does not imply "la possession de plusieurs systèmes dont chacun serait homogène en lui-même; c'est d'abord la ligne de fuite ou de variation qui affecte chaque système en l'empêchant d'être homogène."[29] North African writing in French does not reject the notion of nation or national identity entirely; it simply interrogates the social order which recognises only one language which, in turn, reproduces the same history, as Lucy Irigaray writes, "Si nous continuons à nous parler le même langage, nous allons reproduire la même histoire."[30] This does not mean that Ngugi's substitution of Gikuyu for English, for example, or a North African writing in Arabic, are necessarily a reproduction of the same history. Cultural renewal is not about speaking another language (French or English); it is

rather about speaking a language of difference whether this language is one's own or acquired. Significantly, North African postcolonial writers do not attribute the staleness of North African literature to the continued use of the French language. They do not claim that the innovations can be achieved simply by switching to Arabic as a means of literary and poetic expression. In this respect, their aesthetic concerns reflect the preoccupations of the mid-1960s in Morocco.

In the mid-1960s in Morocco, a small group of young writers and poets had already formed around the *Souffles* review (1966-1972) and academic institutions in Casablanca. The members of the *Souffles* review were interested in a wide-ranging list of social literary issues related to the poetics of national literatures and cultures in postcolonial North Africa. A major concern of their publications was to develop a new understanding of the North African writer's relationship to his or her language of choice, whether it be French or Arabic. This generation of writers critically examined issues such as cultural and national identity, bilingualism, and the neocolonial implications of 'Francophonie.'

In issue number four of *Souffles* (1966), Abdellatif Laâbi, the founder, published one of the most influential essays he ever wrote for the review. "La culture nationale, donnée et exigence historique" became a 'manifesto' for the younger generation of North African writers. It set their proposed itinerary toward a "décolonisation culturelle" based on a rejection of existing literary and poetic models. In this essay, Laâbi argues that the first step in the decolonisation of French-language North African literature should entail going beyond the surface level of language:

> J'affirme personnellement que l'on ne décolonise pas avec les mots. Seule une refonte mentale, une redécouverte de notre patrimoine, sa remise en question et sa réorganisation peuvent mettre en branle cette reprise en main de notre personnalité et de notre destin d'hommes. Nous aurons à ce moment-là entamé notre propre itinéraire et serons rentrés dans la phase effective, concrète, de la décolonisation. Il faut absolument entretenir au départ une méfiance vis-à-vis de la langue d'expression qu'on emploie. Que cette langue soit le français, l'arabe ou n'importe quelle autre. [...] Or, l'écrivain de race

est celui qui fait un usage singulier et irremplaçable de la langue. C'est celui qui nous propose et impose un langage nouveau, marqué du sceau de son univers créateur. A l'écrivain de chez nous de désarticuler cette langue qui est sienne, de la violenter pour lui extirper toutes ses possibilités. Encore faut-il qu'il possède cette faculté organisatrice et exorcisante que seul l'apprentissage des réalités profondes peut lui conférer.[31]

Laâbi contends that merely writing about revolutionary themes cannot lead the way to decolonisation; a complete change in the writer's attitude towards his or her language of expression is required. His own words demonstrate the relationship between the process of psychological decolonisation and language. Laâbi's essay on the revitalisation of national culture does not advocate a return to indigenous languages as a means of achieving a "décolonisation culturelle." To him, a North African writer's originality derives from a transformation of the chosen language into a personalised discourse that challenges and stimulates readers of all backgrounds. Although *Souffles* was banned in 1972, the review's innovative philosophy had a lasting impact upon a generation of Moroccan writers and poets.

Nationalism and the Organisation for African Unity

The debate over the definition of national and cultural identity, or even the definition of the nation, was not confined to the literary sphere. As colony after colony gained independence, the shape of political institutions in Africa became a pressing question. These debates reached their high point in the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the discussions surrounding its charter. The first three points of Article III of the charter of the Organisation of African Unity read:

The member states, in pursuit of the purposes stated in Article II, solemnly affirm and declare their adherence to the following principles:

1. the sovereign equality of all member states;
2. non interference in the internal affairs of states;

3. respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each member state and for its inalienable right to independent existence.[32]

It would be hard to read this as anything other than a declaration of agreement that the nation-state is indeed, as Benedict Anderson points out, "the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."[33] In this Article of its charter, the OAU not only recognises the prior existence of nation-states, but proclaims their "inalienable" right to existence and their loyal sovereignty. This may seem odd in an organisation dedicated to the greater unity of the African continent and indeed a number of political leaders pointed this out. But the OAU charter seeks to walk a fine line in trying to balance the entrenchment of the nation-state with the desire for unity that is proclaimed in the name of the organisation.

The organisation of the OAU around nation-states did not come about without a fight over the best method of achieving African unity. From the first All-African Peoples' Conference (AAPC) in 1958 through the establishment of the OAU in 1963 and even through the first regular session of the Council of Heads of State, the shape of unity was hotly contested, a struggle which the charter's unqualified acceptance of the nation-state does little to reflect.

In 1958, the year after Ghana's independence, Kwame Nkrumah held two conferences in Accra. The first in May 1958 was a gathering of Heads of State of the independent countries of Africa (which numbered eight at that point in time). While this conference was an important event in terms of the message it sent to the colonisers, the more radical rhetoric of anti-colonialism and unity did not emerge until the All-African Peoples' Conference in December of the same year. Nkrumah invited to this conference the leaders of anti-colonial movements from around the continent, thus providing them with their first openly African base of operations (Thompson, *Africa and Unity* 126). It was at this conference that Nkrumah found the greatest acceptance of his cherished theory of a United States of Africa. Nkrumah had long called for an African unity of substance, a real federation of African states modelled on American or Soviet lines. The proclamation of the AAPC calls for "a Commonwealth of Free African States" based on the following reasoning:

> Whereas the great mass of African peoples are animated by a desire for unity; whereas the unity of Africa will be vital to the independence of its component units and essential to the security and general well-being of African peoples; whereas the existence of separate states in Africa is fraught with the dangers of exposure to imperialist intrigues and of the resurgence of colonialism even after their attainment of independence, unless there is unity among them... (Thompson 352)

In this proclamation, the rhetoric of balkanisation as threat predominates. Nkrumah clearly believes that the existence of separate nation-states is a threat to the struggle of African nations to escape the domination of Europe, either as out-and-out colonisers or as neo-colonial forces in the nominally independent states.

Nkrumah, as the president of Ghana, continued to press for a federation of African states going as far as forming a union with Guinea and Liberia in 1959, which Mali joined in 1961 after leaving the federation of Mali (composed of Senegal and Mali). When the Conference of Independent African States was called to meet in Addis Ababa in 1963 (the conference that was to form the OAU), Nkrumah was provided with a forum to try to convince the now 32 independent African states to create a continental wide government of federated African states. He addressed the gathering:

> Let us return to our people of Africa not with empty hands and with high sounding resolutions but the firm hope and assurance that at long last African Unity has become a reality. We shall thus begin the triumphant march to the kingdom of African personality and to the continent of prosperity and progress.[34]

Nkrumah here calls for African unity, claiming that this is the nature of the "African presonality." Like Midiohouan's argument discussed above, Nkrumah asserts that Africa is culturally homogeneous and that unity of the political kingdom will lead to a unified cultural kingdom. While other leaders did not go as far as Nkrumah in their declarations,

he was not the only leader at Addis Ababa to voice the desire for a close federation of states. Nyerere seems to be of a similar mind when he says: "The enemies of Africa are now praying. They are praying for the failure of this conference. The people of Africa are also praying. They are praying for the triumph of Pan-Africanism over narrow nationalism and regionalism" (Cervenka 68). The contrast that Nyerere paints between Pan-Africanism as an inclusionary doctrine and nationalism as a divisive and exclusionary doctrine points back to the debate about national literatures as a hindrance to African unity which provides a threat on two levels; first, the need to unite in order to fight neo-colonialism and second, the possibility of intra-African conflict. Milton Obote points to both of these possibilities in the political sphere when he agreed with Nyerere at Addis Ababa saying:

> A moins que nous ne soyons capable de créer un puissant mécanisme central, la tendance à rester éloignés les uns des autres et à constituer des blocs contre nous-mêmes ne fera que croître. La croissance de cette tendance ne pourra qu'aider les ex-colonisateurs et les autres puissances désireuses de prendre pied en Afrique. Et une fois que cela se sera traduit dans la réalité, toute la base de notre révolte contre la domination étrangère s'effondrera.[35]

Despite the passionately stated support of these three heads of state for a strong federation among the African states, they did not manage to convince many of the other leaders present that this was indeed the most desirable form of African organisation.

Many of the other heads of state responded with the same kind of arguments that appear in Huannou's defence of national literatures as outlined above. The other leaders appealed to the history of the states as irrevocable and some even went as far as assigning a positive value to the idea of nationhood itself. Abubakar Tafewa Balewa, the Prime Minister of Nigeria, responded to Nkrumah's appeal for federation by saying:

> Il est regrettable que les Etats africains aient été divisés en différents groupes par les puissances coloniales. Dans certains cas, une même tribu s'est trouvée partagée entre quatre pays différents... Nous n'y pouvons rien, car ces

> groupes différents existent depuis 60 ans; toute tentative de la part d'un pays africain de méconnaître ce fait pourrait provoquer des troubles et pour cette raison le Nigeria reconnaît l'existence de tous les pays d'Afrique. (Mfoulou 33)

Balewa here makes an appeal to 60 years of history, claiming that this history has formed groups beyond ethnicity. In doing so, he makes a claim for the status of these groups as existing in reality and recognising themselves as a group (sounding here like Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as a mutually imagined community). Nigeria, he says, will respect these feelings.

While most of the heads of state present in Addis Ababa supported the continued existence of autonomous nation-states as outlined in Article III of the charter, a few voiced reservations about the impossibility of changing the borders that existed at the time of independence. Certain movements in several states have continued to challenge this part of the OAU's charter. The Prime Minister of Somalia voiced some of these doubts at the conference, wanting to reserve the right to incorporate the Somalian populations (and lands) that existed as parts of Ethiopia and Kenya. The Ethiopian Prime Minister replied:

> If we are to redraw the map of Africa on the basis of religion, race and language, I fear that many states will cease to exist. It is in the interest of all Africans today to respect the frontiers drawn on the maps, even though they were drawn by the former colonialists. (Cervenka 13-14)

This sense of the appropriateness of the nation-state as a form of political organisation of Africa calls on the pragmatics of co-existing in a world formed by history, but not all the leaders who favoured the nation-states did so for these seemingly purely pragmatic reasons. Modibo Keita, the President of Mali, declared that: "The colonial system had divided Africa, but it had permitted nations to be born. Present frontiers must be respected and the sovereignty of each state must be consecrated by a multi-lateral non-aggression pact" (Cervenka 14). Keita here obviously believes that "the nation" makes up

for any division of Africa that colonialism created. His thinking was echoed by Sylvanus Olympia when he said:

> In their struggle against the colonial powers, the new African states, arbitrary and unrealistic as their original boundaries may have been, managed at last to mobilize the will of their citizens towards the attainment of national independence. Achieved at such great sacrifice, such a reward is not to be cast away lightly.[36]

At the 1963 meeting, the heads of state settled on a charter which proclaimed the legitimacy of the nation-state as a form of political organisation to be both undeniable and inalienable, but the objections raised by some of those present did not simply disappear. In the first Regular Conference of the Heads of State and Government on 17-21 July 1964, the heads of state found it necessary to re-affirm their support for the continued existence of separate states. The conference produced a document that proclaimed:

> Considérant que les problèmes frontaliers sont un facteur grave et permanent de désaccord ,
> Consciente de l'existence d'agissements d'origine extra-africaine visant à diviser les Etats africains,
> Considérant en outre que les frontières des Etats africains au jour de leur indépendance constituent une réalité tangible...
> 1. [la Conférence des Chefs d'Etat] réaffirme solennellement le respect total par tous les Etats membres de l'OUA des principles énoncés au paragraphe de l'Article III...
> 2. Déclare solennellement que tous les Etats membres s'engagent à respecter les frontières existant au moment où ils ont accedé à l'indépendance. (Mfoulou, *L'OUA* 85-6)

This re-affirmation reflects the continuing border disputes between Somalia and Ethiopia, Ghana and Togo, Morocco and various neighbours. The council of heads of state in the statement above appealed mostly to a sense of 'realism' in accepting the borders inherited from colonialism. Francois Tombalbaye, the President of Chad, sums up the argument when he said "realism requires that we build up within each country national unity which is the fundamental basis of African unity."[37] This slow approach to African unity, one that looks first to the existence of nation-states as a necessity,[38] became the doctrine that triumphed in the OAU. Any other conception of the basis for possible unity in the future was ridiculed by President Philibert Tsiranana (Malagasy) when he compared the desire for the African political kingdom to the Christian belief in Christ's kingdom at the end of the world; "I know well that Christians believe that when the end of the world is nigh there will be only one government," he said, "But perhaps this is looking too far ahead" (Amate, *Inside the OAU* 77). Thus as with the arguments for national literatures, the argument for nation-states relies on a sense that nations are too much a part of history to be done away with and that they represent the most legitimate form of political representation in Africa or elsewhere. The critics of the nation respond in both politics and literature by pointing to the divisiveness of the concept of the nation and go on to say that this divisiveness can only hurt Africa in its continuing struggles to overcome European domination.

In the western academy, where the organisation of literary studies by nation is an accepted ideology, the use of nationalism as an approach to literature has turned not so much around questions of its efficacy as a literary tool, but instead around the theoretical weaknesses of nationalism itself. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, with its formulation of nationalism, has set the stage for an extensive questioning of what nationalism does as well as what gets done on its behalf. According to Anderson, the nation is "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (*Imagined Communities* 6). Anderson goes on to place the genesis of nationalism in a time of shifting social patterns in Europe. With the breakdown of the social orders of both the church as a world system and the dynastic realm as a political power, came the possibility of conceiving both time and community differently. The key to this new type of consciousness was the printing press because it allowed for "wholly

new ideas of simultaneity" (37). Anderson gives the example of the newspaper, which he says becomes a quasi-ritual of modern-day community. We may never meet our fellow nationals, but each morning as we read our newspaper we know that thousands of our fellow countrymen are reading exactly the same thing. Thus we participate in a community through the aegis of the press. Instead of the religious notion of time as fulfilment, the modern nation can only be conceived of in a space of "secular, homogeneous, empty time," marked by the clock and calendar, not prophecy. It is this sense of homogeneous, empty time that allows us to conceive of simultaneity not as something ordained by a divine will, but as the nature of time itself.

Anderson also points to the novel as something that comes to serve for its readers as a representation of the nation. He finds significant a description of one of the earliest novels from the Philippines (*El Periquillo Sarniento*): "These episodes permit the author to describe hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries" (31) claiming that this is in itself the national consciousness at work. He writes, "Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of plurals" (37). One prison metonymically stands for all prisons within the national territory. This reading of the one as standing for the many or the plural is only possible in the homogeneous, empty time that Anderson claims provides the basis for national thinking. With this analysis of nationalism, Anderson gives to literature a powerful role in establishing and maintaining the possibility of the concept of a national community.

While Anderson offers a powerful role to literature, many literary critics have begun to question Anderson's understanding of the nature of community and exactly how it is imagined. Homi Bhabha has been trying to suggest new ways of thinking about the nature of communities and how they are established. One of Bhabha's main concerns with Anderson's understanding of nationalism is the present, transcendental subject that one needs in order to conceive of a "succession of plurals" as a representation of a reassuring "sociological solidity." What Bhabha fears in this solidity is the loss of difference and ambiguity. There exists, and should be a way of representing, difference between one prison and another, one person's experience of a prison and another's. If we yield to the myth of the sociological solidity, we become like the Althusserian Marxists who read history through a lens of science that is posited as being able to explain all.[39]

Bhabha seems to be arguing in essence that there should be no key to the national character, no over-riding factor that explains it as Anderson posits in this homogeneous, empty time of horizontal, contemporary, simultaneous society. What Anderson's construct occludes is the presence of vertical (metaphoric) difference that Bhabha claims is always present within nationalism. Bhabha positions this difference in the moment between what he labels as the pedagogic and performative instances of nationalism.[40] The pedagogic aspect of nationalism lies in its cumulative, historical aspects while the performative takes the form of the constant, daily practices of fashioning the national culture. The split between being the subject whose actions produce the nation (the performative) and being the object that the discourse of the nation is supposed to circumscribe (the pedagogical) produces the gap where difference enters.

Most nationalist discourse tries to ignore difference in its emphasis on the ability to fashion a self-similar whole: Bhabha points especially to a saying that Americans see every day on their currency, "Out of the many, one" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 294). This desire to see one in the space of many can be seen to function in a manner very similar to how Bhabha describes colonialist discourse. In his article, "Of Mimicry and Men: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,"[41] Bhabha stresses the desire inherent in colonial discourse to do away with its own ambivalence. Colonial discourse, he says, seeks both to ignore reality and to rearrange it in order to preserve its own authority. Nationalism similarly tries to ignore its own ambiguities. Instead of trying to fit the many into one, a saying that both acknowledges the presence of difference and tries to do away with it, nationalism ought not to strive for a succession of plurals, but a dialogue of difference. Bhabha writes, "For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity." ("DissemiNation," 320). Bhabha obviously wants to retain a desire to fashion a national culture out of dialogue. The concept of a homogeneous, empty time preserves the transcendental subject that sees all, that creates community out of difference, and converts the 'many' into 'one.' For Bhabha, the nation must instead accept its ambiguity. He calls for a national culture that acknowledges itself as a contended, performative space. Literature then should be approached with a desire to "recognize the symbolic

process through which the social imaginary - nation, culture or community - becomes the subject of discourse and the object of psychic identification" ("DissemiNation" 304). Bhabha calls for a recognition of writing as "a signifying practice, a process which sees meaning as a systemic production within determinate institutions and systems of representation." ("Representation" 98). In doing so, the critic can avoid the easy correlation of written word to reality that naturalises the narratives of nationalism.

One of the more determinate systems of representations in which African literature circulates is its own tradition as a 'politically engaged literature.' This tradition includes the institutions of the nationalist party and ascension to independent nationhood, processes of which literature considered itself to be an integral part. This history of the political discourse (with which many writers interact, including the ones discussed in this thesis), whether oppositional or celebratory, becomes a useful lens through which one can read African literatures from differing backgrounds. At the same time, this is not to say that all of these authors are trapped in a position described by a 'tradition' of political engagement. They all seem to recognise their performance as performance, to recognise, as did Fanon, that the culture lies in the making. What they all seem to accept is the idea that they, through their writings, have an important role in that making or contestation of others' structures. However, African texts with explicitly nationalist concerns have recently been accused of a certain *naiveté* at best, or false consciousness at worst, through a questioning of traditional understandings of nationalism. In the face of this, I would argue that African authors recognise the ambiguous nature of nationalist discourse, as evident in the writings under consideration and many others.

In an article entitled, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?,"[42] Anthony Appiah argues along the same lines as Homi Bhabha that nationalist rhetoric often relies on a naturalised sense of identity. He writes, "The novels of the first stage are thus realist legitimations of nationalism: they authorize a 'return to traditions'" (349). Appiah goes on to argue that the novels of the second stage (the postcolonial stage), of which he uses Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* as the prime example, seek to do away with "the form of realism and the content of nationalism" (350). He argues that Ouologuem replaces bourgeois nationalism with an appeal for recognition of the suffering masses who have endured oppressive regimes of

both Black and White making. Appiah points to a very important trend in many African literary texts which reflects the changing intellectual priorities of postcolonial writers. Appiah's study, however, does not explore writers such as Chinua Achebe or Ousmane Sembène who have published during both stages (colonial and postcolonial). Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a realist novel that is capable of subversion in the same way as what Appiah calls "post-realist" writing of the second stage. While "post-realist" novelists are indeed challenging the claims of a realist narrative strategy in novels and nationalism, many of them, as in the writings under consideration, are doing it in the name of nations that otherwise exist, naturalised or not. Many African authors and their critics are looking for ways to investigate African literature that allows for the continuing involvement of these authors in the most pressing problems of their times: the development of their nations but in ways which recognise and celebrate the very ambiguity that Bhabha points to.

Many postcolonial African writers, particularly the ones under consideration, while expressing the need to consolidate national identity, nevertheless recognise that any model of identity is impossible fully to embody. Nationalism and its cultural politics, as Kristeva says, exclude "[...] l'étranger- l'autre identité, ou bien (et surtout) celui qui dans la même, ne parle pas la même langue, l'écrivain analysant."[43] They attempt, therefore, without rejecting identity altogether, to articulate a "fluid" national identity that is heterogeneous in relation to languages, ethnicities, gender, sexualities, and religions, and that questions any totalising binary opposition to the former coloniser. Writers such as Achebe, Khatibi, Ben Jelloun, Djebar, Farah, Nwapa and many others, as we will see throughout this thesis, have argued that the process of decolonisation, which sometimes becomes a search for essential cultural purity, does not necessarily harness the theoretical subversiveness offered by postcolonial writing. Khatibi argued above that not only is the notion of authentic experience as false as its validating concept of the 'centre,' but that the inauthentic and marginal are in fact the 'real.' Thus the condition of postcolonial African experience encourages the dismantling of notions of essence and authenticity. As intellectuals from the developing world, trained in a modern European educational tradition, many postcolonial African writers find themselves in a position that enables them to define with particular acuity the

intersections of poststructuralist and postcolonial thought. Robert Young has perceptively explored these intersections (in relation to Derrida, Lyotard, Cixous, Foucault, Memmi, Althusser, Bourdieu and others) in *Postcolonialism*. Young points out that few poststructuralists "have been 'français de souche'" (415), and that many of those who developed the theoretical positions "subsequently characterized as poststructuralism came from Algeria or had been involved in the war of independence" (413). Their critique of Western Philosophy is indebted to their childhood experience of colonialism in colonised Algeria, or to the Algerian struggle for independence. According to Young, poststructuralism "associated with these names could better be characterized as Franco-Maghrebian theory, for its theoretical interventions have been actively concerned with the task of undoing the ideological heritage of French colonialism and with rethinking the premises, assumptions and protocols of its centrist, imperial culture (414).

Writing about Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "deterritorialisation" in the issue of *Cultural Critique* (1987), David Lloyd, who writes about Irish literature through the lens of the postcolonial, describes and defines some of the cultural consequences and challenges facing minority groups and minor literatures:

> Minority groups are so defined in consequence of a dislocation or deterritorialization which calls their collective identity in question and leads to their categorization as instances of 'underdevelopment': whether a minority group is defined in terms of gender, ethnicity, or any other typology, its status is never merely statistically established but involves the aspersion of 'minority' exactly in the sense of the common legal usage of the term for those too young to be out of 'tutelage.' To enumerate them all too briefly and all too schematically, the characteristics of a minor literature would involve the questioning or destruction of the concepts of identity and identification, the rejection of representations of developing autonomy and authenticity, if not the concept of development itself, and accordingly a profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification.[44]

Deleuze and Guattari's example is of course Kafka, the Czech Jew writing in the language (German) of his oppressor. In their seminal essay, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure,* minor literatures are neither mere reproductions nor imitations but "puissances diaboliques à venir ou [...] forces révolutionnaires à construire," and are, furthermore, preoccupied with the dismantling of forms and significations, with the reproduction of a "séquence d'états intensifs."[45] One other important feature of such literatures is that they are produced by a minority within the language of a 'major' culture and, therefore, there is an equal emphasis on the deterritorialisation of language, a language "arraché au sens, conquis sur le sens" (*Kafka* 38).

Can (or should) a literature of minorities, which adopts the same aesthetic terms as the 'major' literature or the canon, fulfil a 'major' function? David Lloyd goes on to suggest in the same essay that it would be possible; one good example "would be the literature of nationalism which adopts the same aesthetic terms in order to forge an oppositional identity" (173). Such a move, Lloyd observes, means that the young underdeveloped nation is placed on the narrative path to 'development,' but at the expense of accepting the imperial power's hegemonic right to define, among other things, development and aesthetic standards:

> Nationalisms reterritorialise dislocated identities historically, and, despite their initially progressive intents, continue thereby to acquiesce in imperial hegemony even after 'independence.' An alternative response is that represented by what we are terming minor literature, which refuses to reterritorialize identity, preferring to extend the critique of those developmental narratives which perpetuate hegemonic culture. (174)

Lloyd points to the worrying similarities between colonialist discourses and nationalist representations. He therefore calls for an alternative response that would unsettle the model of colonialism and nativist nationalism as polar opposites. The above discussion of nationalism by Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, A. Khatibi, and others, and the nation's double function as a fiction of unity for both the colonial power and the emergent population, all resonate with Lloyd's observation. In varying degrees, The texts discussed

in this study all resonate with Lloyd's alternative rresponse which would subvert, deterritorialise, and break with the old logic, structures, and narratives of colonialism, and would persist in criticising the institutions and apparatuses of rule.

Notes

[1] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989) 33.

[2] Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era off Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986) 85-86.

[3] Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory' ," *Social Text* 17 (1987)

[4] Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983) 50.

[5] Christopher Miller, "Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in African Literature in French," *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993)

[6] Cruise Conor O'Brien, *Camus* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1979, originally published 1970) 46.

[7] For more details see Jean Dejeux's *La Littérature algérienne contemporaine*, 1st chapter "La Littérature des français en Algérie," (Paris: PUF, 1975)

[8] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* in *The African Trilogy* (London: Pan Books and Heinemann, 1988, originally published 1958) 168.

[9] Cited in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1972) 8.

[10] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Coquest of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) 75.

[11] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 107.

[12] Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté: Négritude et Humanisme* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1964) 24.

[13] Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de portrait de colonisateur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995, originally published 1957) 112.

[14] Valentin Y Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 2.

[15] Kohn Hans, as quoted in Gus Liebenow, *African Politics: Crises and Challenges* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 46.

[16] Senghor as quoted in Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 86, without Senghor seeming to recognise Mudimbe's point that "history is an invention of the present" (195).

[17] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Galllimard, 1948) 82.

[18] Guy Ossito Midiohouan, "Le phénomène des littératures nationales en Afrique," *Peuples Noirs/Peuples Africains* 27 (Mai-Juin 1982)

[19] Adrien Huannou, *La Question des littératures nationales en Afrique noire* (Abidjan: Editions CEDA, 1989)

[20] Guy Ossito Midiohouan, "Le phénomène des littératures nationales en Afrique," 58. It is a little unclear to me how these huge blocks of Africans, lumped together by the French, are any less artificial as a basis of identity than the nations that exist along colonial state borders legislated by the same French powers.

[21] Ngugi articulates his position on the role of national languages in the context of national reconstruction as follows: "We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spenser, Milton, and Shakespear did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours." In Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986) 29.

[22] Huannou offers as evidence here the several incidents of deportation of foreigners (immigrant Africans from other countries) occurring in several different African countries in the 1980s. 32-33.

[23] Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991, originally published 1961).

[24] Karen Morel, ed, *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka at the University of Washington* (Seattle, WA: The Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, University of Washington, 1975) 11-12.

[25] Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering Without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenyan Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968) 229.

[26] Ernest Emenyou, ed, *Literature and National Consciousness* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1989) 49-50.

[27] Cited by Khatibi in *Maghreb pluriel*, 11.

[28] "Présentation", *Les Temps modernes* (October 1977) 5.

[29] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972) 11.

[30] Lucy Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977) 205.

[31] Abdellatif Laâbi, "La culture nationale, donnée et exigence historique" *Souffles* 4 (1966) 11-12.

[32] Vincent Thompson, *Africa and unity: The Evolution of Pan-Africanism* (London: Longmans and Green, 1969) 370.

[33] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 1991, originally published 1983) 3.

[34] Zdenek Cervenka, *The Organization of Africa Unity and its Charter* (Prague: Academia Nakladatelstvi Ceskoslovenki, Akademie Ved, 1968) 11.

[35] Jean Mfoulou, *L'OUA: Triomphe de L'Unité ou des Nationalités?* (Paris: Editions Harmattan, 1986) 31.

[36] Leslie Rubin and Brian Weinstein, *Introduction to African Politics: A Continental Approach* (New York: Preager, 1977) 248.

[37] C.O.C. Amate, *Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986) 77.

[38] This echoes the Marxist assertion that class is not a stage that can be overcome, it must instead be worked through. Jumping from the current state of affairs to a classless society is said to be impossible. See the discussion of Terry Eagleton's article "Nationalism: Commitment and Irony," in Seamus Deane, ed, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 46.

[39] Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," in Frank Gloversmith, ed, *Theories of Reading* (Sussex: The Harvestor Press, 1984) 111.

[40] This definition of nationalism is found in Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in Homi Bhabha, ed, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990)

[41] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Men: The Ambivalence of Colonial Dicourse," *October* 28 (1984)

[42] Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Poscolonial?," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991)

[43] Julia Kristeva, *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 18.

[44] David Lloyd, "Genet's genealogy: European Minorities and the Ends of the Canon," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987) 173.

[45] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975) 39.

Chapter Two

Writing, Decolonisation, and (Self)-Representation in Abdelkébir Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

This chapter is a comparative study of *La Mémoire tatouée* (1971) by Moroccan Abdelkébir Khatibi and *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Nigerian Chinua Achebe. Both texts deal with the colonial and the postcolonial condition in Morocco and Nigeria respectively, the countries in which the texts are set; and further, the texts are set in the colonial period, but written from the decolonised perspective of their authors (although Nigeria was not independent in 1958, *Things Fall Apart*, as will be seen, is about 'decolonising the mind'). An important reason for the comparison of these texts and these two authors is the significant insight that may be gained from the pairing of authors not only from completely different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but from two different postcolonial positions. To compare such authors calls for a special kind of reading. This is even more daunting when these authors happen to be Achebe and Khatibi who have always figured as complex, ambiguous presences in the postcolonial discourse of identity and representation.

Achebe's works, especially those set in the past, have been invoked as exemplary texts of nationalist contestation of colonialist distortions of Africa and Africans. This is the postcolonial position within which Achebe has elaborated the powerful novelistic and essayistic project of demythologisation. Achebe's historicist approach to literary culture and writing and his espousal of important pedagogical and utilitarian values for African writers lead logically to his promotion of literature as an aspect of cultural development in society: the locus classicus of this aspect is his famous essays "The novelist as teacher" (1965) and "Africa and her writers" (1963). Yet, as will be argued in the discussion of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's demythologising vision also entails some of the problematics of cultural identity and representation: the pitfalls of essentialisation in the construction of identity or tradition by ex-colonised peoples. Khatibi's theoretical and literary works too are powerful texts which call into question the competing, polarised claims of centre and margin, Western and non-Western. This

tradition of postcolonialism, which clearly intersects with postmodern and poststructuralist theory, emphasises the transformative power of a subversive poetics removed from what is conventionally referred to as the political/historical sphere characteristic of the nationalistic, counter-hegemonic postcolonial tradition. According to Khatibi, a subversive poetics has gradually replaced politics: poetic language has come to be associated with an 'other' politics radically divorced from social institutions and from material relations of domination. Khatibi, however, does not uncritically mimic deconstruction as it is put to use in France. He has appropriated deconstruction for reflection on North African cultural politics: he links deconstruction to the prospect of significant social change to which he gives the name 'decolonisation.'

Generally, except for a few prominent cases, these two formations of African postcoloniality have had very little to say to each other that is productive. Another reason for the pairing of Khatibi and Achebe is to argue that their work belongs to these few exemplary cases. To compare authors who are themselves interested in the subversion and transgression of boundaries in turn blurs the boundaries between them, and shifts the focus to the underlying similarities of their work. The aim of this chapter, then, is not merely to draw attention to the similarities and differences between Khatibi and Achebe, but rather to explore alternate forms of reading that acknowledge their shared literary arguments, strategies and concerns. This initial declaration of the reasons behind this particular comparison will be amplified in the discussion of the authors' texts and theoretical work. As elsewhere, the main issues foregrounded by the authors' texts are: the importance of history, memory and decolonisation. Both writers also concern themselves profoundly with questions of identity and representation. Underlying these issues is the question of 'authority,' which implies the notion of authoring or writing; as well as control and power, or 'agency.' The question of (self) writing in the African postcolonial context inevitably leads to what genre and language the decolonised writing-subject uses.

The following discussion is divided into two sections. The first section deals with Khatibi and the second with Achebe. Each section will delineate the writer's theoretical views on the issues concerning this chapter, before launching into a detailed analysis of their implication and representation in the actual texts under consideration. In

the concluding section, I will bring Achebe and Khatibi together to highlight the similarities, the differences, and the shared literary preoccupations behind the ideological assumptions and the narrative strategies, through which they are able to articulate the issues that are central to this chapter.

La Mémoire tatouée[1]

After becoming familiar with the idealistic principles upon which French society supposedly rests i.e, 'Liberté, fraternité, égalité ' and the 'Déclaration des droits de l'homme,' North African students at French schools felt betrayed when they recognised that they would not be accorded the same treatment as French citizens. Rejecting their earlier admiration for the French cultural achievements that they had studied in the colonial schools, intellectuals of the late 1940s and early 1950s began to use the French language as a vehicle for political protest, for condemnation of colonialism, and the articulation of demands for national liberation. As Kamal Salhi notes:

> The 1950s saw the rise of a North African literature that drew its inspiration from the anti-colonial struggle and the search for national identity. Authors like Kateb Yacine, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Mouloud Feraoun, Assia Djebar, Mouloud Mammeri, Mohammed Dib, Albert Memmi and Driss Chraïbi are associated with this movement. (*Francophone voices* 40)

Many North African intellectuals in the 1950s turned to literature, particularly the novel, as a means of communicating nationalist aspirations. They challenged perceptions of the colonialist status quo both in the *métropole* and in the colony by portraying the devastating effects of colonialism on individuals and on the groups that were subjected to it. Their novels were autobiographical, and they themselves believed that a universal message about alienation and about the quest for identity could be proclaimed even if one's point of departure was an individual, culturally specific perspective. Works such as Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950), Memmi's *La Statue de*

sel (1953), and Chraïbi's *Le Passé simple* (1954) were certainly intended to be read as fiction, but as one proceeds through the growing catalogue of North African French-language literature, one cannot fail to notice a predominance of quasi-autobiographical works with a first-person narrator. As will be shown from the analysis of A. Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* and from references to other North African autobiographical narratives, the reader should not necessarily expect to find exactly the same concepts (as in the West) of the self and of individuality in autobiographies written by authors from non-Western societies.

The boundaries between autobiography and autobiographical fiction tend to be blurred and indefinite. The autobiographical works studied in this thesis, for example, are based on events from the authors' lives, but they are not 'pure' autobiographies according to Philippe Lejeune's definition of the word. They do not comply with what he calls "le pacte autobiographique" because their authors deliberately foster doubts in the minds of readers as to whether or not the narrator and the protagonist are the same individual. Thus, these North African novels fall into Lejeune's category of "roman autobiographique."[2] Until recently, autobiography in non-Western cultural contexts has received relatively little attention, although James Olney's 1973 *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literatures* did succeed in bringing African autobiographies to the attention of literary scholars. He maintains that autobiography can be read as "the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within" and that it offers "a privileged access to an experience [...] that no other variety of writing can offer."[3] Olney's approach implies that a reader of non-Western autobiographies should not assume that the author's reasons for writing an autobiography are the same in non-Western cultures as they might be in Western cultures. While autobiographical discourse allows the reader access to non-Western cultural perspectives, Olney concludes, the reader should not necessarily expect to find the exact same concepts of the self and of individuality in autobiographies written by authors from non-Western societies. Non-Western autobiographies, like the ones considered in this study, are unlike any conventional autobiography. They are not confessional and do not provide any coherent portrait of the narrator or realistic scenes from the narrator's past. The reader cannot gain access to the intimate world of another's self because it is impossible to know another's

self, particularly when this self is an invention of the colonial imagination. In this context, these texts can be regarded as 'plural autobiographies' because they contest the hegemonic historical narratives of colonialism through an articulation of the hitherto silenced voices of the colonised.

Colonial and postcolonial French-language autobiographical narratives from North Africa can be best understood when considered in the light of the socio-historical context with which they enter into a dialogic relationship. Autobiographical novels such as Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950), and Sefrioui's *La Boîte à merveilles* (1954), are not just individual self-portraits but also collective ones that are highly ethnographic in tone and presentation. They were attesting to the reality and to the dignity of North African people by depicting traditional lifestyles and values. Both writers describe a lost childhood world of innocence and security, viewing the time before they attended French school as an era that would be destroyed by their subjection to a colonial education. In retrospect, they insisted on depicting their societies in a positive, even idealised light because they were seeking to emphasise the positive values and the cultural specificity of Arab-Muslim North Africa. This common approach is not of course confined to North Africa; it is also common in sub-Saharan fiction of the 1950s and 1960s such as we find in Camara's *L'Enfant noir* in relation to Guinea, or in Sheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambigüe* (in more complex fashion).

In Chraibi's *Le Passé simple* (1954), self-writing is an integral part of the emotional and intellectual decolonisation process. In fact this autobiographical narrative marks a departure from the earlier ethnographic texts in which a positive portrait of the colonised's culture was presented. The protagonist of this novel rebels against his situation as a colonised subject and rejects indigenous values and customs; he feels that, in order for self-decolonisation to occur, he must rebel against all forces (internal or external to his own culture) that attempt to define him without his consent. He is on a journey to self-knowledge which will be completed only when he affirms his *moi* by accepting the divisions and ambiguities that characterise it as the result of his having been subjected to a specific set of cultural circumstances and to French colonial education.

For many North African authors, writing in the autobiographical mode was a means of reclaiming their status as subjects. Memmi's *Le Portrait du colonisé* describes

the coloniser-colonised dialectic and discusses the power of the coloniser's discourse to deny the colonised's subjectivity. He relates how the inherently racist principles that underpin the structures of colonial control operate in a series of negations, "Il n'est pas ceci, n'est pas cela" (*Portrait* 105). He refers to this process as one of "déshumanisation" in which the coloniser exercises control over the colonised by either ignoring the latter's humanity, or by reducing it to insignificant proportions. According to Memmi, the most effective weapon in the coloniser's "discourse of power" is the refusal to acknowledge the individuality of the colonised. "La marque du pluriel" reaffirms the coloniser's subjectivity while denying that of the colonised: " Le colonisé n'est jamais caractérisé d'une manière différentielle; il n'a droit qu'à la noyade dans le collectif anonyme. (' Ils sont ceci [...] Ils sont tous les mêmes')" (106). By viewing all members of the indigenous population as an indistinct mass, the coloniser effectively denies the uniqueness of the colonised individual. Within the context of Memmi's explanation of the colonised-coloniser dialectic, autobiographical narrative becomes a tool of self-empowerment for colonised writers, a means to reaffirm their individuality and to assert their subjectivity through first-person narrative.

Emile Benveniste has observed that the relationship between language and the self is a mutually dependent one. An individual's subjectivity is established through language and, in turn, he believes, language is only possible because of the human capacity to posit one's self as a "sujet:"

> C'est dans et par le langage que l'homme se constitue comme sujet; parce que le langage seule fonde en réalité, dans sa réalité qui est celle de l'être, le concept d'"ego." [...] Le langage n'est possible que parce que chaque interlocuteur se pose comme sujet, en renvoyant à lui même comme <u>je</u> dans son discours.[4]

Benveniste's theory about the interrelatedness of subjectivity and language suggests the need to reflect on the implications of a situation in which an individual's subjectivity is expressed in the language of the other. Precedents for literary writing did and do exist in

the Arabic literary tradition. Why then do many North African writers write in and continue to use the French language instead of Arabic?

Each writer has his or her own reasons for using French, but a common denominator is that some (de)colonised writers direct their discourse towards a dialogue with the European other. The dialogue they seek to establish serves not only to affirm the colonised's subjectivity, but also to interpellate the other. In this way the coloniser is made aware of the harmful effects of colonisation, and of the French educational system on the psyche of the colonised, thus, obliging the coloniser to relate to the colonised subject as a unique individual. Other significant material reason are the relative absence of organised publishing and distribution, high levels of illiteracy and audience (largely French).

Kacem Basfao's analysis of North African literature and the language issue presents us with a hypothesis that can account for the reasons why more North African fiction is written in French than in Arabic. His premise is that the use of French, the "foreign" or "other" tongue, facilitates the expression of intimate details of the author's past, family difficulties, sexual encounters, and the social and religious criticisms he or she desires to make. This is so, he maintains, because if one is writing in the "langue maternelle," one must, for example, veil sexual references with modesty because a failure to do so would incite the accusation of linguistic "incest." To the extent that Arabic is the paternal, sacred language of religious tradition, North African writers are often reluctant to use it in criticising the social and religious institutions of their own societies. To write about oneself is seen as "transgressive" in an Arabic-Islamic context because it appears to be in conflict with what Basfao characterises as traditional inhibitions (i. e. modesty) and an emphasis on the collective ("*L'oumma*") as being more important than the individual.[5] Basfao discusses texts such as Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* (1969) and Chraïbi's *Le Passé simple*. They interest him primarily because their treatment of family life, women's sexuality, and religious hypocrisy could only have been expressed in French; otherwise they would have violated the taboos of the mother's tongue (380).

One of the aims of Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* is to deconstruct previous North African writing, particularly its avoidance of hybridity and its reliance on the themes of alienation and protest. Alienation, a painful condition, is an issue which

preoccupied the writers from the 1950s, and Chraïbi's *Le Passé simple* is a representative example. This autobiographical novel elaborates social and religious critiques that sought to expose not only the disastrous personal consequences of French colonialism and French education, but also the mechanisms of a 'self-colonising' society. It establishes the model (later adopted by many other North African writers) of a self-dissection that enables an author to examine the alienated and divided nature of his or her own colonised self. Several themes emerge in this novel, the most evident of which is the protagonist's feeling of being a misfit, of being neither North African nor French. As a result of a colonised situation, the hero is in limbo. The protagonist experiences alienation from the heritage of his family, and yet he cannot find total acceptance in the coloniser's group.

In *Le Passé simple*, Chraïbi's alter ego explains the nature of his untenable situation by remarking on how he feels about the external manifestations of his 'difference' from his fellow Moroccans:

> Imaginez-vous un Nègre du jour au lendemain blanchi mais dont, par omission ou méchanceté du sort, le nez est resté noir. J'étais vêtu d'une veste et d'un pantalon. Aux pieds une paire de chaussures. Une chemise. Une ceinture à la taille. Un mouchoir dans ma poche. J'étais fier. Comme un petit Européen! Sitôt parmi mes camarades, je me trouvais grotesque. Et je l'étais.[6]

His European clothing cannot hide the fact that his *moi* is divided between two languages and two world views. Driss Ferdi, the protagonist, does not feel comfortable or accepted in either the French or the Moroccan group; Chraïbi's narrator considers himself to be a misfit, bordering on the monstrous, because the external manifestations and the internal reality of his identity are in total disequilibrium with each other. The passage cited above highlights the effect of 'doubling' or the internalised schism that characterises the colonised subject's experience of alienation as depicted in North African novels from the 1950s. For Chraïbi, the possibilities of self-analysis and self-creation offered by the act of writing provide a means of exploring the divided self and of lending it a sense of coherence by representing it in textual form. The writing project for many writers from

North Africa can thus be cathartic in the sense that it enables writers to fuse together the fragmented elements of individuality they feel inside themselves.

The adoption of European clothing and mannerisms is not the only external manifestation of an acculturation that belies an internal schism and its concomitant alienation. *Le Passé simple* portrays the protagonist's confusion about the language that might be best suited to express the divided identity of the colonised subject. Each language, Arabic and French, remains separate from the other and serves different purposes under different circumstances. The (de)colonised subject thus experiences an external division on a linguistic level, and this schism becomes apparent in many North African novels because the inherent interrelatedness of language and self is exposed in the act of self-writing. For this reason North African narratives illustrate the ambivalences of the entire self-language question. Driss Ferdi and many other North African fictional protagonists identify their monolingual childhood with a 'lost paradise' of unified selfhood. In nostalgic recollections of this time of innocence, they do not question the mother tongue's ability to translate or to communicate the reality perceived by the self. Only the acquisition of the other's tongue and the resulting internalised schism give rise to the writer's reflection about the nature of the bilingual, divided selfhood or identity.

Since the publication of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, North African writing has clearly undergone an evolution in terms of its dominant thematic concerns and its characteristic narrative structure. The publication of Abdelkébir Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* in 1971 marks a turning point in North African writing because it creates a new space for itself in the midst of previous models of writing, especially *Le Passé simple*. In *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi reflects on the illusion of the unified self in a postcolonial context. He challenges the existing models of French language fiction through his highly self-conscious use of new writing paradigms. The portrait of the split and alienated colonised subject has given way in his work to a sophisticated examination of questions surrounding bilingualism and subjectivity, identity and difference. He writes after colonialism had ended, and this factor helps explain how his work differs from earlier North African works. Published during a period of ongoing French colonial presence in North Africa, *Le Passé simple* depicts the colonised subject's reaction to the colonial

situation from the perspective of someone who is still living within it. Khatibi came of age near the end of French colonial rule in North Africa, and although he was profoundly influenced by French colonial education in much the same way as writers such as Kateb Yacine, Albert Memmi and Driss Chraïbi, his writing also reflects the attempt to reconcile the two linguistic and cultural spheres that had shaped the evolution of his identity. His desire for recovery and growth characterises his perception of the kind of postcoloniality that seeks to end recriminations against former colonial masters and to end some postcolonial writers' reliance on the old themes of protest and alienation.

Khatibi's text breaks new ground by examining the self-other question in the light of what he describes as the plural heritage and the cultural-linguistic "hospitality" of North Africa, a region that has served as a site of cultural *métissage* for many centuries. Khatibi, unlike Chraïbi and many other North African writers, is not overcome by the sense of having lost the mother tongue as a result of having been subjected to colonial education. On the contrary, he focuses on the North African writer's growing awareness of the advantages of bilingualism and the possibility of using it to analyse the writer's own relationship to language. The double vision of the bilingual writer enables him to explore the act of writing in the French language. In turn, the path he retraces leads back to a rediscovery of the mother tongue and to the recognition that, rather than being in opposition to each other, the mother tongue and the 'other' tongue can function harmoniously together, affecting each other and intertwining with each other in the writer's mind. Writing, as practised by Khatibi and contemporary North African writers of French expression, allows for a conscious exploration of the bilingual and bicultural self, of the languages and cultures affecting its development, and of the nature of the text resulting from this self-analysis.

La Mémoire tatouée consciously engages in a dialogue with previous North African writing referred to earlier, while at the same time seeking to deconstruct it. This text thus breaks new ground in the sense that it adopts a postmodernist perspective to explore the relationship between the (ex)colonised writing subject, his or her own language of expression, and the possibility of autodecolonisation through writing. To Khatibi, the themes of earlier North African literature (i.e. alienation and protest) had been growing stale. Equally writers such as Mohammed Dib and Ben Jelloun, among

others, openly proclaimed their acceptance of their dual heritage as North African writers who wrote in French. They abandoned stereotyped themes and critically examined the new socio-political order that had replaced French rule. Consistent with Fanon's challenge that "Le jeu Européen est définitivement terminé, il faut trouver autre chose," Khatibi criticised Maghrebian writers for their reluctance to seek out new themes and modes of narration, which would, in his view, do justice to the linguistic and social issues of the postcolonial era. Significantly, his criticism and aesthetic concerns, as we have seen in Chapter One, continue to reflect the preoccupations of the *Souffles* review in the mid-1960s in Morocco: innovations cannot be achieved simply by switching to Arabic as a means of literary and poetic expression or as a means of a 'décolonisation culturelle.'

The *Souffles* experiment made it clear that, if North African writers hope to bring about decolonisation on the national level, they must begin by decolonising their own psyche and their own language. In Khatibi's introduction to *Le Roman maghrébin*, he points out that the Algerian revolution failed to inspire a comparable revolution in Algerian literature, whether it was written in French or in Arabic. The only exception, he felt, was Kateb Yacine, whose complex novel *Nedjma* (1954) demonstrated an understanding of the fact that "un écrivain révolutionnaire ayant choisi de combattre par la plume doit être révolutionnaire aussi dans son propre domaine, celui de l'écriture."[7] Even before Khatibi wrote his first novel, he remarked on the need for North African writers to go beyond the familiar and the safe: the novel of protest, the ethnographic novel, and the novel of acculturation; otherwise, they risk being "enfermés." Writers ought to explore new areas of creativity and linguistic experimentation instead of bemoaning an alienation that results from historical factors beyond their control:

> Dans ce sens la littérature ne peut être ni révolutionnaire, ni conservatrice, elle possède son propre rythme qui passe par en-dessous la vie. Après tout, on ne libère pas un peuple avec un langage qui lui reste incommunicable et qui plane au dessus de ses préoccupations. Pour ce peuple Maghrébin, la littérature orale demeure l'expression pendant ses loisirs. En fait, cette situation n'est pas particulère à l'écrivain maghrébin, elle est celle de

> l'intellectuel qui n'arrive pas à se situer dans une société en grande partie analphabète et dans un monde en pleine transformation. (47-48.)

North African writers must find their own methods for dealing with the ambivalences of the postcolonial, bilingual, and diglossic situation in which they are living. Khatibi believes that part of the solution lies in the articulation of a poetics that takes their situation into account. The passage cited above raises another issue: What purpose can European-language writers serve in a culture with a high illiteracy rate? Their position is inherently ambiguous and can only be reconciled on a personal level by their choice of employing indigenous forms of expression or of disregarding them. Many North African writers never successfully reconciled their choice of language with their own origins in a predominantly oral culture; their ambivalence towards their choice of language is a recurring theme in their works. Some North African writers chose exile in Europe, while others, like Khatibi, continued to reside in their countries of birth and to write in French, despite the fact that they must respond to critics who accuse them of pandering to foreign audiences and of being alienated from the people of their homeland. A number of North African writers of French expression (Ben Jelloun, Kateb, Djebar, Chraïbi and others) have attempted to resolve this ambiguity by inserting dialectical Arabic structures and idioms into their French-language texts. In this way, they seek to compensate for diglossia by creating a fusion of the two tongues.

Khatibi envisages a new era in which such universal themes as alterity, sameness, and the relationship between self-writing and language can be explored. In this way, he hopes to transcend the issue of the alienated, colonised self. Although the psychological results of colonialism continue to be a major consideration of his work, Khatibi's own writing goes beyond an exclusive concern with the ego. His *La Mémoire tatouée* promotes an intellectual decolonisation through the deconstruction of the paradigms that characterise French-language North African writing. He goes beyond the psychological aspects of the split or doubled self of the colonised subject in order to explore duality on the linguistic and narrative planes. In this process, he frequently returns to two tropes which will be discussed below: the autobiographer's 'regard dédoublé' and the palimpsest.

The unique structure of *La Mémoire tatouée* distinguishes it from previous examples of North African autobiography that followed a linear pattern common to Western autobiographies, although the first half of the text appears to adopt a chronological sequence. The book opens with the story of the narrator's birth, his naming ritual, and his first recollections of childhood. But the reader is disconcerted from the start by the fragmented and digressive narrative flow. Arabic interjections are transcribed into French and are used throughout the text. Superstitions, dreams and allusions to historical and political events, however, undermine the illusion that the work's "autobiographie" subtitle would seem to encourage. The second half of the text differs from the first in that it consists of an interior dialogue (actually an imaginary monologue); stage directions are included to evoke the impression of a theatrical performance, as if the author's doubles, named A. and B., were performing a 'one man show ' in front of the reader. This dialogue enables Khatibi to deconstruct the first half of his autobiography, for the verbal duellists actually discuss whether or not the autobiographical act is possible. In this part of the text, Khatibi becomes the critical reader of what he had written in the first half of the book. The autobiographical illusion allows Khatibi to situate his own discourse on self and language within a narrative space that at first appears familiar. He proceeds to explore his own coming to writing in the language of the other; he meditates on having been different from his *colon* class mates, and on having exploited this difference to seduce young women. In the dialogue section at the end of the narrative, however, Khatibi exposes the fictitious, self-created aspects of these episodes in his autobiography. By undermining the structure of the text, he decolonises the genre of North African autobiography and liberates it from its previous obsessions with the father and with the quest for identity. In the end, the text asserts that the unified self is a fallacy, thus destroying a fundamental premise of standard autobiographical discourse.

The first section of *La Mémoire tatouée*, "Série hazardeuse 1," follows a linear trajectory of a colonised child's growth into adolescence and adulthood, and presents two cultural spaces: one belongs to the narrator's familiar environment, his home, women, the streets, and the Moroccan traditions, the other space belongs to the rigid and alienating space of the French school which the narrator attended. Throughout, the narrative voice

marks this spatial opposition. In the streets, for example, the boy is told by tribal female voices to open himself to the environment around him:

> Enfant, vois le jour faste, va une fois par an à la foire de la tribu. Traîne ton regard sur la poussière, flotte furtivement avec la foule, au bord de la plage rocheuse, voisine de la foire [...] Passe devant le maïs grillé ou le nougat enroulé, passe devant le Kaléidoscope, mais arrête-toi devant le conteur. (74)

These informal and intimate voices, rendered in a language that expresses the tribal culture, indicate the boy's ambiguous status within his colonial culture, and suggest at the same time the crossing of the boundaries (tradition/modernity, writing/orality, civilised/primitive) that sustain the coloniser's hegemony. In contrast to the tribal voices, the narrator's culture is seen by the French colonials in a paternalistic way:

> Et quoi! Les Arabes aiment regarder des roses en papier, ou en plastique, la nature leur a échappé d'entre les doigts, ils croupissent, grisés par le thé et l'absinthe. Et pour cacher leur misère, ils forniquent toute la journée. Il faut créer des jardins rationnels, des villes géométriques, une économie en flèche, il faut créer des paradis sur terre, Dieu est mort, vive le colon! (53)

The French occupation of Morocco sets up artificial boundaries which make it difficult for the narrator to reconcile the environment of home and the French school.

When the child is sent to the Franco-Moroccan school, he is obliged to confront the foreign other. As a result of the 'doubling' endured by any bilingual subject, he must also later confront the 'difference' that has been engendered inside himself. The negative image of the colonised is subtly woven into the education of colonised children, and when they encounter it for the first time, they begin to reflect about their own identity.

Khatibi recalls his introduction to works of French literature in the mandated school curriculum. He reflects upon the ambivalent situation of indigenous students who have been asked to memorise and to digest cultural artifacts that are completely alien to

them. This situation contrasts with the Koran, for example, whose importance was vouchsafed by the ritual sacrifice of a lamb and by family celebrations such as the ones that took place when the boy's older brothers finished their education at the *m'sid* (Koranic school) after having memorised the sacred book.

French literary 'classics' were not anchored in real-life experiences for colonial children. In French schools during the colonial era, as Khatibi recalls, North African children read works that were written with French children in mind; for example, it was not unusual for them to read about events and places that they were incapable of relating to in their own lives. More significantly, the narrator remembers that his own family's emphasis on a single book induced in him an inferiority complex regarding an apparent lack of a well-developed written tradition in his Arabic background:

> Le museé des morceaux choisis d'où partait le discours suivant: parler dans nos rédactions de ce qui se disait dans les livres, du bois brûlant dans la cheminée, sous le regard malin de Médor, partir dans la neige quand on imaginait difficilement son existence. Médor s'abritait sous un nom arabe. Cela ne changeait rien à notre culpabilité, on se sentait des enfants conçus en dehors des livres, dans un imaginaire anonyme. Et de cours en cours, disparaître derrière les mots, en prenant soin d'éliminer toute trace suspecte. Chacun est le flic de ses mots, ainsi tourne la culture. [...] Recracher dans les rédactions l'essence des morceaux choisis, telle quelle, quand, en flèche brisée, l'esprit de l'enfant se colonise. (57-59)

Khatibi's itinerary of 'autodécolonisation' must begin at the point of transformation--when children are brought face-to-face with the implied inferiority of their own heritage, which, according to the colonialist orthodoxy, lacks any great tradition of written literature. He himself recalls having felt a sense of guilt when he considered the possibility that his own people existed in a cultural void and that they should be grateful for the chance to 'put down roots' in a 'superior' foreign tradition.

Because the French education system ignored the achievements of Arabic philosophers, writers, and poets, and because the narrator has been raised by his mother

and by his aunt (i. e., women without formal schooling), he came to the French language virtually illiterate in his own written tradition. In the passage cited above, the autobiographer translates this commonplace theme about the alienating impact by the colonial school into an exploration of his youthful relationship with words. The abstract concept of words and the concrete examples of the other's printed and spoken language contrast sharply with the orality of his mother tongue. During his days at school, he went from class to class, trying to dissimulate what he mistook for the 'defectiveness' of his dialect. He felt that the "suspect traces" (Of his difference? Of his mother tongue?) needed to be erased. The colonised child's sense of shame toward his maternal language had thus been induced by the colonial school, which assumed the superiority of French on the basis of its allegedly more valuable written tradition.

Autobiographical narrative thus provides an outlet for exploring the origins and aspects of the fragmented ego because it textualises the subject-object dichotomy and the double gaze by means of which the writer sees himself mirrored, or recreated, in the text. Colonisation, as promoted by the colonial school, engenders the need for self-writing that can serve as a safety valve for the cultural and psychological tensions and anomalies (i.e. doubling, breaking with one's family, abandoning one's religious heritage) that characterises the colonised intellectual's youth.

In *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi's adult autobiographer recalls how he and his childhood companions observed the daily activities of the French—activities that were so different from those that were conducted in their own homes. The children viewed these activities as external manifestations that attested to the 'difference' of the *colons*: "Les parties de tennis ou de boules près d'un petit bar de la France éternelle: un coup de Martini, le beret rituel, et puis la partie interminable" (43). The irony of his tone in recollecting the stereotypical images of French civilisation as it was transplanted to Moroccan soil demonstrates his consciousness of the forces that condition people to think in terms of artificial distinctions between themselves and others.

The racial, religious, and cultural differences between coloniser and colonised were often invoked to justify the special and administrative divisions that were imposed on the colony. The narrator's understanding of the assumptions behind colonisation emerge clearly when he reflects on the colonialist mania for dividing cities into Arab and

French quarters. The colonisers sought to protect their 'otherness' by refusing to live in the same neighbourhood as the indigenous inhabitants. In *Les Damnés de la terre*, Frantz Fanon describes the way in which racist ideology is projected into the design of colonial cities. Compartmentalised sections for administrative services and for secure residential enclaves were constructed in European architectural style: their very existence served to create and preserve order (69). According to Fanon, the assumption behind this special organisation is that the colonial system can only function if the alleged 'differences' between the colonised and the European settlers are legitimised through the design of the environment. Because the colonised are associated with 'barbarity,' 'chaos,' and 'violence,' the colonisers felt they must keep these tendencies in check by isolating the colonised in areas that are separate from their own. The coloniser's refusal to live in the same sorts of dwellings or in the same neighbourhoods as the colonised merely reflected their belief that they must not become too much 'like' the colonised if they wished to maintain their dominant status. In the North African cities, the Arab quarter usually consisted of labyrinth-like *medinas* that had existed for centuries; their apparently incomprehensible design corroborated the coloniser's stereotyped assumption that Muslim culture lacked a fundamental sense of order.

Khatibi plays on the alleged differences between *colons* and Arabs in terms of an order-vs-chaos distinction when he recalls how the French areas ("zones interdites" for himself and for his companions) were geometrically arranged clusters of villas, parks, and administrative buildings. The French sense of order was particularly apparent in the parks, where he and his friends felt themselves to be alien. Yet he was not intimidated by the colonisers' implicit claim to control the space they had occupied:

> Voici le parc, voici un petit musée de fleurs et de plantes, dont des parfums se perdent dans la géométrie maniaque. Traînez vos pieds, reposez vos fesses, puis regardez au travers, en travers, dedans et par-delà. Sachez que le parc est une douceur qui habitue à la tombe. Voici, mon lecteur, la fraîcheur de l'esprit cartésien qui se morfond sous l'ombre des arbres, et voici la vierge intouchable. Interdit de cueillir la pointe de ses seins, il faut laisser au vent l'arôme de ses quatre saisons. (43)

Playing upon the cultural difference between colonisers and Moroccans by hypothesising a link between the colonialist's appropriation of land and his obsession with transforming 'Arab' chaos into order, Khatibi adopts a tone of nostalgic teasing. The interdiction of Arab 'trespassing' in the neighbourhoods reserved for Europeans parallels another sort of 'trespassing' that haunts the coloniser's imagination. In an ironic metaphor, he compares French parks to European women, intimating that he understands one of the real reasons why Moroccans are kept out of French neighbourhoods: the fear of sexual transgressions.

Fanon observed that one of the biggest fears in the coloniser's mentality is that the original inhabitants of the colony will one day dispossess him of his land and of his wife (*Les Damnés* 70). When Khatibi refers to the park as a "vierge intouchable," he is tacitly recognising that the differences between colonised and coloniser were posited as absolutes in order to prevent any intercultural (spatial or human) *métissage*. In the passage cited above, the narrator's ironic tone suggests that permanence and continuity are stereotypically characteristic of the other's differences. When he employs the words "éternelle" or "interminable" in reference to them, he is actually turning the coloniser's accusations of stagnation and historical rigidity against themselves. The coloniser-colonised dichotomy seemed impervious to change, and it was inscribed in his memory like a tattoo, the central image in his autobiographical text:

> Je jouais parfois avec des copains dans ce lieu, nous allions regarder des parties de tennis ou de boules [...] N'est-ce pas que le temps se détruit dans une répétition fissurante! Je me retrouvais, perdu dans cette montagne d'images baroques, défilant dans le désordre d'un enfant colonisé. Que pouvions-nous faire, écrasé dans nos corps, sinon, bel Occident, déflorer ta nature, sauter sur tes zones interdites et attraper les petits poissons rouges fétillant dans ta matrice? (43-44)

The rhetorical questions that he asks in this passage draw attention to the static quality of the coloniser/colonised duality.

Each side regards the other as an absolute alterity because each sees the other from a distance; there is little interaction between the two groups, except in individual cases. The child cannot understand why the barriers are in place. Why should he not freely visit the city's parks and cafés? Moroccan children assume that the Europeans are 'different' because they see external signs of difference (i.e. the beret, the alcohol, the lawn games). But they are also tempted to cross the boundaries that separate them and to violate the supposed sanctuary of the other. Penetrating the "zones interdites" and becoming voyeurs of the other's activities represent transgressive acts that were later mirrored in the colonised subject's appropriations of the other's language in the transgressive act of becoming a writer.

The ironic tone of the narrator's recollections about his 'coming to knowledge' of the other and about his growing awareness of the difference between himself and the other reflect the autobiographer's retrospective attitude toward his own earlier uncertainty about his own identity. Like Memmi, Feraoun, and other colonised autobiographers, he learned about the history of his own people as it was filtered through the world view of the foreign occupier. Seeing one's culture in this way produces a "double vision" that parallels the linguistic and the psychological *dédoublement* of the (ex)colonised subject:

> Par le glissement dans le vide, je me rencontre dans le regard louche d'un double, [...] Certes, le Maroc, dans ces textes, sous la forme joyeux folklore, tuniques blanches, babouches vif écarlate, pasthèques ensanglantées, et que dire? Un muezzin mécanique, enfourchant une humanité endormie et qui ne se réveillait que pour se mouiller le bout de doigts, ébauchant quelques génuflexions. La prière, c'était parler au vide. Etonnés par cette image de nous-même, nous gloussions, un peu honteux comme lorsqu'on va voir un film un peu canaille en mâchant du chewing-gum, pour faire passer une émotion larvée. (57)

The narrator's recollection of the emotion felt by the young students at being presented with such false images of their own culture exemplifies the insidious processes at work in

the colonial educational system. The students are conditioned to regard their own people in terms that are defined by the foreign occupier.

The result is that Khatibi's protagonist becomes an outsider to his own group; he becomes an allegedly 'superior' person because he can now recognise the deficiencies of his own culture. The embarrassed chuckling that accompanies their attempt to repress their true feelings when confronted with such images of their culture also reveals how the students are being emotionally coerced into seeing themeselves as 'different' from the rest of their group. The resultant 'doubling' cannot help but influence the way in which the children view themselves and their relationship to their own language and culture. As Khatibi's narrator recalls, the children learned to 'mask' their real emotions and to act as if they had been convinced by the indoctrination process.

Seduction by the coloniser's promise of assimilation is another significant element of the coloniser/colonised dialectic. The colonial school seduces indigenous children into believing that the culture and the language of the other are superior to their own. It also holds out the promise of great rewards for those students who succeed in mastering the foreign language and in leaving their origins behind them. However, part of Khatibi's self-decolonisation involves the recognition that seduction works both ways, for it affects both partners in the coloniser/colonised relationship. The masters of the Franco-Moroccan school were themselves seduced by the reflection of their culture as it was mirrored in the successful students'assimilation of it. Impressed by the students who mastered the French language, for example, they desired to see their indigenous pupils as incarnations of the values associated with their own *mission civilisatrice*. In *La Mémoire Tatouée*, Khatibi's narrator describes how this game of seduction became increasingly important to him and to his teacher, who willingly participated in it by directing class discussions into areas where his star pupil could demonstrate his successful assimilation.

At the secondary school he attended in Casablanca before leaving for Paris, the majority of his classmates were young French women, and in this situation, he became obsessed with the idea of seduction. The seduction of the colonised by the coloniser's language becomes reversed, for the young Moroccan now uses the French language as a weapon with which he seduces the feminine (cultural, religious) other. His mastery of the other's language enables him to be particularly seductive because he can

present himself as 'being different:' " La séduction devenait ma passion. Je travaillais pour éblouir et je parlais une langue introuvable dans les livres, puisque, m'écriais-je par procuration, 'La chair est triste et j'ai lu tous les livres'" (111). His motivation to master the French language is thus heightened by his desire to increase his power to seduce the foreign women at his school. In any case, he views language as a means for attaining a goal. The assumption that the other's language can serve him as a tool of seduction is actually rooted in the assumptions behind the colonial educational system, for colonised children are conditioned to believe that the key to their acceptance into French society is their ability to assimilate the French language and the French culture. By extrapolating from this line of reasoning, the colonised young man naturally assumes that, by impressing the French women with his linguistic abilities, he can legitimately expect to be accepted by them as a lover.

The passage cited above also reveals how literary models of the other's culture are internalised by the colonised adolescent. The narrator's account of his intimate identification with Mallarmé betrays his awareness of the absurdity of his situation; he has become a *simulacre* of himself. He attempted to imitate the literary models that had been taught to him in the colonial school. But as the adult autobiographer understands, his earlier game of seduction had required him to wear a mask. If the colonised subject is going to seduce the other, he must never reveal his true identity (i. e. that he is merely the 'copy' of a true Frenchman). No traces of his Muslim, colonised identity can be visible; there must be no tell-tale accent to betray his origins; otherwise, the illusion of being the 'same' as the other will be lost. When the narrator explains that he had cultivated the identity of a "poète maudit," he is revealing that, at the same time of his life he felt constrained to wear a mask - to appear to be the other - if he hoped to seduce the feminine other.

With the hindsight of an autobiographer's perspective, he understands the psychologically equivocal situation in which he had placed himself by playing at seduction. The game of seduction between coloniser and (ex)colonised revolves around the question of identity and otherness. By trying to assimilate, he was only playing a role, becoming a *simulacre* (of himself and of the 'ideal' French man). The French women in his classes, in turn, appreciated him for his 'difference' from other Moroccans. Accepted

into the other's group as a curiosity, he experienced an ambivalent pleasure that merely heightened his internalised 'otherness:'

> Car ces filles que je désirais profondément me caressaient de loin. Elles disaient que je différais de mes compatriotes. On m'acceptait parce que j'étais semblable, annihilant d'avance toute mon enfance, toute ma culture. Devant un tel plaisir complexe, je me mis des moustaches et une cravate de soie bariolée. Le personnage se donnait un air dévergondé. J'apprenais aux autres à écrire leur propre langue. On applaudissait, sans plus. Je souhaitais une victoire irreversible, ce furent le sourire, la surprise. Passion déréglée qui me convainquit de la solitude. Toute la place était pour la poésie, ma contrée criminelle où s'inscrivait ma blessure. Je m'attaquai aux auteurs difficiles, Mallarmé, Valéry, sans oublier la douceur si proche d'Eluard. M'ouvrir ainsi à une existence voilée, et par les mots j'étais mon propre dieu, au-delà de Casablanca, ville quelque peu détéstable qui m'a volé ma parole. (122)

The narrator's report of the girls'appreciative cooing, 'you're 'different' from the others,' recalls the perpetual dilemma of identity and alterity in the colonial situation. The *assimilé(e)* and the *évolué(e)* only receive the praise and acceptance of the coloniser if they are perceived as being other than they really are.

In *Peau noire, masques blancs,* Fanon recounts an anecdote that demonstrates the ambiguous identity of the colonised subject. After a lecture in which he himself had spoken (in French) about the parallels between black and European poetry, he was congratulated by a listener who complimented him by remarking "Au fond, tu es un blanc."[8] The message is clearly similar to the one received by the young Khatibi: 'You're different; you're one of us.' Homi Bhabha describes this ambivalent use of the adjective 'different' and claims that it reveals the insidiousness in the way in which identities are assigned to the colonised other: it is, he argues, "the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body" that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness.[9] Khatibi's narrator reveals that his seductions took place only on an intellectual level. From the female students, he received applause for his brilliance but no other manifestations of admiration

or respect. In fact, the term "de loin" reinforces the idea of the "zones interdites" that separate female *colon* classmates from their male, Moroccan counterparts. The "blessure" that he suffers is more than alienation and a break with his origins; it is linked to the tattoo—the painful scar, the indelible trace of the memories that constitute his identity. The conjunction of "mémoire" and "tatouée" in the text's title indicates the degree to which memory is corporeal and indelible. Khatibi's novel is a tattooed *mémoire* in that, as Lucy Stone McNeece writes, "it tells a tale of alienation and exile that carries within it both its roots and its history traced in its rhetorical figures and linguistic patterns."[10] The narrator's culture and desire are present not only in tribal voices, but in words, images and linguistic rhythm.

Only words, poetry, and escape through his imagination could save his divided ego, torn between seducing the other and finding his own unique discursive space. The passage cited above occurs at the end of the chapter "par gestes décrochés" and prepares the way for his departure for Paris at the beginning of the next chapter. Before describing this departure, the narrator accuses Casablanca of having 'stolen' his words, his identity. His confusing experiences in the French secondary school had blurred the boundaries between self and other. In his desire to be accepted by the other's group, he had abandoned his identity by donning the mask of the *simulacre*--a mask that he hoped would lessen the differences between himself and his French classmates. This image is echoed in the next chapter when he describes his mother's sadness at his departure, "car elle me savait devenir un peu plus simulacre" (114). Indeed, the trip to France only exacerbated his confused sense of identity. Looking forward to truly engaging the other, he repeatedly encounters reminders of his difference.

In the autobiographical novel, the departure for France is a predictable stage in the account of 'coming to writing.' In *La Mémoire tatouée*, the narrator situates his departure for Paris within the context of a continuing quest for self-knowledge and for a knowledge of the other as well: "Je partais à Paris sans autre histoire que celle d'un étudiant ombrageux, à la recherche d'une autre image de l'autre et de moi-même. [...] ce vol, rencontrer l'occident dans le voyage de l'identité et de la différence sauvage" (113). He believed his trip would confirm his sense of identity and his belief in an absolute alterity. Instead, his experience of France during the period when its people were forced

to reevaluate the identity of their country as a colonial power prompted him to reformulate the self-other dichotomy by adopting the decentring perspective of the 'pensée autre'--knowing oneself as an other.

In the chapter "Rive gauche," he sets out to meet the other on a new ground from which he will be able to examine the *noeud* of identity/alterity. In describing his studies at the Sorbonne, his outings to the cafés and jazz clubs of Paris, and his meetings with young avant-garde writers and musicians, he subverts the paradigm of the European explorer in exotic lands and he himself becomes an "ethnographe démusclé de l'occident" (122). Living on the margins of Parisian society, he observes everything from an outsider's perspective. Like an ethnographer, he reflects on the nature of cultural difference. His stance as an analytical observer later makes it possible for him to dialogue with the other from a position of 'power' because he too has visited the other's country and transformed it into an object of study.

At that time, Paris was the site of a rapidly changing social and aesthetic order; the rise of the *nouveau roman* and the birth of the *nouvelle vague* cinema very roughly coincided with the start of the Algerian revolution. Khatibi's encounters with the French were coloured by a general atmosphere of fear, intolerance, and an indiscriminate desire for vengence against North Africans. Several times he was mistaken for an Algerian and detained. For him, it was a time of discovery, a time when he was face-to-face with the other's blind, racist hatred of anyone with Arab features: "en pays étranger, avais-je le droit de regarder en face le dégoût de l'autre?" (125). His true identity proved to be of no consequence to many French people because his features marked him as an 'Arab.' His subjectivity and his individuality were rejected. Categorised according to the rules of 'la différence sauvage,' he is relegated to the status of the 'other,' a featureless being reduced to an absolute alterity. His confrontation with this situation leads him to re-think his ideas about the relationship between self and other and about the possibility of a genuine dialogue between them.

"Série hasardeuse 1" ends with the narrator's decision to return to Morocco in the company of his European wife. This return, presented in Khatibi's work under the guise of what he refers to in *Maghreb pluriel,* as "l'impossible retour au même" (196), demonstrates that the dream of returning to one's origins is an illusion. In North African

fiction (e.g. Chraïbi's *La Succession ouverte* (1962)), the return to the native land is often evoked as the final confrontation between the protagonist and his family, between the protagonist and 'traditional' culture. In *La Mémoire tatouée*, the narrator's awareness of 'l'alterité irréductible' (the inescapable otherness as an internalised facet of his own identity) makes it impossible for him to overcome the 'doubling' of his identity by seeking a mythic unity in the land of his origins: "La différence est une femme et la différence sauvage une séduction larvée. Belle illusion est le retour au pays! On ne revient jamais chez soi, on retombe dans le cercle de son ombre. Qui m'attendait pourtant? Ma mère aux grands yeux et le vouloir de tout transformer" (143).
His comprehension of the fact that he cannot rid himself of his internalised duality causes him to seek some means of at least reconciling the two (or more) sides of his identity. Rather than attempting to bridge the schism, he transforms his doubling into a textual exercise in which both sides have the opportunity to speak.

Khatibi's theories about identity and difference are grounded in his belief that a reductionist, Manichean vision of self and other is incapable of sustaining the hoped-for recovery of a unified, monovocal identity in the wake of the turmoil that has gripped postcolonial Africa. As he states in *Maghreb pluriel*, a new discursive space is necessary--one that decentres and continually questions the old dichotomies while fostering an ongoing fertile exploration of difference. His point is that neither the West nor the Orient exist as metaphysical absolutes. Indeed, just as the West is an assimilated facet of his own multi-faceted identity, the Orient is another aspect of it:

> Quoi qu'il en soit, cet intime de notre être, frappé et tourmenté par la volonté de puissance dite occidentale, cet intime qui est halluciné par l'humiliation, la domination brutale et abrutissante, ne peut être résorbé par une naïve déclaration d'un droit à la différence, comme si ce "droit" n'était pas déjà inhérent à la loi de la vie, c'est-à-dire à l'insurrection contre sa propre aliénation. Un droit à la différence qui se contente de répéter sa revendication, sans se mettre en question et sans travailler sur les lieux actifs et réactifs de son insurrection, ce droit-là ne constitue pas une transgression. Il en est la parodie. [...] Tout reste à penser en dialogues avec les pensées et les

> insurrections les plus radicales qui ont ébranlé l'Occident et continuent à le faire. (*Maghreb* 11-12)

If 'difference' is vital for the creation of a sense of identity, simply claiming the right to be different is pointless. One needs to engage, as Khatibi suggests, in a 'double critique' that offers the possibility of a fruitful dialogue about identity and difference - a dialogue that can have far-reaching consequences for a restructuring of fundamental metaphysical assumptions in the west and in the Orient.

Within this context, he explains that the 'pensée autre' actually originates in the schism of the subject or in the splitting of the ego; it is the 'third term' which is a marginal, alternative discourse that contrasts with the two more dominant discourses: that of the West and that of the Orient. This 'third term,' Bhabha's "in-between space," exists in the psychological 'no man's land' created in the splitting of the ego. Within this neutral space; the 'difference' of the subject is inscribed, enabling bilingual, decolonised autobiographers to remain conscious of their foreignness, while focusing a dissecting gaze both within and outside themselves.

Before the bilingual, decolonised ego can assimilate its own alterity and exploit it as a source of greater creativity and self-knowledge, the demons of 'l'identité aveugle' and 'la différence sauvage' must be exorcised by finding the *locus* for a new dialogue with the other. In "variation sur la différence," Khatibi's narrator returns to the 'Jeu de séduction,' which is an inherent component of the coloniser-colonised dialectic. In this chapter, his recollections of seduction by writing and by the other's language are transformed into a seduction of 'l'occident' (represented in terms of the female body). The *corps scriptible* of 'l'occident' is violated by the narrator's desire to inscribe his own presence and his own bitterness onto the 'white page' of her body: "Occident [...] tu m'as arraché le noyau de ma pensée. Occident, j'allongerai ton corps d'albâtre, vrai de vrai, rien, néant de rien, rien" (169). In this instance, the colonised seduces the 'West' by means of the power that his writing gives him. This vengeful fantasy recalls his earlier attempts to seduce the European girls in his class by drawing upon his impressive linguistic manipulations. But in the passage cited above, the narrator reverses the 'jeu de séduction' as a way of rejecting the West's supposed power of total attraction over the

'colonisé-décolonisé' intellectual. He is also affirming his rejection of the Manichean self-other perspective by proclaiming that his salvation lies in the acceptance of his multiple identity: "Certes, Occident, je me scinde, mais mon identité est une infinité de jeux, de roses de sable, euphorbe est ma mère, je suis protégé, Occident!" (171). He ascribes a talisman-like quality to his multiplicity and discovers that his doubling is a source of empowerment, not a sign of weakness. By invoking the desert as his place of origin, he further intimates that the discovery of his mythic origins has saved him from a complete loss of self.

Instead of psychologically crippling him, the narrator's *dédoublement* proves to be his salvation, for doubling actually creates the multiple identity that he perceives as a source of creativity and insight. Once he has acknowledged the beneficial qualities of his situation, he plays on the theme of his difference—'la différence barbare' that Westerners advanced to support their stereotyped notion that he and his culture needed to be colonised because they lacked a 'civilisation.' At this point, however, the seduction takes place in the opposite direction, and the other looks to the bilingual writer as a source of creative life in a language that has once been 'offered' to the colonised as a vehicle of expression that was supposedly superior to his own. Rejecting both the idea that the 'West' is 'un mal absolu' and the belief that the West is the sole guardian of truth and goodness, he accepts his double heritage. The final image of "Variation sur la différence" is that of writing, which is again linked with the image of the tattoo, the trace of myth and symbol that evoke both the feminine presence and a particular system of transmitting meaning: "Je tatoue sur ton sexe, Occident, le graphe de notre infidelité, un feu au bout de chaque doigt. Point nodal, crac!" (173). The violence of this image signals the narrator's appropriation of the West. In effect, he is making his presence in the other('s) tongue. By tattooing his mark onto the body of the West, he is also, as Scharfman points out, affirming his right (and by extension that of any North African writer) to "possess" the language of the other.[11]

When the French language is assimilated by the colonised individual, it becomes, in Deleuzean terms, a weapon to be used in the struggle to undermine the other's authority and to salvage the fragmented colonised identity. With a friend in his *lycée* years, the adolescent Khatibi devoured difficult texts and strove to write the best

essays: "Nous régnions sur la littérature. Ecrire, bien écrire, devenant notre technique terroriste, notre lien secret" (77). This passage echoes the objectives of the *Souffles* project in terms of the writer's need to appropriate language so as to control it from within. To decolonise the writer's assimilated language, a syntactically and linguistically violent appropriation of the other's language was necessary in order to claim a newly independent, 'decolonised' discursive space. During weekends at the boarding school, young Khatibi served as an "écrivain publique" (77) for his classmates, who requested his services in the composing of passionate love letters. His willingness to perform this service is a measure of the control he desired to exercise over the French language. Demonstrating his assimilation of the techniques employed by the Balzacian narrator, he recalls how a sense of power over the 'plots' in his letters made him feel as if he were a master storyteller: "Entouré de mes dictionnaires, j'étais exalté, multiple à travers ces passions épistolaires. Je gérais ainsi, jusqu'à midi, la sensibilité du monde" (78).

The paradise that can be gained through the mastery of the French classical tradition is, however, no more than a mirage for the colonised student. The canonisation of French writers guarantees their 'immortality' and reinforces the cultural doctrine of the coloniser's mission. Writers whose works have become part of the canon are eulogised as examples of a 'superior' French civilisation, and they came to symbolise the power of the written word for the indigenous students.

At first, the narrator hopes that his imitation and manipulation of the discursive and generic conventions of the French canon will protect him against the self-splitting alienation of someone who had been born into a civilisation which, he had been led to believe, lacked a viable literary tradition. By assimilating and parodying the language of the other in its most complex form, he thought he could neutralise the power of the coloniser's discourse and then acquire it for himself. He regarded his control over the French language as a step toward decolonisation because it allowed him to inscribe his presence in that language; it allowed him to reverse the nightmare of being inscribed, of being etched by words; instead he could act upon them. "J'avais viré carrément vers la parodie que je croyais décolonisante" (84-85). If his earlier obsession with the imitation of French lyrical styles had been repudiated as a sign of colonisation, he also came to the realisation that parody reinforces the belief that French models are central to any writing

project undertaken by colonised individuals. A true decolonisation of the writer's relationship to language must, he concludes, be more than parody; it must initiate an active reformulation of the writer's participation in the communication of a unique inner vision through language.

To find his own discursive voice, he had to accept the interaction of two tongues in order to establish a second self through an *écriture* that would be capable of transforming (or even breaking apart) the literary models he had once so admired. Within this context, self-writing opened a space in which a rebirth could take place--not necessarily his own rebirth as a whole, unified subject embodied in the autobiographical text, but his rebirth as a 'sujet écrivant.' Conscious of a dual identity, this 'writing subject' would experience a creative rejuvenation in attempting to realise its project:

> Je flottais. Quelle histoire orpheline ou agressive pouvait me dessaisir? J'attendais que se dénouât le temps, que commençâ ma vraie vie dans l'exaltation d'une nouvelle naissance. [...] J'écrivais, acte sans désespoir et qui devait subjuguer mon sommeil, mon errance. J'écrivais puisque c'était le seul moyen de me retrancher du chaos, de m'affûter à la solitude. (85)

The self that had previously been 'flou' and in limbo thus becomes anchored through writing in a cathartic experience that resembles that of other colonised autobiographers. The writer that was linguistically 'orphaned' as a result of the loss or absence of the mother ('s) tongue finds rebirth in the autobiographical text, where, metaphorically, he 'gives birth' to a new self.

The Moroccan critic Soraya Choufani describes Khatibi's symbolic rebirth as a struggle between two linguistic presences in his conscious and unconscious mind. Both seek ascendancy, according to Choufani, but the 'true' line of Khatibi's inheritance is marked by his name, by its link to the feast day of Abraham, and by the rites to which he was subjected during his first hours of existence. These inscriptions are, she believes, more 'real' in the narrator's memory than his acquisition of the French language and the 'tattoos' etched in his memory by this experience. Nevertheless, she concludes that the French language rules over the narrator's imaginary faculties and fuels "représentations

fantasmatiques élaborant le code des images auxquelles [il] tente de s'identifier."[12] Both rebirth paradigms exist in the text, posing the fundamental question that Khatibi explores in *La Mémoire tatouée:* What is the nature of his multiple identity and which literary tropes can best express its diverse forms?

If the image of a rebirth through writing parallels the implicit 'regard dédoublé' of the autobiographical act, other figures of the double haunt Khatibi's work as well—the *simulacre*, bilingualism, and the palimpsest. Imaginary dialogues such as those in *La Mémoire tatouée* allow Khatibi to turn his project on its head and to undermine his own arguments by creating 'alter egos' to express the 'other' sides of issues. The double as a narrative and thematic trope thus demonstrates the underlying reality of Khatibi's dual/multiple identity, which is also brought to the surface by a narrative voice that oscillates among the uses of different personal pronouns, moving from 'je' to 'tu' and 'il,' while still referring to the same person.

Doubling and the figure of the *simulacre* are the psychological results of the colonised writer's dual linguistic and cultural situation. Memmi's Sartrean analysis of the coloniser-colonised relationship had defined the dialectical and polemical nature of the situation that exists between the coloniser and the colonised. Focusing upon the attraction-repulsion conflict that characterises the two participants in this dialectic and hypothesising that the desire for assimilation produces a schizophrenic reaction in the colonised subject, Memmi ascribed the resultant sense of loss and alienation to French education:

> Tel est le drame de l'homme-produit et victime de la colonisation: il n'arrive presque jamais à coïncider avec lui-même. La peinture colonisée, par exemple, balance entre deux poles: d'une soumission à l'Europe, excessive jusqu'à l'impersonalité, elle passe à un retour à soi tellement violent qu'il est nocif et esthétiquement illusoire. En fait, l'adéquation n'est pas trouvée, la remise en question de soi continue [...] persiste le douleureux décalage d'avec soi. (*Portrait* 154-55)

Despite the best efforts of the colonised to reintegrate a split identity into a coherent whole, he or she remains, in Memmi's view, continually divided from within. Aspirations to return to one's origins are futile, he concludes, because once colonised subjects have been cut off from the 'natural' historical evolution of their own people, there is no longer a 'lost paradise' to be recovered. For Khatibi, however, the splitting or doubling of the colonised subject is not a source of anguish. On the contrary, it is a source of creative energy, the point of departure for a challenging exploration of the 'decolonised' intellectual/subject. In his epilogue to the 1979 re-edition of *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi explains that: 'C'est le détachement de ce corps inprononçable qui me fascine quand j'écris - perte infinie" (206). He implies that the loss experienced by the self induces a distanciation, or a 'detachment' that accompanies the 'double vision.' This distancing in turn enables (de)colonised writers to consider themselves and their writing projects with a certain neutrality, freeing them to perform a sort of self-analysis (or auto-autopsy). Not being able to 'coincide' with himself is, for Khatibi, a springboard that can propel (de)colonised writers into an examination of other doubling tropes.

Khatibi's theories on identity and difference revolve around the figures of the *simulacre* and the palimpsest. The images of the palimpsest are highly evocative in terms of defining the colonial experience. In a colonised context, the palimpsest metaphor, as in Nehru's earlier image of India as a palimpsest, draws attention to the fact that indigenous languages and cultures are submerged beneath those of the coloniser. In *La Mémoire tatouée,* the palimpsest actually becomes a metaphorical weapon that can be used in the decolonisation struggle. On one level, it is a textual manifestation of the bilingual writer's situation; on another, it symbolises the efforts of the colonised to rewrite their stories and their presence into the French-language discourse that 'writes' the text of colonialism. Khatibi himself develops the palimpsest trope as a means of carrying out a self-reflexive analysis that enables him to rewrite his own story by alluding to narrative models of previous North African autobiographies, to those contained in the Koran and in Arabic culture and language. Like a palimpsest, Khatibi's text has no beginning and no end; every text begins before it is opened as Khatibi himself writes in *Maghreb pluriel*: "Début du livre: commencement sans commencement [...] Le commencement a eu lieu dans un ailleurs sans cesse reculant vers l'innoui, là où l'effacement du sujet se joue de

toutes les manières" (180). For Khatibi, all writing is intertextual, and the traces of previous encounters with other cultures and other languages cannot be denied because they are always present. The palimpsest trope in Khatibi's writing is designed to dismantle the notion of purity or integrity inherent in grand narratives.

Beginning his 'autobiography' under the signs of the palimpsest, the narrator of *La Mémoire tatouée* describes his birth in a manner that reinscribes his story onto that of Abraham and his son. His eyes were 'opened' by a ritual that ensured his future ability to 'see:'

> De ma naissance, je sauvegarde le rite sacré. On me mit un peu de miel sur la bouche, une goutte de citron sur les yeux, le premier acte pour libérer mon regard sur l'univers et le second pour vivifier mon esprit, mourir, vivre, mourir, vivre, double à double, suis-je né aveugle contre moi-même? (10)

As the Moroccan critic Zakya Daoud points out in "*La Mémoire tatouée* ou la difficulté d'être 'double à double' ou 'aveugle à soi-même," *La Mémoire tatouée* is a transcultural artifact that is symbolically/culturally engaged with other artifacts from the languages and cultures that shaped the writer's development. She calls it "un dialogue avec d'autres livres, et, en premier lieu, le livre, le coran, puis les poètes ante-islamiques, puis tout ce que la culture arabe a produit de plus achevé et de plus raffiné, puis enfin, les poètes français, surtout Mallarmé."[13] Viewed from this perspective, Khatibi's Koranic and cultural references are palimpsests - cultural and literary reinscriptions of the author's multiple identity. As Khatibi himself explained, any text by a bilingual writer can be read as a palimpsest, for when the language of the other is used as a means of expression, the mother tongue does not simply disappear. Barely visible traces of the maternal language can be found between (or beneath) the text written in the adopted tongue.

The palimpsest actually does exist as a physical object in Khatibi's cultural context. It is the polished wood board upon which young boys (and sometimes girls) at the *m'sid* write the verse that is to be memorised for the day's lesson. After the verse has been learned, the board is erased; another verse is written on its surface, and the process begins again. Fascinated by the notion that layers of writing build up on the tablet's

surface and the traces of one text appear through the gaps of the new one, Khatibi exploits the trope of the palimpsest as the model for the writing of North African autobiography. Inscribing his own text into the canon of colonised autobiographies, he himself becomes a cultural hybrid unto whom a foreign culture has been grafted. As Scharfman observes, he has also become a "palimpsest[s] culturel[s]" himself (68).

The title of Khatibi's autobiographical narrative establishes a link between *tatouage*, *graphie*, and memory; in fact, it is itself a variation on the themes of doubling and of the palimpsest. Writing the colonised memory is, thus, for him, a necessary step in the colonised subject's pursuit of a viable sense of identity. It is also a way of establishing the legitimacy of the act of writing:

> Ce n'est pas un hasard si des écrivains maghrébins sont captivés par l'autobiographie. Ecrire dans une langue qui était étrangère, est une façon de fonder la légitimité de l'acte d'écrire. Cet écrivain dit d'abord: voici ma naissance, voici mon nom, voici mon terroir et voici "mon coeur qui ne bat que pour vous."[14]

Khatibi here recalls the theories of other critics who speak about the colonised's use of memory to reconstitute a lost sense of historical participation in the development of their nation. By recreating the past and a "coming to writing" in the language of the other, the (de)colonised autobiographer legitimises his or her use of this language. Self-writing thus becomes a means of filling in the gaps that exist in the conscious and unconscious mind of the colonised individual - gaps that have been created by French education and by the colonial dialectic of attraction/hatred.

In *La Mémoire tatouée*, the author explores his own relationship to language and writing in a manner that sets his autobiographical project apart from other North African autobiographical narratives. Instead of a work whose goal is to 'faire le bilan' of alienation, Khatibi's autobiography is an autodecolonisation that at the same time serves to decolonise the existing model of North African autobiography. He does not deplore the unified self, which he regards as a myth in any case. In fact, his dual and cultural heritage becomes a source of great creativity for him. By developing the themes of doubling, the

simulacre, and the palimpsest, he succeeds in analysing his situation from the perspective of a bilingual writer who rejoices in his multiple identity because it allows him to formulate his theories on alterity, 'double critique,' and the 'pensée autre.' As a decolonised writer/intellectual, he has come to view the cultural, linguistic, and geographic plurality of North Africa as the appropriate *locus* for a decentred approach to the issues of representation and the problematic polarities issues of self and other, identity and difference.

Whereas many postcolonial writers struggle to balance their political commitments and their involvement with the French language, Khatibi sees no inherent contradiction in adopting the other's language as long as it has been assimilated to suit the writer's inner vision. An (ex)colonised writer's identity need not be compromised or defined exclusively from the standpoint of his or her choice of language. Identity and alterity are fluid constructions, he concludes, their rhythm and evolution must be considered in light of the dynamics of trans-cultural exchange and communication, which can themselves be the hallmark of the de-colonised writer:

> Ainsi l'identité ne se définit pas par une structure éternelle, mais, d'après notre propos, elle est régie par des relations dissymétriques entre le temps, l'espace et la culture structurant la vie d'un groupe, d'une ethnie, d'une société. Traduction du mouvement d'être et de sa flexibilité, de son adaptation aux événements, à sa propre énergie de renouvellement. "Hospitalité" veut dire ici une écoute de l'autre en tant qu'autre. Lui prêter l'oreille pour l'accueillir dans sa singularité. Parole venant d'ailleurs et de loin, apprentissage initiatique à ma propre prétention à l'universalité, qui que je sois, muni ou démuni de force, de stratégie et de puissance sur les autres. [15]

This commentary by Khatibi underlines what he considers to be the potentiality of a cultural space that opens boundaries between cultures and among people within the same cultures. Linguistic hospitality necessitates an openness that can sustain the ever-changing patterns of individual and national identities. "Si nous acceptons l'idée d'une identité qui n'est plus fixité au passé, nous pourrions aboutir à une conception plus juste,

celle d'une identité qui est en devenir" (*Francophonie* 5). Reliance on an 'identité aveugle' (or 'sauvage') as a substitute for a smooth, open, and 'hospitable' national identity can only serve, he asserts, to render national and individual identity stagnant, freezing it into reductive categories.

Things Fall Apart [16]

Both the sense of loss and cultural displacement compel many African postcolonial writers (writers of the first stage) to the urgent task of the need to find new ways for the African to think him/herself. This task assumes a fundamental and strategic importance given the disparity between the West's representations of the formerly colonised world, and the contrasting experience as expressed by African writers. The West's representations in this context, as has been seen in *La Mémoire tatouée*, are posited as 'natural' depictions of Africa and the Orient as uncivilised locations in need of the so-called *mission civilisatrice*. They come in various written and visual forms - photographs, paintings, academic texts, novels and other literature - and are thought to state 'a fact.' The ideological content of representations in the colonial situation played a major role in supporting colonial domination. Edward Said, in his analysis of textual representations of the Orient in *Orientalism*, emphasises the fact that representations can never be exactly realistic:

> In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as "the Orient."[17]

These representations are instead constructed images that need to be interrogated not only for their ideological content, but for the way in which they collapse the image of the other

which reflects ignorance and a lack of respect for the diversity within marginalised communities.

Chinua Achebe, among others, has articulated his own experiences of his culture, history and people and what he writes contests Western representations of Nigeria/Africa. As a writer at the crossroads between two cultures, whose relationship has historically been marked by traumatic encounters, Achebe acts and speaks, using western instruments (language and form), and in the process deterritorialises them in order to reterritorialise writing and thus write himself back into history. His literary production operates not only as a focus of resistance to Western discourse, and a reassertion of the history of his people, but also as an attempt to construct viable alternative paradigms of cultural identity. *Things Fall Apart*, a work of great realist fiction, is an important exploration of these concerns.

Like the prevalence of autobiographical fiction in North Africa, there is an acknowledged proliferation of realist fiction in sub-Saharan Africa. Dennis Walder is right to note that "despite recent attempts to undermine the idea of realism as outdated or infected by humanist ideology, its use persists."[18] Theoretical responses to realism in postcolonial contexts have ranged from viewing it as a form of political and social commitment, to virtually dismissing it as a naïve and conservative form, unable to hold disruptive content and, therefore, incapable of subversion. The problem with the latter position is that it links only experimental or post-realist fiction with political or social resistance. While this link is true, as will be seen in Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Farah's *Maps* in Chapter Three, I argue that realism in postcolonial contexts, such as the example of *Things Fall Apart*, is a viable form for resistance narratives. Realism, as Stephen Slemon has noted, may be used in a naturalising and ethnographic way, or may be used together with postmodern techniques in order to be subversive.[19] Naturalising and ethnographic fictions are indeed conservative in their reinforcement of the structural hierarchies of colonialism and, as Kwame Anthony Appiah notes, may not be "truly" decolonised.[20] This kind of fictional realism not only reproduces 'First World' concepts of nationalism; it also fails (generally) to interrogate the naturalisation of otherness in its representation of the everyday. Other realist texts, however, may be just as powerful as experimental writing or magic realism in their critique of cultural, social and political

institutions and by allowing a space for what Wilson Harris calls the "re-visionary potential within texts of reality."[21]

For Appiah, realism is the first stage in the evolution of a decolonised literature. The second stage is what he calls "post-realism" or the postcolonial stage (150). He argues that the first stage of African writing (roughly 1955-1965) is concerned with the changes "largely thrust on African peoples by European imperialism" (81), and calls it "realist legitimations of nationalism" (150) because of its inscription of the narrative of nationalism on the nation. The examples which Appiah gives of this first stage are Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* as anticolonial and nationalist narratives. In their celebratory "imaginative recreations of a common cultural past crafted into a shared tradition by the writer" (149), these realist texts are not, according to Appiah, overtly critical in their representation of the African past. Appiah's argument is convincing when applied to novels like Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* or Sefrioui's *La Boîte à merveille* in their attempt to delegitimate colonialism and at the same time present an idealised African or Arab past. *Things Fall Apart*, however, does not entirely fall into this category. First, Achebe is concerned with the cultural specificity of an Igbo past, not an African past. Secondly, while *Things Fall Apart* delegitimates colonialism, it does not do so by representing an idealised Igbo past or by naturalising otherness in its representation. What distinguishes *Things Fall Apart* from other novels in the first stage of African writing is its objective realism (detachment/neutrality). Like Appiah's 'post-realist' novels, Achebe's realism in this novel, as will be seen, was capable of disrupting grand narratives, internal and external.

Achebe's return to the past in *Things Fall Apart* is, as it is for many postcolonial writers, necessary and vital. For him it is the writer's duty in a postcolonial situation: "The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing then in human terms what happened to them, what they lost" (*Morning* 44). The primary function of Achebe's writing then, in this novel, is to help his people rediscover their past and assert a truthful picture of Africa which the colonialists distorted. In the above statement, Achebe refers to what he called the "fundamental theme" that has to be disposed of first:

> This theme - put quite simply - is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain.[22]

Achebe recognises the urgent need for a redefinition of modern African values but he also asserts that this must be preceded by a confrontation with the past. *Things Fall Apart,* like *Arrow of God* (1964), is thus compelled by historical circumstances. In it, Achebe recreates indigenous culture and dignity and thus contests Western ethnocentric images and myths which reduce Africa to a 'dark continent' and Africans to 'savages.' This is indeed the stereotype which we find in J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, that Africa is "the earliest beginnings of the world [...] an impenetrable forest," with wild primitive customs, inhabited by "prehistoric," "black limbs [...] of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling," "a thing monstrous but free," who "howled and leaped, and made faces."[23] This particular stereotype was equally evoked by missionaries, commissioners, explorers and academics. Edward Said refers to this assertive representational logic in his analysis of Conrad and *Heart of Darkness,* which to him:

> works so effectively precisely because its aesthetics and politics [...] are imperialist; and that, by the time Conrad wrote, seemed an attitude that was inevitable and for which there could be no alternative. For if we cannot truly understand someone else's experience, and if, as a result, we must depend simply upon the assertive authority of the sort of power Kurtz wields in the jungle or that Marlow possesses as narrator, there is no use looking for non-imperialist alternatives in a system that has simply eliminated, made unthinkable, all other alternatives to it. The circularity of the whole thing is unassailable. ("Intellectuals" 49)

It is against this background that Achebe's 'fundamental theme' becomes significant. It is propelled by the (nationalist) desire to negate, what Mudimbe calls the colonial episteme. This is what Achebe says about how he first came to write: "The nationalist movement in British West Africa after the Second World War brought a mental revolution which began to reconcile us to ourselves. It suddenly seemed that we too might have a story to tell. '*Rule Britannia!*' to which we had marched so unselfconsciously on Empire Day now stuck in our throat" (*Morning* 70). Achebe's remark indicates that the colonised seemed to accept that they were always the object of the coloniser's story. It was precisely the project of *Things Fall Apart* to negate the colonial episteme and replace it by an (alter) native narrative that tells the story of (ex) colonised people. And thus, as Kwame Appiah has noted, a counter-hegemonic discourse also "helps constitute the modern community of the nation."[24]

Things Fall Apart, written in 1958, already prefigured the postmodern scepticism of the grand *récits* of the 'historical confidence' which accompanied European colonialist constructions of non-European colonised peoples and cultures. It is directed at deconstructing and subverting not only imperialist representations of Africans and African cultures, but also at exposing the imperialism of representation which is a process of 'othering' and exclusion of alternative versions and constructions. By attesting to and emphasising the humanity, dignity and positive values of his society, Achebe's return to the past is equally a critique of the weaknesses of some aspects of African culture. Unlike Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* and other African writings inspired by *négritude,* Achebe is not tempted to depict Africa in an idealised light or 'gloss over inconvenient facts' in the historical period he sets out to celebrate:

> This is where the writer's integrity comes in. Will he be strong enough to overcome the temptation to select only those facts which flatter him? If he succumbs he will have branded himself as an untrustworthy witness. But it is not only his personal integrity as an artist which is involved. The credibility of the world he is attempting to recreate will be called to question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts.

> We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like other people's pasts ours had its good as well as its bad sides.[25]

Achebe's articulation of the past must be recognised as vitally important in a postcolonial context, both to the creative artist who must not get carried away by the imperatives of nationalism, and to the reconstruction of a viable postcolonial identity. *Négritude* and other forms of nationalism unquestionably enabled liberation in many African countries as well as students and intellectuals during the era of the fall of colonialism. But, as discussed in Chapter One, *Négritude* or similar forms of nationalism do not always fit comfortably with the needs of new nations in terms of constructing a national and cultural identity in a postcolonial situation. A return to an authentic African past in a search for identity relies on a version of history that makes no sense to the divergent claims in present-day African society. This is what Achebe says: "You have all heard of the 'African personality'; of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet. Once we are up, we shan't need any of them anymore."[26]

Achebe's emergence as a novelist and a critic is of paramount importance in a postcolonial situation, especially in the articulation of the politics of postcolonial identity and (self) representation. While *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are a response to Africa's encounter with Europe, and the subsequent re-creation of African tradition and identity, they are also written to subvert some aspects of the pre-colonial and colonial identity-forming practices. His other novels, *No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People,* and *Anthills of the Savannah,* are also at once a critique of the way things were going in late colonial and post-independence Africa, and a serious attempt to reconstruct a viable postcolonial identity. If Achebe's name is synonymous with the rise and development of modern African literature in its present form, particularly in Anglophone Africa, it is arguably because of his artistic and social vision. African literature, as he puts it, is meaningful only when it takes into account the past and the present: "The most meaningful work that African writers can do today will take into account our whole history: how we got here, and what it is today; and this will help us to map our plans for the future."[27]

Indeed Achebe's novels take into account the "whole history" of his people in which their successes, failures and problems are addressed. In his novels, Achebe at once captures the history of his people and tells the story of particular characters bound up with that history. *Things Fall Apart* examines Igbo society prior to and at the point of confrontation with colonial rule. *Arrow of God* shows the same society as it tries to accommodate the new system. Okonkwo and Ezeulu in these novels are created as characters with admirable individual qualities rooted in Igbo values, yet their actions which lead to their demise are bound up with historical and social circumstances. The death of both men is the death of two individual characters, but it also symbolises the destruction of the Igbo social order from within; this, in turn, is shown to be quickened by outside forces, epitomised by the colonial administration, the new religion, and the missionaries. *No Longer at Ease* examines the cultural collision in Nigeria on the eve of independence when the positive values of the past have suffered a terrible breakdown as the two cultures met and caused tension in the central character Obi Okonkwo. The dilemma which Obi is confronted with in this novel is that of many African intellectuals who were regarded as the natural leaders in the 1950s and 1960s. *A Man of the People* turns its attention to the leaders of post-independence Nigeria, found to be incapable of providing adequate leadership. The two central characters in this novel, Odili and Chief Nanga, are portrayed as having distinct personal qualities, but their story is also bound up with the story of Nigeria in the first six years of independence. *Anthills of the Savannah* focuses on the country under military dictatorship, alerting the reader to the political, social and cultural situation of a fictitious West African country (which is Nigeria). Characterisation in this novel is very important. The major characters, Chris, Ikem, Beatrice and Sam, his Excellency, are members of the educated elite class. The insight Achebe offers through his character portrayal in this novel is that the elite and the government should realise both the needs of the ordinary people in new African nations and the important role they can play in nation-building. The portrayal of Beatrice as a major character also suggests that any representation that ignores and excludes women in African writing is structurally related to other forms of oppressive representations.

Fictional writing for Achebe is thus that which is firmly rooted in the community, recording and determining its 'whole history.' Taking the ceremony of the

Owerri Igbos of Nigeria as a model, Achebe stresses the African belief in the indivisibility of art and the community, the artist and ordinary members of society, for, as he puts it, "there is no rigid barrier between makers of culture and its consumers. Art belongs to all and is a 'function' of society" (*Morning* 22). Whether in his novels set in the past or those set in modern Africa, Achebe's social vision and artistic creativity find balanced textual inscription in his texts. Most of the problems which African societies face in post-independence years are not caused by colonialism but by Africans themselves. Nigerian society stands as an example of a world torn apart by bribery, corruption, nepotism, economic mismanagement and other social ills which characterise Nigerian leadership. The African writer, therefore, should not be 'over-fascinated' with the past or avoid the burning social and political issues of contemporary Africa. He should, as Achebe puts it, expose and attack injustice wherever it takes place. To fail to do this is to be completely irrelevant, "like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames" (78). Achebe calls upon the African writer to reassume his/her role, as the conscience of society; to be conscious of his/her role in society, and his/her involvement in its past, present and future. It is a call upon writers to commit themselves, that is, to criticise and protest and, at the same time, reform and remould.

Achebe's 'meaningful work' also includes the history of his rhetoric: his use of language. The problems and possibilities posed by the use of European languages to represent non-European cultural identities are of specific concern in many postcolonial texts. The language issue, as has been seen in the previous section, has been one of the most hotly contested issues in postcolonial studies, and became a central issue in the 1980s, affecting both Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial writers. Ngugi (Kenya) and Boudjedra (Algeria), two of the most successful writers in Africa, took a radical decision to abandon writing in European languages, and to devote themselves to writing in their original, native tongues. Ngugi wa Thiongo, who has written at length on the language question, notably in *Decolonising the Mind,* argues the case for refusing to adopt the language of the colonial master: "What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?" (*Decolonising* 26). Ngugi's and Boudjedra's decisions to

reject European languages have been seen as an appeal for the decolonisation of the mind. While the ideological sentiment behind this position is understandable (these are languages of a small elite and are symbolic of continued domination), critics of European-language writers have to recognise, as argued earlier, that former colonial languages are no longer the possession of the former colonisers alone. Before I look at Achebe's position on the language issue, two questions have to be asked of contemporary hybrid literatures of Africa. Do these literatures make any significant contribution to the dialogic relation between Africa and European discourses? How does European-language African fiction represent the encounter between the literate and supposedly 'superior' culture of the coloniser and the oral/mythic/repressed cultures of Africa? As I argued in relation to *La Mémoire tatouée*, it is the presence of the repressed language and culture which give to the text what Bakhtin would regard as its distinctively "dialogic" character. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin notes that "a word, discourse, language, or culture undergoes 'dialogisation' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative and absolute."[28]

As I have said in relation to Khatibi and other North African writers, many (de)colonised writers (unlike more recent writers) direct their discourse towards a dialogue with the European other; thus they affirm the colonised's subjectivity and specific culture and interpellate the other. Not to do so would leave the definition and representation of themselves and their cultures at the mercy of racist colonial writers. However, they use the European language in a way that deterritorialises it. Achebe's use of the English language in his writing is indeed in line with what he says on "African writing and the English language:"

> The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience [...] But it will have to be a new English, still in full

> communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (*Morning* 61-62)

The African writer's appropriation of the hegemonic language and genre is not necessarily a reproduction of colonial ideologies of domination. Achebe finds an interesting analogy in Afro-American cultural formation:

> Did not the black people in America, deprived of their own musical instruments, take the trumpet and trombone and blow them as they have never been blown before, as indeed they were not designed to be blown? And the result, was it not jazz? Is any one going to say that this was a loss to the world or that those first negro slaves who began to play around with discarded instruments of their masters should have played waltzes and foxtrots and more Salvation Army hymn tunes? (*Morning* 17)

Achebe's decision to use English and the 'realist' novel allows him not solely to disrupt the coloniser's written discourses that have repressed and dominated the (ex)colonised, but to produce something new. His theoretical work on language thus breaks new ground in the sense that it explores the relationship between the (ex)colonised writing subject, his or her own language of expression, and the possibility of decolonisation through writing.

Achebe writes in English, but not in conventional literary English. He appropriates the English language and indigenises it. He transforms, as Lloyd W Brown observes, "the cultural 'burden' of the mother country's language into the means of expressing a sense of human identity, and of liberating his modes of self-perception."[29] Achebe's talent is evident in the use of Igbo proverbs, especially in *Things Fall Apart*, as a rhetorical device. In the period of the novel, we learn that "Amongst the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (*Things Fall Apart* 20). In this novel, proverbs permeate the narrative and are therefore a key to a full understanding of the cultural milieu, the themes, the characterisation, and the values of Igbo society as a whole.

Writing for Achebe is thus an activity through which he attempts to rectify and rebuild his world. This attempt at rectification or reconstruction of the world very often leads to disruptive content, especially, as Frederick Karl argues, in the way in which it is "always testing out the received and the given, attacking hypocrisy, and demonstrating alternate ways of action and response."[30] The African writer, according to Achebe, has a constructive role to play which also involves a critique of all forms of oppression (Western and African). This, as I have said above, underlies Achebe's articulation of a double critique which is similar to Khatibi's. As a story-teller interested in the history and story of his people, Achebe is concerned not only with the cracks in Nigerian cultural identity, pointing out "where the rain began to beat us" (*Morning* 44), but also in how best to build and reconstruct a viable sense of identity based on the concepts of duality, balance, and the illusion of absolutism.

Achebe's essay "*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology" (*Morning* 93-103) deals extensively with the Igbo notion of duality. This notion discourages viewing life as simple and absolute; this is well expressed in the Igbo proverb quoted by Achebe, "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it" (*Morning* 94). He frequently draws attention to the negativity of absolutism and, at the same time, highlights the constructive value of flexibility and adaptation. He at once provides his heroes with alternatives and demonstrates how their failure to explore these alternatives largely contributes to their demise. In addition to dualism, the principle of balance and moderation underlies Achebe's reconstruction of identity. There is often a sense of denunciation of strong-headed characters in Achebe's novels. Achebe will always create alternative voices whose moderation counterbalances strong-headedness (as discussed below, Obierica is the alternative to the strong-headed Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*). His discussion of the dynamics of community and individuality in his works is another example of his emphasis on balance: "Community and individuality are the twin poles of man's search for fulfilment. It has never been a simple question of a choice of one and rejection of the other but of a balance between them."[32]

A related theme that it is important to recognise in his work is his depiction of the process of 'othering' within the pre-colonial social order, a process which marginalises others on the basis of their race, class, and significantly gender. Achebe's quest for the

middle position, his constant juxtaposition of opposites, and his sense of objectivity represent what many scholars have remarked as the realist provenance *of Things Fall Apart.* He, indeed, looms large in postcolonial discourse on account of his engagement and reflections on the postcolonial politics of identity and representation.

Things Fall Apart can be broken into three parts. The first is set in Umuofia before the arrival of the 'white' man and thus gives a vivid picture of traditional life. The second part describes Okonkwo's seven-year exile in Mbanta with his mother's kinsmen, for the offence he committed against the Earth goddess. This part also describes the coming of the 'white' man, the establishment of Christianity, a new government and trade, and the gradual encroachment of these on the traditional culture of tribal life. The third part records Okonkwo's final tragedy following his return to Umuofia and his unsuccessful attempt to destroy Christianity or take his people to war against the 'white' man. Within this main narrative line, there are countless 'minor' narratives which reveal a far more complex and ambiguous world than that of the 'main' narrative.

One of the most important achievements of *Things Fall Apart* is the manner in which Achebe appropriates a European literary genre together with the English language and the values it embodies, and transforms them into a means of articulating an African identity and a point of view. This articulation is twofold. First Achebe reconstructs a thriving village called Umuofia, proud of its culture and history, ruled in traditional ways by rites and laws which maintain its continuity, peace and harmony. Secondly, Achebe is concerned with the dislocation of the clan as it comes into contact with Christianity as well as an objective presentation of the causes and consequences of this dislocation. As Abiola Ariele states: "The reconstruction of the Ibo village is directed at revealing the forces at work inside and outside the traditional society that prepared the way for its eventual disintegration."[32] Achebe's reconstruction of this Igbo community is not only limited to showing and celebrating its beauty and dignity; it is also directed at revealing its imperfections which, together with outside forces, exemplified in the 'white' man and his religion, have contributed to its disintegration.

My aim is to approach Achebe's vision of *Things Fall Apart* as a conscious effort to rearticulate his pre/postcolonial experience and define alternative paradigms of

cultural identity. Nowhere is this vision more apparent than in the narrative voice. On his appraisal of Achebe's sensitive control of the narrative voice, David Carroll remarks that:

> The novel is narrated in the third person, but there is no suggestion of an omniscient observer scrutinising and analysing the customs and habits of this Igbo community. The voice is that of a wise and sympathetic elder of the tribe who has witnessed time and time again the cycle of the seasons and the accompanying rituals in the villages.[33]

This is undoubtedly true; this wise and sympathetic elder's voice is felt throughout the novel and is intended to give us an inner view of Igbo community, as opposed to the outer view which the District Commissioner gives of it in the last paragraph of the novel. But it is not entirely true, however, to say that the novel is written consistently from a traditional or a sympathetic elder's point of view. Achebe, as G. D. Killam observes, is a decolonised writer who understands the complexity of historical processes: "Achebe is a twentieth century Ibo man, a decolonised writer, and recognises the wide gulf which exists between his present-day society and that of Ibo villagers sixty years ago, sixty years which have seen remarkable changes in the texture and structure of Ibo society."[34] Achebe's narrative voice is couched in a way which sees beyond the dominant Umuofian viewpoint of the traditional narrative in order to consider the social demands which the modern period of Eastern Nigeria makes upon its citizens. The two voices are distinct but they seem to blend as Achebe's intrusions are not easily noticed.

The novel's opening paragraphs indicate how Achebe speaks for and establishes the values of Igbo community:

> Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was

> one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights [...] and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bushfire in the Harmattan. (17)

The opening sentence builds a geographical identity of the clan and establishes its boundaries. It is the world of nine villages from Umuofia to Mbaino. The rest of the passage reveals some of the values of Igbo people. They recognise courage, honour, strength and solid personal achievements. The function of the narrative voice, as it is maintained throughout most of the novel, is to record the story of the clan and recreate their myths, tales and legends, which colonialism will come to negate. The first example of this is the myth concerning the origin of the clan at the end of the opening paragraph. Through the narrator, the native oral mode of communication is established: Achebe's use of proverbial wisdom is an important part of his art and links his sophisticated novel with the art of the traditional griot/storyteller. The wisdom, ideas and experiences of past generations are handed down in the form of proverbs, tales, legends and myths. The narrative mode is thus an outgrowth of this oral literature. The primary function of Achebe's sensitive use of English is directed at revealing and reflecting Igbo thoughts, speech patterns as well as describing characters and situations in Igbo terms. His use of African proverbs, similes, images, and myths concerning the origin of the clan belong to Igbo oral literature. In the opening passage, for example, we are told that "Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the Harmattan." This reference to fire in the Harmattan evokes a purely African milieu. This image is also invoked to describe Okonkwo's fame and ascendance. Achebe's dramatic use of proverbial wisdom focuses our attention on the values of Igbo community which individual members follow and by which they are judged. The following dialogue is but one of many passages which illustrates Achebe's technique of using Igbo proverbs and expressions. Okonkwo seeks help from a wealthy man, Nwakibie:

> 'I have come to you for help', he said. 'Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are

afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of hard work. The lizard that jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did. I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mothers' breast. If you give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you'.
Nwakibie cleared his throat. 'It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. Many young men come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them they think I am hard-hearted. But it is not so. Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching. I have learned to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm.' (31)

Both proverbs stress the fusion between villagers and their natural world as well as personal achievement and hard work. The above dialogue also shows how proverbs and tales inform Igbo people's perceptions and are thus part of a living tradition.

The community of Umuofia is introduced as a thriving civilisation and the villagers are proud of its mythic position within the clan: "Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in war and magic, and its priests and medicine-men were feared in all the surrounding country. Its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself ... It had its shrine in the centre of Umuofia, in a cleared spot" (24). The position of the shrine in the centre of Umuofia is very important. It represents the core of the clan and is the source of its stability and continuance. Without it the centre cannot hold. We are told that Umuofia is naturally feared by all its neighbours but it never goes to war unless its case is just and "accepted as such by its Oracle - the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves" (24). If the clan disobeys the Oracle, and fights what the Igbo call 'a fight of blame,' they will be beaten and defeated. The Oracle's dictates are adhered to by every member of the community and are symbolic of the clan's solidarity and harmony. This emphasises the importance of religious beliefs in Igbo community, a community that will be branded as pagan by the missionaries towards the end of the novel. Igbo religion

consists of three categories of belief. The Igbos believe in the greatest god, Chukwu, who "made all the world and the other gods" (147). Thus, like the Christian god, he controls creation. He does not have a shrine in the clan, and can be approached only through his intermediaries: minor deities. One of the most powerful deities is Ani, "the earth goddess and the source of all fertility [...] the ultimate judge of morality and conduct" (41).

The ancestors are also worshipped; they are represented by masked men whose function is to mediate between men and gods and act as agents in controlling morality in the clan. Although they are dead, they are treated as living people and with great respect. Then there is the *chi*, or personal god. Each person is believed to have a *chi* at birth. Achebe describes the concept thus: "Every person has an individual *chi* who created him, its natural home is somewhere in the region of the sun but it may be induced to visit an earthly shrine; a person's fortunes in life are controlled more or less completely by his *chi*" (*Morning* 12). A *chi* is protective of the individual and is responsible for his/her destiny. The notion of the *chi* directs attention to the ambivalence of this religious system. A person controls his/her own fate but only as long as his/her *chi* agrees. Okonkwo's success is due to his *chi*. He "said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed" (35). This system of belief provides the base for Igbo's individualism and independence, tolerance and equality as Achebe points out:

> And finally, at the root of it all lies that very belief we have already seen: a belief in the fundamental worth and independence of every man and of his right to speak on matters of concern to him and, flowing from it, a rejection of any form of absolutism which might endanger those values. It is not surprising that the Igbo held discussion and consensus as the highest ideals of the political process. This made them argumentative and difficult to rule. But how could they suspend for the convenience of a ruler limitations which they impose even on their gods? (*Morning* 13)

Like other religions, this religious system is designed to explain and give answers to the mysteries of the world, and help to sanction good conduct on both the private and public levels: the belief that the clan should not fight a war of blame; an individual should not

swear by his *chi* unless his/her case is just. Yet in spite of their conviction in the rightness and effectiveness of their religious beliefs, Igbo people are remarkably tolerant and flexible: they allow room for the new religion, Christianity, and are moderate enough to tamper with the Oracle's dictates if thought too harsh. This sense of tolerance and moderation, as we will see, is absent from Reverend Smith's teachings of the new religion (Christianity).

Igbo culture embraces not only its religious beliefs, its power and history but also its art. Although Unoka, Okonkwo's father, does not recognise the importance which the clan places on courage and hard work, Umuofians appreciate and respect his artistry on his flute and his devotion to his singing:

> Unoka was never happy when it came to wars. He was in fact a coward and could not bear the sight of blood. And so he changed the subject and talked about music, and his face beamed. He could hear in his mind's ear the blood-stirring and intricate rhythms of the *ekwe* and the *udu* and the *ogene*, and he could hear his own flute weaving in and out of them, decorating them with a colourful and plaintive tune. The total effect was gay and brisk, but if one picked out the flute as it went up and down and then broke up into short snatches, one saw that there was sorrow and grief there. (19)

Unoka is a coward by Igbo standards, but, like Achebe's writing, his contribution to the oral culture and its survival is remarkable: "Sometimes another village would ask Unoka's band and their dancing egwugw*u* to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes" (18).

The Umuofians have also an elaborate social, administrative and judicial system which correlates with the religious system to ensure justice and stability in the clan. This system also ensures that political, social and moral problems are debated and solved publicly and ritualistically as is the custom. This is depicted as the real cause of stability and peaceful coexistence in Umuofia. Through the rituals of the clan, observes David Carroll, "the life of the community and the life of the individual are merged into significance and order" (*C. Achebe* 14). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the arrival

of the nine masked ancestor spirits, or *egwugwu,* who preside over trials. In this trial scene we can see how the concerns of the individuals are shaped by their rituals:

> And then the *egwugwu* appeared. The women and children set up a great shout and took to their heels. It was instinctive. A woman fled as soon as an *egwugwu* came in sight. And when, as on that day, nine of the greatest masked spirits in the clan came out together it was a terrifying spectacle. Even Mgbafo took to her heels and had to be restrained by her brother.
>
> Each of the nine *egwugwu* represented a village of the clan. Their leader was called Evil Forest. Smoke poured out of his head.
>
> The nine villages of Umuofia had grown out of the first father of the clan. Evil Forest represented the village of Umueru, or the children of Eru, who was the eldest of the nine sons.
>
> 'Umuofia Kwenu!' shouted the leading *egwugwu,* pushing the air with his raffia arms. The elders of the clan replied,
>
> 'Yaa!'
>
> 'Umuofia Kwenu!'
>
> 'Yaa!'
>
> 'Umuofia Kwenu!'
>
> 'Yaa!'
>
> Evil Forest then thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth. And it began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life. He took the first of the empty stools and the eight other *egwugwu* began to sit in order of seniority after him. (79-80)

This trial scene is concerned with the case of a young husband, Uzowulu, who has beaten his wife, Mgbafo, and is brought to trial by her family. The marked ritual of this trial scene reflects the formality with which traditional law in Umuofia handles internal disorder in order to preserve peace and harmony in the clan. It is important to note here, as Achebe tells us immediately after this scene, that the villagers know who the *egwugwu* are as living people: "But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves"

(80). Through the clan's rituals, differences are forgotten and the community acts as one. It must also be noted that Achebe's intention is not to present the clan as monolithic. Despite the formality of the event, the social structure is only apparently inflexible. To illustrate Achebe's point, it would be useful to quote in full the *egwugwus'* verdict on the two different versions of the dispute as presented by the husband and his wife's family:

> The *egwugwu* had emerged once again from their underground home. They saluted one another and then reappeared on the *ilo*.
> 'Umuofia kwenu!' roared Evil Forest, facing the elders and grandees of the clan.
> 'Yaa!' replied the thunderous crowd; then silence descended from the sky and swallowed the noise.
> Evil Forest began to speak and all the while he spoke everyone was silent. The eight other *egwugwu* were as still as statues.
> 'We have heard both sides of the case,' said Evil Forest. 'Our duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute.' He turned to Uzowulu's group and allowed a short pause.
> 'Uzowulu's body, I salute you,' he said.
> 'Our father, my hand has touched the ground,' replied Uzowulu, touching the earth.
> 'Uzowulu's body, do you know me?'
> 'How can I know you, father? You are beyond our knowledge,' Uzowulu replied.
> 'I am Evil Forest. I kill a man on the day that his life is sweetest to him.'
> 'That is true,' replied Uzowulu.
> 'Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman.' He turned to Odukwe, and allowed a brief pause.
> 'Odukwe's body, I greet you,' he said.
> 'My hand is on the ground,' replied Odukwe.
> 'Do you know me?'

> 'No man can know you,' replied Odukwe.
>
> 'I am Evil Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots. If your in-law brings wine to you, let your sister go with him. I salute you.' He pulled his staff from the hard earth and thrust it back.
>
> 'Umuofia kwenu!' he roared, and the crowd answered. (82-83)

The ceremonious reappearance of the *egwugwu* and the ritual greetings and gestures appear to be formal and inflexible, yet they do not preclude debate and questioning. The views of the parties involved are presented, juxtaposed and resolved. The way in which this case is resolved reflects the importance that the clan attaches to peace and harmony. The *egwugwu*'s decisions are general and can be questioned. But they, nevertheless, as S. O. Isayere observes, emphasise an important unifying aspect that "the peace of the tribe as a whole takes precedence over personal considerations" (*Critical Perspectives* 15).

The same thing can be said about the decrees of the gods; to preserve the peace of the whole tribe, they are formally carried out even if they violate human feelings. But this formality, as S. O. Isayere points out, "does not preclude dialogue, probing, and debate" (16). Decrees and customs are not absolute: they are questioned and debated, and sometimes compared with customs from the past or the customs of neighbouring clans. Numerous instances in the novel confirm the Igbo's sceptical attitude toward customs. For instance, when Okonkwo breaks the Week of the Peace by beating his wife, Ezeudu, the oldest member of the clan, tells his two friends that the punishment for breaking the Peace of Ani has become very mild:

> 'It has not always been so' he said. 'My father told me that he had been told that in the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoilt the peace which it was meant to preserve. 'Somebody told me yesterday', said one of the younger men, 'that in some clans it is an abomination for a man to die during the week of Peace'.
>
> 'It is indeed true' said Ogbuefi Ezeudu. 'They have that custom in Obodoani. If a man dies at this time he is not buried but cast into the Evil Forest. It is a

bad custom which these people observe because they lack understanding.' (38)

It is clear from this passage that Igbo social structure is not static and fixed. It is receptive to change and open to new ideas. Igbo people discuss and probe their customs and even modify them if found contradictory. This openness is extended to the Albinos and the 'white' man. This is what Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, says to Obierika after he judges Abame people as fools for killing a 'white' man: "The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others. We have Albinos among us. Do you not think that they came to our clan by mistake, that they have strayed from their way to a land where everybody is like them?" (117).

The Igbo clan, as portrayed by Achebe, is ritualistic and formal; but it is also flexible and serene. When it is not threatened by internal disorder, it is depicted as a world of peaceful coexistence and communal activities as in the scenes of the Feast of the New Yam Year, or the coming of the locusts that are occasions for joy and peace. Yet one feels that some of its values cause more discontent than they are meant to alleviate. In his vivid picture of the beauty and dignity of Igbo culture, Achebe does not 'gloss over inconvenient facts: namely the cruelty of some Igbo values. For instance, two innocent young people, a boy and a virgin girl, are taken away from their families and village as a penalty for the murder of a Umuofian woman. The ill-fated boy called Ikemefuna is placed as a hostage in Okonkwo's compound and becomes one of the family. Three years later he is ruthlessly killed by Okonkwo, his guardian, on the Orders of the Oracle. This harsh treatment is meted out to twins who are abandoned in the evil forest, and to the *osus* (slaves) who are ostracised from communal activities. Another harsh penalty is reflected in Okonkwo's seven-year exile and the destruction of his property, for the inadvertent murder of Ezeudu's son: "It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years" (105). The crime against the Earth goddess must be sanctioned, and peace established. What is even more cruel in this incident is that Okonkwo's friends, including his best friend Obierika, console him and

then act as the messengers of the Earth goddess and carry out her justice by destroying his houses, animals and barn for: "they were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman"(105). The following paragraph is Achebe's critique of some of the identity-giving practices of Igbo culture. This is emphasised by the dramatic shift from the communal to the individual. Obierika, the (alter) native voice in the clan, probes and questions the rigidity of tribal practices:

> Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his *obi* and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others. (105-106)

Publicly the clan preserves peace and harmony. Privately, it is torn by human discontent and doubts. What takes precedence is the public, the clan as a whole. But as we can see through Obierika's doubts and questions, the public and the private, the divine and the human are juxtaposed, but they bear no logical connection. This juxtaposition appears to be the basis upon which peace and harmony within the clan depends. Obierika's doubts and questions suggest how things should be, but this remains suppressed because the community as a whole comes first as expressed in the proverb which closes his unpronounced speech. Gradually then, Achebe provides us with a dualistic picture of the clan's identity. On the one hand the clan is a world of peace, harmony and flexibility; on the other it is torn by human fears and doubts. Achebe has thus articulated not only the destructive practices within pre-colonial Igbo social order

but also the positive values against which they can be measured. It is against this picture of the clan that Achebe traces the actions of his central character, Okonkwo.

From the opening of the novel, as discussed above, Okonkwo is introduced as a wrestler who is well known "throughout the nine villages and beyond" whose "fame rested on solid personal achievements." He is a great warrior, he has taken two titles and his wealth consists of two barns full of yams and three wives. His achievements are remarkable and are indeed acknowledged by the clan:

> If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. (34-35)

In many ways Okonkwo is representative of the clan in so far as he is the product of a society which places so much importance on strength or "manliness" (33) in order to survive. But Okonkwo's perception of these qualities, as I will argue, is conflictual with that of the clan, and will indeed alienate him from the society he seeks to represent and lead him to his final tragedy. As the novel progresses we see that Okonkwo's pursuit of success and strength calls into question his inflexible and masculinist identity.

For him, strength and anger are the hallmarks of manliness to the exclusion of all other emotions: "Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength" (35-36). Okonkwo's excessive adherence to the social norms of his society is an expression of a strong need to live down his father's weakness and idleness. In order to wipe out the memory of his father, he pursues success and status single-mindedly to an extent that makes his plan of action in life too narrow:

> Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little

> children. Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion - to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another idleness. (25)

While one can appreciate Okonkwo's fears, especially as a boy, and extend sympathy to him for not being essentially 'a cruel man,' one cannot defend his actions. For his society provides us with many examples which invalidate his blind passion and rigid attitude. Fortunately we are told that among Igbo people "a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (20). Okonkwo himself was that man. He was one of the greatest men in the nine villages, when he was only eighteen. Among Igbo people maturity is respected and achievement revered, as summed up in their saying, "If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings" (21). But Okonkwo does not see things this way. In fact his success and status are, as he says, put down "to his inflexible will" (33). Okonkwo's rigid attitude towards himself is also reflected in his relationship with his family, and in particular with his son Nwoye whom he wants to be a "great man:" "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed. Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man. He would stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in him" (39)" It is clear from the above two passages that manliness, as exemplified or implied by Okonkwo, is synonymous with strength, success, anger and violence. Even his wives' storytelling is classified as soft and

is, therefore, womanly and threatening: "So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *Obi* and he told them stories of the land - masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell" (53).

His insistence on manliness as such becomes a menace to the clan's values. On one occasion, he breaks a sacred custom, the Week of the Peace, by beating his wife and we are told that he is not the kind of man "to stop beating somebody halfway through, not even for fear of a goddess" (36-37). On another occasion, his concern with manliness coincides with his exaggerated sense of communal duty and contradicts the values he thinks he defends. His part in the killing of Ikemefuna is one of the most tragic scenes in the novel. The Oracle announces that the boy must die as is the custom; Okonkwo was warned by Ezeudu, a respected elder of the clan, not to take part in the killing, "I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father" (55). But Okonkwo's public image takes precedence over such a balanced and humane solution:

> One of the men behind him cleared his throat. Ikemefuna looked back, and the man growled at him to go on and not stand looking back. The way he said it sent cold fear down Ikemefuna's back. His hands trembled vaguely on the black pot he carried. Why had Okonkwo withdrawn to the rear? Ikemefuna felt his legs melting under him. And he was afraid to look back. As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his matchet, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, 'My father, they have killed me!' as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (p58)

Okonkwo's action is disapproved of by the clan because it is "the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families"(63). While the Oracle's decision cannot be disputed, individuals like Ezeudu and Obierika are moderate and flexible enough to tamper with it in order to make the dilemma less painful: "I [Obierika] would neither dispute it [the Oracle's decision] nor be the one to do it" (63). Okonkwo's offence is not

his affirmation of the Oracle's decree; it is the fact that he does more than is expected of him for fear of being 'thought weak.' Okonkwo's action upsets the balance which is maintained between individual freedom and responsibility to the clan as well as the maintained traditional balance between male and female values.

It is true that the clan attaches great importance to the feminine principle in so far as this pervades and judges the moral and spiritual life in the clan. Ani, for example, is "the Earth goddess and source of all fertility [...] ultimate judge of morality and conduct" (41) (Incidentally, Okonkwo was judged and punished on three occasions for offences committed against her). Furthermore, Ani has a male priest, Ezeani, while the male deity of the Oracle of the Hills has a female priestess, Chielo. One can perhaps argue that there is discrepancy between the feminine principle as such and the subordination of women in the clan as well as the language used to describe inadvertent crimes as 'feminine' or men like Unoka as *agbala* (effeminate man). C. L. Innes rightly points out that it is "that terminology and its implications which frame Okonkwo's attitude; enclosed within the everyday usage, he is unable to acknowledge the mythic implications of femininity and its values."[35]

Okonkwo's conflict, which cannot be solved satisfactorily, is between the feminine and masculine principles, the private and public images. When we see him in private following the killing of Ikemefuna, he is unable to eat or sleep for two days. When he tries to walk about, he is like "a giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito" (60). From his reaction to his act of violence we know that deep in his heart he is not a cruel man. But in public, however, as soon as he leaves his compound to visit Obierika, he turns against his own human reaction with derogatory terms: " 'When did you become a shivering old woman?' Okonkwo asked himself. 'You are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war. How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed' " (61). To Okonkwo, the show of love, affection and gentleness is womanly and therefore not intrinsic to a man's greatness. In his rigid view, his daughter Ezinma who has a strong personality "should have been a boy" (60), and Nwoye who prefers his mother's stories has "too much of his mother in him" (62). This reversal of the traditional

female and male roles marks Okonkwo's rigid and masculinist identity as well as the change which will have to come about if the clan is to survive.

Okonkwo's inability to bend and adapt is again exposed in the dramatised fusion of the feminine and masculine principles as symbolised in the death of both Ogbuefi Ndulue and his eldest wife, Ozoemena:

> 'It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind', said Obierika. 'I remember when I was a young boy there was a song about them. He could not do anything without telling her'.
> 'I did not know that', said Okonkwo. 'I thought he was a strong man'.
> 'He was indeed', said Ofoedu.
> Okonkwo shook his head doubtfully.
> 'He led Umuofia to war in those days' said Obierika. (64)

A man is never great if the male and female principles admit of no balance in him. Ogbuefi was a strong man, yet he was also considerate with no sense of fixed masculinity. It is this which makes him great and which Umuofia values in great men. Okonkwo's definition of a 'strong man' is and will remain different from that of his own society, and the adverb 'doubtfully' closes off all further understanding.

While in exile in his mother's clan, Okonkwo was again warned by Uchendu, his uncle, against the limitations of manliness, and lectured on why "mother is supreme" (113). But Okonkwo does not show any willingness to bend; his main concern is to regain his status after the setback which exile has brought him, and become one of the lords of the clan. Okonkwo's inflexible will is shown to have not only estranged him from his flexible clan; it has also broken the organic unity within the family and the clan, This truth is affirmed by one of the elders in Mbanta:

> I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and

> his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan. (137)

Had the clan been united, one can argue, the intrusion of the 'white' man and his religion would have undoubtedly only strengthened that unity. For, as we have seen, what keeps the clan united in spite of the cracks in its social identity is its balancing of values. This is made possible by the flexibility of the clan's social structure within which debate, questioning, adaptability and change can take place. Okonkwo, however, does not understand how the clan's delicate social order is sustained. His aggressive masculinity and literal interpretation of tribal laws fail to respect the humanity of Nwoye, Ikemefuna and the twins as well as the voices of change.

From the above passage the 'abominable' religion is actively preparing for the clan's eventual disintegration by making converts, one of whom is Okonkwo's son Nwoye. It is important to note that the 'white' man and his religion are presented with rare objectivity by Achebe. Initially there is no confrontation between the two ways of life. The Umuofians, with their flexibility and tolerance of aliens, allow a place for the new religion, although they are sceptical of its intentions. The missionaries are not feared because only unworthy men are made converts, "they were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men" (119). Christianity, however, 'abandons' its initial strategy of promoting the power of the Christian god by undermining that of the great Chukwu. Instead, it penetrates the clan's structure in the places where it is weak. As David Carroll observes:

> The Christian god cannot rival the great Chukwu in power, but in his loving, personal care for the individual he appeals to all the unresolved fears of Umuofia. He can break the deadlock between divine law and personal affection which has caused so much anguish in the clan. (*Chinua Achebe* 53)

It is thus significant that the first converts should be the *osus* who are ostracised from communal activities, the mothers of twins and those who cannot comprehend the killing of Ikemefuna. A vivid example of this is the effect of conversion on Nwoye:

> It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in the darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul - the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. (122)

Nwoye could never be content with Okonkwo's harsh code and his adherence to the letter of the laws he represents. Nwoye's identity cannot be expressed as a whole in a community where personal considerations are constrained. His communal duty and his personal feelings cannot admit of any synthesis within the clan. His conversion to the new religion is a relief from constraints and can be seen as one of the signs heading towards that desirable synthesis.

Okonkwo's personality, however, is too inflexible to understand his son's deeply felt need that has led to his conversion. To him Nwoye's conversion is a womanly act and an abomination, "to abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men" (126). This then becomes a personal issue for him; and on his return to Umuofia, he will use it to recover his lost place in the clan. But things have already changed in Umuofia, as Obierika explains: "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (145). The dramatic changes in Umuofia run parallel to Okonkwo's return and therefore thwart his plans to reassert himself. For the white man not only brought a religion "but also brought a government" (143). Achebe seems to suggest that the changes that have taken place are inevitable, and, unlike Okonkwo who resists them, wise Umuofians are adapting themselves to them:

> There are many men and women in Umuofia who did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation. The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia. (146)

Achebe does not play down the positive aspects of the new 'dispensation.' Mr Brown, for example, the first missionary, epitomises these positive aspects. He is even respected by the clan because he is not confrontational and is willing to learn more about Umuofian beliefs. He achieves his aims by building a school and by means of education which proves to be a powerful attraction to Umuofians. To a certain extent things might not have fallen apart if all Christians were as sensitive and tolerant as Mr Brown, and no Umuofian was as inflexible as Okonkwo. Inevitably and regrettably, however, the total effect of the new religion, particularly under Mr Smith, is destructive. Mr Smith is a violent and ignorant ethnocentric European missionary who openly condemns Mr Brown's compromise and whose primary aim is to negate Igbo culture: "He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness" (150). Mr Smith exemplifies some of the characteristics of British colonial education in the history of the British African colonies. In his discussion of British colonial education, John McLeod notes that the "the bible was one of the chief resources that Christian missions used to condemn indigenous African religious practices and was often cited to legitimate the presence of the British in Africa, spreading Christian enlightenment in 'heathen' lands" (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 95).

Mr Smith's ethnocentric bias towards his own religion and lack of awareness of Igbo culture is complemented by violence. He instigates unprovoked attacks on Igbo traditional values, as in the unmasking of the *egwugwu* in public by Enoch, a recent convert. This outrageous act is "one of the greatest crimes a man can commit" (151) on an ancestral spirit. Okonkwo seizes this opportunity to recover his status and, against the warning of the elders, he involves his friends in an attack on the Christian church. This then leads to their arrest and humiliation by a force they hardly know: the 'white'

government behind the church. The impact of this incident on Okonkwo leads to his attempt to take the clan to war against the 'white' man. But the clan does not view the situation in terms of war or violence. As the white man's messenger arrives to break up the meeting, Okonkwo draws his matchet and kills him:

> Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in the tumult. He heard voices asking: 'Why did he do it?' He wiped his matchet on the sand and went away. (165)

At this point Okonkwo, perhaps for the first time, feels that he is alone, representing the end of a way of life. Unable to accept the new dispensation or the passing of the old one, he hangs himself and thus commits an offence against the Earth goddess and will be buried in the Evil Forest.

Okonkwo's refusal to bend and change has in life as in death severed his relationship with the people he sought to defend and represent. While one can sympathise with Obierika's emotional remark that Okonkwo is "one of the greatest men in Umuofia" driven to kill himself by the 'white' man and "will be buried like a dog" (167), one cannot dismiss the 'white' man as the only force behind the disintegration of the clan. The 'white' man and the new religion are the catalyst, not the source of things falling apart. My reading of this novel is that things have been falling apart for some time. The sense of tolerance in Umuofia has allowed a place for the new religion. Once this encounter has taken place, the failure of the internal order is exposed, and Okonkwo's response is shown as meaningless. The new religion, then, gains an insight into the weakness of a culture it is determined to destroy. In the name of a loving god, the missionaries appeal to and resolve the fears and doubts of Umuofians and as a result make a considerable number of converts. The converts' response opens the way to what Mr Smith is conditioned to find and see in Africa: 'sons of darkness' and 'evil.' The eventual disintegration is then hastened by Okonkwo who refuses the new order and Mr Smith who "saw things as black and white."

Having restored African culture and dignity as well as exposing the forces which destroyed it, Achebe goes on to expose the myth that Africa has no history or culture. Achebe transfers us from an inside view of Umuofia, which he has invested with a sympathetic identity, to an outside one by the District Commissioner, in which our immersion in and assumptions about Umuofia and Okonkwo's tragedy are revoked and then given a new meaning by the European. The details leading to this outside view are thus: Obierika leads the colonial District Commissioner to the dangling body of Okonkwo and asks him to have the corpse brought down by one of his men because their customs forbid them to touch it. Then we are told that "the District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs" (167):

> 'Take down the body', the Commissioner ordered his chief messenger, 'and bring it and all these people to the court.'
> 'Yes, sah,' the messenger said, saluting. The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilisation to different parts of Africa he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger." (167-168)

The District Commissioner knows that the story of Okonkwo "would make interesting reading," but he will not write it in any developed form lest it elevates Okonkwo to a man

with a history and a culture. Instead he will reduce him to "a reasonable paragraph." The District Commissioner is afraid of a long story, as Zbigniew Biolas points out, "because an epic tale would mythologise the tribal exploits."[36] Equally reduced to "a paragraph" is the story of a living indigenous oral world in which Achebe immersed us so objectively. The Commissioner's act of writing is arguably one of the European's major disintegrative tools. The predominant oral mode of communication in Umuofia, as unobtrusively and sensitively expressed by Achebe, is eventually reduced to a brief set of English words in a book. The end of a way of life will now be recorded in writing, as in the Commissioner's history book in which African history does not exist. Achebe's shift of point of view is intelligently designed to highlight this point. The commissioner's paragraph is part of *Things Fall Apart*, but it is ironically juxtaposed with the entire narrative of the novel. It stands as the only valid detail in the whole narrative space of *Things Fall Apart*, for it is recorded history. The rest of the narrative, which is the (alter)native's version of the Igbo way of life and its encounter with the coloniser, is simply excluded and negated. What we are left with is the colonialist's exclusivist definition of history and culture.

The significance of *Things Fall Apart* for postcolonial discourse and the politics of identity and (self) representation lies in the way in which cultural affirmation and cultural demystification find a balanced textual inscription in the novel. Cultural affirmation is charged with the discourse of the postcoloniality of nationalist assertion against colonial and imperial cultural subjugation, displacement and depersonalisation. Cultural demystification is infused with the critique of nationalism which offers remarkable parallels to Fanon's statement in "Mésaventures de la conscience nationale:" "Le nationalisme s'il n'est pas explicité, enrichi et approfondi, s'il ne se transforme pas très rapidement en conscience politique et sociale, en humanisme, conduit à une impasse" (*Les Damnés* 274). *Things Fall Apart* is located in a space between the imperialist representations of African peoples and cultures, and the grand narratives within the cultural system of the colonised that are complicit with the process of imperialism because they do not interrogate the normalisation and naturalisation of otherness in their representation of the everyday. Okonkwo's resistance to imperialism is as brilliantly articulated as his marginalising representational logic which foreshadows the District

Commissioner's assertive and exclusionary logic in his projected 'reasonable paragraph' on the colonised Okonkwo and his culture.

The ideological assumptions and the narrative strategies through which Achebe is able to engage with the politics of identity and representation are exceptional (for Achebe' time of course) in the tradition of African postcolonial fiction of the colonial past. In the 'main' narrative centering on Okonkwo's tragic destiny, Achebe adopts a rare sense of objectivity; he is not tempted to 'gloss over inconvenient facts.' It is hard to find in other African postcolonial fiction of the colonial past the kind of ethnographic self-distancing which allows Achebe's authorial voice such articulations as the tragic story of Ikemofuna, twins being abandoned in the evil forest, or Okonkwo, in Umuofia's latest war, being "the first to bring home a human head," and on occasions drinking "his palm wine from his first human head" (23). Moreover, as elaborated in the above discussion of the text, the omniscient narrative presents the pre-colonial social order and the new colonial presence in their respective self-representations, as contending totalities. Inside these totalities, tragedy is propelled by the polarised agency of Okonkwo among the colonised and by the missionary, Mr Smith, among the colonisers.

Outside this omniscient totalising narrative of Okonkwo's tragedy and the historic colonial pacification, however, lie the counter-narratives and stories from the margins, which disrupt the 'main' narrative line, by interrogating Okonkwo's rigid, authoritarian and masculinist identity. In this light, *Things Fall Apart* ought to be read as an implicit critique of the dominant masculine tradition of postcolonial African society and fiction.

The stories and modes of thought about 'minor' characters like Unoka, Obierika, Ogbuefi Nbulue and his wife Ozoemena, Ikemefuna and Nwoye, Okonkwo's uncle Uchendu and many others, represent (alter) native versions and constructions, but, yet, are marginalised and 'othered.' It is significant that these 'minor' narratives and characters in Umuofian community have to do with the 'subaltern' people, not with the male *ozo* (title holders) like Okonkwo, who always dominates discussions at so-called egalitarian village assemblies. Indeed, in the deeply gendered discourse of personality and identity in the novel, the other name for these "subaltern" people is *agbala* (woman), or *efulefu* (worthless men and women). One of the many ironic articulations of *Things*

Fall Apart is that while the main narrative about Okonkwo leads to tragedy, almost all the first converts to the new religion are drawn from this subaltern group. It is important to recognise Achebe's depiction of the process of 'othering' within the pre-colonial social order, a process which creates a vast body of marginalised 'others' made up mainly of the *osu* (slaves), social outcasts, and significantly women. It is significant that these subordinate members of the tribe are the first to be captivated by the new religion. One can even go as far as to say that for these converts things have not fallen apart at all.

Conclusion

Achebe and Khatibi's desire for an African narrative is, as they tell us in their respective texts, initially motivated by the loss or repression of an African tradition under colonialism. This loss, in turn, generates narratives such as *Things Fall Apart* and *La Mémoire tatouée* that rewrite African culture. Both Khatibi and Achebe, in spite of the cultural, linguistic and colonial differences in their respective backgrounds, are aware that political or tribal independence in no way guarantees decolonisation and freedom. Both know that the writer is the one who must explore the implications of the problem, not only for himself/herself, but for those who cannot ask the questions that must be asked. However, while Khatibi's stress in *La Mémoire tatouée* is on a transformative subversive poetics, the opposite is true in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where a broader socio-political perspective and a stress on the issue of social commitment in literature is the dominant critical concern. Thus, though Khatibi and Achebe share common concerns, such as the issues of the choice of language and writing, (self) representation in a 'truly' decolonised literature, the critical theories which inform their literary practice have different emphases. Both writers are important literary theorists in their respective countries.

The publication of *Things Fall Apart* brings into focus the two traditions (African and European) which, in both complementary and contesting ways, frame the politics of literary production in much of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. The idea of a national culture that restores dignity to African peoples is an important ideal in Achebe's writing. The context in which national consciousness is written into fictional

texts may change, but Achebe will still insist that the primary function of African literature lies in its commitment to the notion of a national community. In varying degrees, this resolute artistic attitude shaped the work of many sub-Saharan writers and critics in the 1960s and 1970s, who stressed the need to see Anglophone and Francophone African literature in relationship to the society that produced it. The English language is indigenised by Anglophone writers and has a synthesising function which is a guarantee of universalism and of reaching a vast audience, in Africa and overseas. Realism, as a prevailing rhetorical trope, is shown to be able to join together with 'post-realist' techniques in order to be subversive. *Things Fall Apart*, written in 1958, as we have seen, already prefigured the 'post-realist' scepticism of grand narratives through which it was able to subvert both imperialist representations of Africans and the representational logic within the colonised cultural system itself. Postcolonial critics should not assume, therefore, that only African 'post-realist' texts are capable of disruptive content.

In the North African context, the engagement with postmodernism and poststructuralism has been more pronounced than in sub-Saharan Africa. In the tradition of the *Souffles* group and consonant with the spirit of Khatibi's philosophy on the absolute necessity to rethink existing polarities that shape our perceptions of the postmodern, postcolonial world, he writes in *Maghreb pluriel* about the need to recognise the common bond that links decolonisation with French thought, including deconstruction (*Maghreb pluriel* 47-48). He freely acknowledges his intellectual debt to Jacques Derrida, who was born in North Africa, a region that, as Khatibi suggests, might well serve as the catalyst for radical new ways of thinking because of its geographical and psychological location--between the West and other parts of the world, between European visions of the world and those of Africa and Asia. Like Derrida, Khatibi is seeking a 'pensée de la différence,' a means of challenging accepted notions about language, about the mythical unity of the self, and about the mythical 'différence sauvage.' It is no accident, he argues, that deconstruction occurred at about the same time as the decolonisation of the French colonies. The change in the world order that shifted (some) power away from the centre to the (geographical and cultural) peripheries created

a discursive space that provided a more 'hospitable' environment for minority voices to be heard from within the dominant discourse.

As an intellectual from the developing world and as a sociologist-philosopher in a modern European educational tradition, Khatibi finds himself in a position that enables him to define the intersections of deconstructionist and postcolonial thought. He argues that if decolonisation simply means administrative and (allegedly) political liberation, it will never yield its anticipated benefits to a formerly colonised people without a comparable move toward a deconstruction of European power. He challenges not only the economic and technological dominance of the west, but also the assumption (held both in the *métropole* and in the peripheries) that the West is the sole source of worthwhile knowledge. To Khatibi, the 'decolonised' intellectual-writer must establish a new centre of power in 'somewhere' that is neither 'West' nor 'East,' neither Euro-nor Afrocentric, but a 'somewhere' that is somehow in between them all.

Khatibi is one of the first writers and intellectuals to make a significant contribution to (self) writing by consciously assuming his role as a bilingual, decolonised writer in Morocco. In his fictional works, *La Mémoire tatouée* and *Amour bilingue* (1983) in particular, as well as in his theoretical work, he has explored the writer's multiple identities in ways that seek to reconcile the writer's own subjectivity with the region's postcolonial order: a sort of cultural *métissage*. *Métissage*, a concept that is tightly linked to hybridity and which is similar to Edouard Glissant's *métissage*, is, according to Celia Britton, "the mixture of races and cultures that sweeps away notions of racial purity and singular origin."[37] In this context, "humanist essentialist conceptions of identity and origin become," as Graciela Moreira points out, "devoid of meaning vis-à-vis the [...] contact among cultures."[38] Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* has been influential on the post-1962 generation of writers (the *Souffles* group) who followed his example and published narratives that challenged earlier models of the genre, arguing that the first step in the decolonisation of French-language North African literature should entail going beyond the surface level of language, French or Arabic, transforming the chosen language into a personalised discourse that challenges and stimulates readers of all backgrounds. In this respect, North African experimentation with language appears much more radical than in sub-Saharan Africa.

In her "Linguistic Guerilla in the Maghrebian and sub-Saharan Europhone Novel" (1988), Chantal Zabus notes that "although they both operate beyond the confines of the communally owned system, the West African experiment is rooted in bilingualism and diglossia whereas the Maghrebian experiment is understood in terms of a philosophical "bilangue." "[39] The notion of 'bilangue' is associated with Khatibi's 'pensée autre,' a 'thinking otherwise.' On a linguistic level, the language of North African writing is not the hegemonic European language; rather, it is the dissolving of the border between French and Arabic into a 'third code.' West African methods of literary decolonisation, however, Zabus continues, "are necessarily methods of "indigenization" in that novelists attempt to convey indigenous concepts, thought patterns and even linguistic features of the mother tongue in the European language" (278). The reasons for such differences between the North African deconstruction-inspired 'bilangue' and the West African 'reflexification' (278) (the use of European vocabulary but indigenous structures) are difficult to assess. It is possible that West African novelists are less familiar with or not interested in deconstruction. This does not mean that all North African writers are interested in deconstruction.

Although Khatibi and Achebe come from two different formations of African postcoloniality, one appropriating poststructuralism, the other espousing cultural 'nationalism,' they both interest me in the way in which they distance or detach themselves in their challenging exploration of the decolonised intellectual/subject. This detachment accompanies their double vision and, in turn, enables them as (de)colonised writers to consider themselves and their writing project with a certain neutrality. It is this detachment which allows the contradictory dialectical poles of cultural affirmation and cultural demystification to find balanced textual inscription in their novels. To articulate this inscription, both writers use similar tropes.

To create something new, Achebe adopts what he calls "the crossroads of cultures" (*Morning* 67) as the juncture where Igbo tradition intersects with the colonising structure. This distanciation or detachment from his Igbo culture "becomes not a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backstep which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully" (*Morning* 68). The figure of the 'crossroads' makes it possible for Achebe not to take things for granted. His reading of

Onitsha market and its literature provides further clues to his writing. To establish why "Pamphlet Literature" developed in Onitsha, Achebe argues that geographical, political, economic and "other rational explanations" are not enough (*Morning* 90). The town feels "different from the peoples and places in its vicinity" (90). Onitsha, like the figure of the crossroads, is a site of temporal differences, doubleness and reversal. "It can be opposite things at once: It sits at the crossroads of the world. It has two faces - a Benin face and an Igbo face - and can see the four directions, either squarely or with the tail of an eye" (*Morning* 90-91). As a place of exchange, Onitsha rejects singular meanings. A similar kind of doubleness and reversal is located in Achebe's writing.

This duality allows the author, like his Igbo ancestors, to contest the central claims of Western metaphysics and its dependence on 'reason.' As Derrida puts it, metaphysics is "the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the White man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his reason, for the universal form of that [which] he must still wish to call reason."[40] Such a claim makes no sense to the Igbo mind, which thrives on a temporal reversal of concepts and categories. For the Igbo, says Achebe, "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute. 'I am the truth, the way, and the life' would be called blasphemous or simply absurd for it is not well known that a man may worship *Ogwugwu* to perfection and be killed by Udo" (*Morning* 94). This dualism, a dynamic relationship between opposites, offers remarkable parallels with Khatibi's conception of the Maghreb, and could well be the key to understanding Achebe's and Khatibi's textual practice in their texts.

Instead of a reductionist self-other vision of the world, *La Mémoire tatouée* develops an idea that Khatibi expressed when he declared:

> L'autre est inscrit en moi, d'abord en tant que passé, que mort, nos ancêtres, arabes ou non, que nous avons oubliés. C'est donc par rapport à nous-mêmes, par rapport à ce qui est passé, qui nous travaille encore d'une manière ou d'une autre, que l'Occident vit en nous, constitue une partie de nous-mêmes [...] L'essentiel c'est d'une part, de ne pas oublier cette multiple identité qui compose notre être, et d'autre part, il s'agirait de penser l'unité possible de

toutes ces composantes, mais une unité non théologique qui laisse à chaque part, sa part et à l'unité la plasticité d'inspirer l'ensemble des éléments.[41]

For Khatibi then, the unique nature of North African identity – whether individual or collective – derives from the region's multiple heritage. The Maghreb's plural identity is manifested in the region's cultural and linguistic potential for 'métissage.' Khatibi often evokes the dynamic heritage the area has acquired because of its geographic location between Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Another dominant theme in his writings about *métissage* and the plural nature of North Africa is his concept of linguistic and cultural 'hospitalité.' Since the pre-Roman era, North Africa has been a meeting ground for many cultures, races, and religions. For this reason, no reductionist self-other model can do justice to Khatibi's understanding of the multiplicity of identities that have formed North African subjectivity. According to him, decolonised writing in the North African decolonisation process implies a coming to terms with the region's multiple identities, and such an enterprise challenges the model of the alienated, embittered writer.

Khatibi and Achebe's rejection of singular meanings and their effort to pluralise their respective national communities are synonymous with decolonisation, a process requiring a double critique of African institutions and culture on the one hand, and of the universalising, colonising dynamics of Western metaphysics on the other. To Achebe, the process of decolonisation is associated with duality and the figure of the crossroads. To Khatibi, it is associated with what he calls *bilangue*: a space in which native and foreign languages, feminine and masculine sexualities, voice and writing, as well as hegemonic and marginalised cultures, may mingle and mix without merging to form a new unity (*Maghreb pluriel* 177-207). The basic goal of a double critique is, as he explained to Abdellah Bensmaïn, to "démanteler toute théologie d'origine. Elle est double, parce qu'elle s'inscrit dans deux langues, deux sols historiques et Métaphysiques. C'est peut-être entre deux langues qu'une pensée nous est possible aujourd'hui."[42]

Hybridity is the defining characteristic of Achebe and Khatibi's postcolonial identity: it is the recognition and celebration of what Bhabha calls the "migrant's double vision," which subverts the established conventions encompassed within the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. Achebe's hybrid identity is one that is a composite

of Igbo tradition and European culture; it participates in two worlds. Khatibi's hybridity, however, as in his philosophical notion of *bilangue*, is more radical; it is created of multiple sources and is positioned in-between, emphasising its fluidity and its disregard for linguistic, cultural or sexual borders. Khatibi's hybridity refuses to be confined to a fixed role or function. It could well be termed nomadic. The practice of nomadic writing as a new creative space in African literature, as we will see in Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Farah's *Maps* in Chapter Three, is a powerful form of resistance and liberation from fixed positions of either Europe or Africa, masculinity or femininity.

Notes

[1] Abdelkébir Khatibi, *La Mémoire tatouée* (Paris: Denoël, 1971)

[2] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) 5.

[3] James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural moment: A Thematic, Historical and Bibliographical Introduction," in James Olney, ed, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, N.J; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1980) 13.

[4] Emile Benveniste, "De la subjectivité dans le langage," in *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) 259-260.

[5] Kacem Basfao, "La littérature maghrébine: une question de langue," *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* XXIV (1985)

[6] Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passé simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954) 18.

[7] Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin* (Paris: Editions Maspero, 1968) 15.

[8] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952) 30.

[9] Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating identity: The Postcolonial Perogative," in David Theo Goldberg, ed, *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1990) 188.

[10] Lucy McNeece, "Decolonizing the Sign: Language and Identity in Abdelkebir Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée*," *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993) 28.

[11] Ronnie Scharfman, "Autobiographie maghrébine," in Ahmed el Kohen Lamrhili, ed, *Abdelkébir Khatibi* (Rabat: Edition Okad, 1990) 72-73.

[12] Choufani Souraya, "Autour du texte: Essai sur l'écriture péritextuelle du roman, *La Mémoire tatouée* de Abdelkébir Khatibi," in Lamrhili ed, *Abdelkébir Khatibi*, 15.

[13] Zakya Daoud, "La Mémoire tatouée ou la difficulté d'être 'double à double' ou 'aveugle à soi-même'," *Lamalif* 48 (1971) 26.

[14] Abdelkébir Khatibi, "Nationalisme et internationalisme littéraire," *Basamat* 1 (1988) 151.

[15] Abdelkébir Khatibi, "Francophonie et idiomes littéraires," *Al Kalam* (Rabat, 1989) 5.

[16] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* in *The African Trilogy* (London: Pan Books and Heinemann, 1988, originally published 1958).

[17] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 21.

[18] Dennis Walder, ed, *The Realist Novel: an Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1995) 18.

[19] See Slemon's "Modemism's Last Post," in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, eds, *Past the Last Post,* (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 1990)

[20] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 150.

[21] Wilson Harris, "The Fabric of the Imagination," *Third World Quarterly* 12.1 (1990) 176.

[22] Dennis Duerden and Cosmos Pietrese, eds, *African Writers Talking* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975) 7.

[23] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 182-83, 186.

[24] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 2 (1988) 156.

[25] Chinua Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," in G. D. Killam, ed, *The writings of Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977) 10.

[26] Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988) 30.

[27] Ernest and Pat Emenyonu, "Achebe: Accountable to Our Society," *Africa Report* 17 (1972) 25. Cited in Kolawole Ogungbesan, "Politics and the African Writer," in C.L. Innes & Bernth Lindfors, eds, *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann, 1979) 41.

[28] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981) 427.

[29] Lloyd Brown, "Cultural Norms and Modes of Perception in Achebe's Fiction", in *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, 23.

[30] Frederick Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Eighteenth Century English Novel: A Study in Genre* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974) 39.

[31] Chinua Achebe, "The Uses of African Literature" *Okike* 15 (August 1979) 12.

[32] Abiola Ariele, "The Tragic conflict in Achebe's Novels," in *Critical perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, 10.

[33] David Carrol, *Chinua Achebe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) 31.

[34] G. D. Killam, *The writings of Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann, 1977) 14.

[35] C. L. Innes, "Language, Poetry and Doctrine in *Things Fall Apart*," in *Critical perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, 117.

[36] Zbigniew Biolas, *Post-Tribal Ethos in Contemporary Anglophone African literature: A Study in Detribalisation* (Essen: Verl. Die Blane Eule, 1993) 32.

[37] Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Pres, 1999) 16.

[38] Moreira Slepoy *Graciela,* "Reading Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things as an Imaginary Reflection on the Power Dynamics and Colonial Heritage in Post-colonial India" (Doctoral Thesis, Université Laval, 2001) 89.

[39] Chantal Zabus, "Liguistic Guerilla in the Maghrebian and sub-Saharan Europhone Novel," *Africana Journal* 4-1 (1988) 287.

[40] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982) 213.

[41] Abdelkébir Khatibi, "Véritable," 29-30.

[42] Abdellah Bensmaïn, "Entretien avec Abdelkébir Khatibi," *Pro-culture* 12 (1978) 10.

Chapter 3

Narrating Nation and Self: Transgressing Cultural and Colonial Narratives in Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Farah's *Maps*

The tension between high hopes of national liberation and the stark reality of economic underdevelopment, political corruption, factionalism, sexism and neocolonialism is repeatedly thematised in postcolonial writing. Before independence, in the era of colonial rule and mounting anti-colonial struggle, Fanon described the " recherche passionnée" by the "intellectuels colonisés" for "une culture nationale" that was not distorted, disfigured, or destroyed by European versions of native history (*Les Damnés* 254-55). By writing into being a 'national people' with implicit rights to autonomous self-rule, anti-colonial writers used European languages in order to formulate a cultural basis for the ideological and political struggle against European domination. For the 'native intellectual' seeking to resist colonial domination, the nation appears as an attractive and 'natural' compromise between the apparently irreconcilable poles of West and non-West. The nation appeals precisely because of its blending of the utopian possibility of community and solidarity and the aspiration to freedom from domination. For the intellectual, national independence is associated with both modernisation and the return to tradition: membership of the world community and re-creation of a 'passionately sought' cultural identity. Embodiments of this interplay of modernisation and tradition are everywhere to be found, from the iteration of folkloric 'traditions' at the highest moments of state ritual to the complex and hybridised narration of postcolonial writers.

Paradoxically, then, emerging nations assert their difference within a form of social, cultural and political organisation and governance developed in Europe's recent past. Partha Chatterjee argues precisely that the central problem of 'Third World' nationalist thought is the paradoxical existence of independent national cultures within a universal framework of nation-states: "Nationalist thought, in agreeing to become "modern", accepts the claim to universality of this "modern" framework of knowledge. Yet it also asserts the autonomous identity of a national culture. It thus simultaneously

rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic, and moral, of an alien culture."[1] As a restoration of the ancient traditions of the people, then, the nation is always fictive. Moreover, the administrative districts of European imperialism that dictate the new national boundaries often do not correlate even with precolonial or even colonial cultural, linguistic or ethnic divisions.

Anti-colonial 'nationalist' writing, like the nation state itself, is also caught up in the paradox of non-Western/Western nationalism. Despite its apparent claim to 'indigenous authenticity,' anti-colonial fiction is inescapably hybrid. It narrates into being a cross-cultural national subject whose full realisation is deferred or postponed to the moment of 'independence.' The postcolonial subject is thus tied to the narratives of anti-colonial resistance and national independence which literally call him (and less often, her) into existence. Both *L'Enfant de sable*[2] and *Maps*[3] allegorise the postcolonial situation and describe what it means to be born into a postcolonial identity. The protagonists, Ahmed in *L'Enfant de sable*, and Askar in *Maps*, are mysteriously handcuffed to history, and their destinies chained to those of their respective nations. While anti-colonial thought and resistance construct the nation, the frustrations of post-independence national history break it apart. In constructing national cultures, conflictual divisions, such as those of class, gender, ethnicity, tribe, religion, and language were downplayed. In post-independence nations these differences assume enormous importance. Given the disappointing history of post-independence nations, it is not surprising that postcolonial writers such as Farah, Ben Jelloun, Khatibi, Achebe, Djebar, Nwapa, and many others question monolithic state authority and challenge representations of unified national identity and narratives of coherent national development. Thus, as embodiment of both possibility and frustration the nation itself has come to have a complex position in postcolonial writing and thought. In an issue of *Social Text* (1991), Aamir Mufti argues that the role of the postcolonial intellectual involves "going beyond a mere 'telling of the experience of the collectivity itself,' to a posing of specific challenges, directed at historical fictions of community and representations."[4]

Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*, like many other postcolonial Francophone and Anglophone fictions, are symptomatic sites of the

struggles and contradictions discussed above. They also sometimes offer narrative allegories of these struggles and contradictions; they are indeed two of the most important extended examinations of the dilemmas of emerging nationhood. Consistent with the alternatives posited by Bhabha, Khatibi, Lloyd, Deleuze and Guattari, and others in Chapter One, and with earlier fictional writing as in Chapter Two, these texts of the 1980s make an important intervention in the way in which they deterritorialise, and break with the structures, and narratives of colonialism, and of nationalism. A brief look at the authors' background and the issues raised in their texts will point to the areas of comparison which this chapter will undertake.

Ben Jelloun (1944-) attended the *lycée français* in Tangier, and did his first degree in philosophy at Rabat University. In 1968, he taught philosophy in Tetouan and then in Casablanca. He moved to Paris in 1971 where he completed his *thèse de 3e cycle* in social psychiatry and worked as a psycho-sociologist. As a poet, novelist, essayist, journalist and playwright, Ben Jelloun has since lived and worked in France and Morocco, but mainly in France. As a young intellectual in Morocco, he joined the revolutionary review *Souffles* (1966), a review well ahead of its time, centred around key postcolonial intellectuals and writers. Consistent with the *Souffles* agenda, Ben Jelloun, like Khatibi, continues to write, as he himself once said, "pour dire la différence." Since the publication of his first novel *Harrouda* (1973), he has remained a significant writer in North African literature. He was the first Arabo-African writer to win *le Prix Goncourt* for the sequel to *L'Enfant de sable*, *La Nuit sacrée* (1987).

Farah (1945-) was born in Baidoa in the Italian-administered south of Somalia, which would be united with the northern territory of British Somaliland in 1960 to form the independent republic of Somalia. He grew up in the Ethiopean-ruled Ogaden. Farah's studies, jobs and travels have been nomadic. He was educated in Ethiopia and Mogadiscio (Farah's preferred spelling of the name of the city) where he was taught mainly in Amharic, Arabic, and English. In 1966, he left for India where he studied for a B.A. in Literature and Philosophy at the Punjab University of Chandigarh. He also spent two years at the University of Essex (1974-76). Farah did not return to Somalia as a jail sentence awaited him for the publication of his second novel *A Naked Needle* (1976) which had fallen foul of the government. He spent the next three years writing in Rome.

Since then he has lived in exile for twenty years. He has held teaching positions at universities in the United States, Germany, Italy, Nigeria, Sudan, the Gambia and India. Despite his exile, postcolonial Somalia and Africa, like Ben Jelloun's Morocco, form the main focus of his artistic production. This forced exile, combined with the earlier migrancy of his academic career, has shaped his artistic creation: throughout his fictional writing and essays, Farah associates closure and linearity with tyranny, multiple viewpoints with tolerance. He was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for literature in 1998.

Both Ben Jelloun and Farah come from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. Their literary and intellectual influences are legion. There is the oral tradition, classical and modern Arabic literature, and, inevitably, the Koran, as both writers are culturally Muslim. Farah and Ben Jelloun's writings, of course, bear the marks of wide reading in Western literature, especially the Moderns. Both authors use African/Arab storytelling and mythologies of their respective native regions as well as those from Western and other sources. Using a novel to narrate African nation and self, *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps* make European forms their own by fusing them with African/Arab forms and styles. Combining novelistic techniques with high modernist prose and the traditions of the Oriental/African tale, as well as writing in major European languages, Ben Jelloun and Farah expose, denounce and de-centre Western and African discourses of power. To compare authors who are themselves interested in the transgression of boundaries shifts the focus to the underlying similarities of their work.

L'Enfant de sable is loosely set between colonial influence and full political independence for Morocco (1956). *Maps* is set at the height of Somalia's ill-fated but initially successful attempt to reclaim the Ogaden from Ethiopia in 1977-78. The pairing of these two texts is paticularly interesting because both their authors explore the pain of cultural uncertainty in postcolonial Africa through an examination of the lives of their respective protagonists whose births open both texts. The precariousness of cultural identity is extended to include issues of gender, race and sexuality that are paramount in both texts, especially as both protagonists attempt in each case to construct an identity that challenges accepted tradition. As the study of these two texts will show, *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps* also raise questions about the nature of storytelling: can a story ever be

told fully? Both texts represent some of these writers' most ambiguous and challenging texts. They have no regard for closure. They may fall into Appiah's second stage of African writing which he calls "post-realist" African writing: experimental in terms of form and non-realist in terms of approach to reality. The plots and the narrative strategies employed by Farah and Ben Jelloun are not based on a conventional sense of time or linearity. They parallel the nomadic state of their protagonists. Another reason for pairing Ben Jelloun and Farah, unlike Khatibi and Achebe who continue to reside in their respective countries, is that they are both exilic/border writers, writing outside the nation. The exilic space in which they write is an interesting site of becoming that resists the identities of ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and even of exile itself.

Within the framework of my problematic, namely, the relationship between marginalised identities and writing, this chapter will highlight the radical developments that have taken place in *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps*, by focusing on the subversive strategies deployed by their authors. My concern is to analyse how these writers negotiate the tensions of their identities in postcolonial Arab, Muslim, and African society. The authors, writing in disparate contexts, are linked through the themes they explore: their exposition of the artifice of gender construction, their interest in the analogies and disjunctures between gender formation and the formation of national identity, and their shared 'postmodern' affinities. This chapter will draw attention to the multiple and innovative ways in which the issues of race, culture, gender, colonialism and nation can be approached.

L'Enfant de sable

Abdelkébir Khatibi argued that decolonisation has not been accompanied by the deconstruction of the imperialist and ethnocentric ideologies which provided great support for colonial domination.[5] To Khatibi, as we have seen in Chapter Two, decolonisation can only be fully realised by means of a "critique double": on the one hand, the decolonised writer must develop ways of thinking which consist in "l'affirmation d'une différence", and not in the mere reversal of power; on the other hand, he/she must foreground "une critique du savoir et des discours élaborés par les différentes

sociétés du monde arabe sur elles-mêmes" (*Maghreb pluriel* 47-48). According to Khatibi, the latter must begin by a contestation and subversion of the foundations of patriarchy which he identifies as one of the structuring forces of Arab societies.

L'Enfant de sable offers a powerful contestation and subversion of the patriarchalism decried by Khatibi and other North African postcolonial writers. It does this by a complex critique of the phallocentric discourse of sexual difference which informs Moroccan society. At the same time, Ben Jelloun's novel indirectly subverts the narrative of French colonialism and cultural imperialism in North Africa. This subversion takes place through an exploration of the question of identity in North African, Muslim society. This question is addressed through an explicit interrogation of sexual identity and the exploitation of women, which can also be read as a metaphor for the problem of cultural identity for the colonised and postcolonial subject in North Africa.

Ben Jelloun explores these issues through the figure of Ahmed, a girl given a male name and reared and socialised as a male. This central protagonist and 'sandchild' of the title, is referred to in *La Nuit sacrée* as "un être de sable et de poussière à l'identité incertaine, s'effritant au moindre coup de vent."[6] Ahmed is compared to an "être de sable" and an "être de vent" to emphasise the instability of identity, because Ahmed does not have choice over which destination to take. After the birth of seven girls to a Moroccan, Muslim couple during the period of French rule in Morocco, the father decides that the next child will be his son and male heir regardless of its biological sex. Consequently, the eighth child is triumphantly presented to the world as a boy. Only the mother and the midwife know the secret of Ahmed's true identity, "Et l'enfant grandit dans une euphorie quasi quotidienne" (*L'Enfant* 31). The circumcision ceremony, a social declaration of a boy's 'manhood' in Muslim society as it celebrates "le passage à l'âge d'homme" (31), is a public event and a test of the lie El Hadj Ahmed has constructed:

> Figurez-vous qu'il a présenté au coiffeur-circonciseur son fils, les jambes écartées, et que quelque chose a été effectivement coupé, que le sang a coulé, éclaboussant les cuisses de l'enfant et le visage du coiffeur. L'enfant a même pleuré et il fut comblé de cadeaux apportés par toute la famille. (32)

By circumcising his own finger rather than any part belonging to the child, El Hadj Ahmed has succeeded in his quest to pass his daughter off as a boy. After the circumcision ceremony, it is stated that "Ahmed grandissait selon la loi du père qui se chargeait personnellement de son éducation: la fête était finie. Il fallait à présent faire de cette enfant un homme, un vrai" (34). The "Loi du père" stresses El Hadj Ahmed's belief in his role as a patriarch, and his society's values and mores. The father, thus, sends Ahmed to the Koranic school, to the mosque, and tutors her in business matters at his workplace. "La loi du père," the novel shows, is also symbolic: the father gives the child his own name and creates her in his own image; he tells his wife that "Ahmed restera seul et régnera sur cette maison de femmes" (23). This "loi du père" calls to mind Jacques Lacan's theory of the "nom du père." Lacan writes, "C'est dans le nom du père qu'il nous faut reconnaître le support de la fonction symbolique qui, depuis l'orée des temps historiques, identifie sa personne à la figure de la loi."[7] Ahmed's relationship to her father is closely tied to her perception of "la loi du Père," a law that is immutable and unrestricted because it is related to a symbolic function rather than mere biology.

Despising and ignoring his daughters, El Hadj Ahmed raises his youngest child to enjoy the privileges and power given to the male sex in this society. The story of Ahmed's life is told by a series of storytellers. After the disappearance of the original storyteller who claims to be in possession of her journal, Amar, Salem, Fatouma - members of the audience of the original storyteller - and the blind troubadour, offer different endings/versions to the unfinished story of the sandchild. *L'Enfant de sable* is a richly puzzling narrative with stories embedded within stories, with the levels of narration confused as storytellers become characters, and characters taking over as storytellers.

As the narrative traces Ahmed's childhood, Ben Jelloun depicts the overt characteristics of his male dominated society: the inferior status of women; the woman's duty to obey her husband; the legal code that disinherits female children; and the idea that the male hereditary line constitutes the nation, and if it is lost, the nation disappears. As a young, prepubescent boy Ahmed has access to both the secluded domestic world of women and the public world inhabited by men. In *Beyond the Veil*, Fatima Mernissi notes that:

> The symbolism of sexual patterns certainly seems to reflect society's hierarchy and power allocation in the Muslim order. Strict space boundaries divide Muslim society into two sub-universes: the universe of men (the *umma*, the world-religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family.[8]

Accompanying her mother on her weekly visit to the *hammam* (the public bath), the only escape from the house for a traditional Moroccan woman, Ahmed is privy to her conversation with her friends. As she witnesses the reality of their lives, she muses on her own good fortune in escaping such a fate: "Et pour toutes ces femmes, la vie était plutôt réduite. C'était peu de chose: la cuisine, le ménage, l'attente et une fois par semaine le repos dans le *hammam*. J'étais secrètement content de ne pas faire partie de cet univers si limité" (*Enfant* 34). The women in the *hammam* in this novel are ignorant about anything outside the domestic realm. The strict regulation of space in their culture assures that the knowledge of these women is limited. In the public sphere, by contrast, Ahmed comes to revel in this world of men: "J'aimais bien me retrouver dans cette immense maison où seuls les hommes étaient admis" (37-38). Equally, Ahmed begins to develop a loathing for the female body and for characteristics regarded as feminine by her society. Ahmed's misogyny is evident in his revulsion at the sight of female genitalia in the *hammam*: "Je m'accrochais à ces cuisses étalées et j'entrevoyais tous ces bas-ventres charnus et poilus. Ce n'était pas beau, C'était même dégoutant [...] je ne pouvais pas être comme elles [...] C'était pour moi une dégénerescence inadmissible" (36).

Under the tutelage of her father, Ahmed's "natural" female tendencies are subjugated. She is inculcated with the machismo deemed proper for a man and is taught to reject 'feminine' modes of behaviour. Seeing his 'son' crying when bullied by three young street boys, El Hadj rebukes him: "Tu n'es pas une fille pour pleurer! Un homme ne pleure pas!" As she dries her eyes and heads off in pursuit of her attackers, Ahmed learns the 'masculine' response to the situation: "Il avait raison, les larmes c'est très féminin. Je séchai les miennes et sortis à la recherche des voyous pour me battre" (39). This is an early example of Ahmed's internalisation and acceptance of her father's law.

Ahmed's rejection of feminine things is the seed of her own self-alienation and self-hatred. Raised in a culture which holds women in low esteem, Ahmed begins to identify with the dominant attitude. Because she has not yet reached sexual maturity, Ahmed sees her own body as different from those of her mother and her friends: "Je me cachais le soir pour regarder dans un petit miroir de poche mon bas-ventre: il n'y avait rien de décadent: une peau blanche et limpide, douce au toucher, sans pli, sans rides" (36). At this point then, she can regard these women as other and inferior without being aware of her own self-alienation. As her mother binds her chest to stop the growth of female breasts, Ahmed is pleased to co-operate with her parents' efforts to make a boy of her: "Je ne disais rien, je laissais faire. Ce destin-là avait l'avantage d'être original et plein de risques. Je l'aimais bien" (36).

Ben Jelloun's representation of Ahmed's childhood may be read as an exploration of the relationship between gender and biological sex. By showing how the young child, a biologically sexed female, absorbs and identifies with masculine attitudes and characteristics, Ben Jelloun points to gender as a social construct and not an essence determined by biology. In disclosing how society naturalises femininity and masculinity, Ben Jelloun attempts to deprive this essentialist conception of its authority. For instance, when El Hadj tells his son that tears are for girls only, the narrative ironises such essentialism when Ahmed, whose biological sex is female, adopts the behaviour and attitudes regarded as proper to a man. Given that the alleged natural inferiority of women is the basis for their subordinate status in Ahmed's society, this strategy is an important one in the struggle for women's emancipation.

Ahmed's childhood enthusiasm to acquire a male persona, and to hide the traces of her biological identity, is very suggestive when read in the context of cultural identity. From the evidence in the text, perhaps Ben Jelloun intends to make this shift from the biological to the colonised mentality. The allegorical connection between Ahmed and her country is made when the father announces 'Ahmed's' birth in the newspaper, "Vive Ahmed! Vive le Maroc!" (30). After this we are told that "La police française n'aimait pas ce "Vive le Maroc!" Les militants nationalistes ne savaient pas que cet artisan riche était aussi un bon patriote" (30-31). Thus, this narrative of a girl raised as a boy is also the story of French colonialism and its effects on the colonised Moroccan

people. El Hadj, the father who denies the female sex of his child and imposes a masculine identity upon it, is also the symbol of French colonial authority and its imposition of metropolitan culture and language upon the North African people. Just as Ahmed is taught to speak the language of men and to value it above that of women, so too is the colonised population imbued with the superiority of the language and culture of the *métropole*. The misgendered young Ahmed is like the 'native' described by Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs*: a product of cultural violence. The allegorical connection in this text should not be glossed over, particularly in relation to young Ahmed. This connection, however, is not offered as the only reading of the text as there are risks in assuming that all structures of oppression are the same, or all minority or marginalised groups have the same responses to oppression. Ahmed's later development in the text will clarify this initial declaration.

Like the colonised who adopt the culture of the colonising country, Ahmed identifies with the physical and psychological attributes of manhood to such an extent that she develops some traits of the male sex:

> De temps à autre des signes extérieurs venaient me confirmer dans cette voie. Ainsi le jour où la caissière du hammam me refusa l'entrée, parce qu'elle considérait que je n'étais plus un petit garçon innocent mais déjà un petit homme, capable de perturber par ma seule présence au bain la vertu tranquille et les désirs cachés de femmes honnêtes. Ma mère protesta pour la forme, mais elle était au fond heureuse. Elle en parla fièrement le soir à mon père qui décida de me prendre avec lui dorénavant au hammam. (37)

Realising that the 'signes extérieurs' which testify to Ahmed's manhood constitute a language which will afford her entrance into the male world of power and privilege, the mother is happy to see the child escape the denigrated status of women. These exterior signs are to masculinity what the French language is to those who speak it in a colonial situation, namely a source of power. As Fanon argues, the acquisition of the coloniser's tongue is frequently the key to power in a colonial situation: "Parler, c'est être à même d'employer une certaine syntaxe, posséder la morphologie de telle ou telle langue, mais

c'est surtout assumer une culture" (*Peau noire* 13). Mastery of language, Fanon asserts, affords remarkable power.

Ben Jelloun's narrative, however, exposes the language of masculinity as an illusion supported by the legal codes and cultural institutions of Moroccan society: "Être homme est une illusion et une violence que tout justifie et privilégie" (*Enfant* 94). By extension, *L'Enfant de sable* implies that French colonial power is also constructed upon the illusion of French superiority, and depends for its authority on the violence of cultural imperialism - the imposition of the culture and language of France - and ultimately, on the use of military force. Conversely, the narrative suggests that the colonised, like women, can be constructed as inferior because they have internalised this idea and do not question it: "Être femme est une infirmité naturelle dont tout le monde s'accommode" (94). Like Fanon's example of the West Indian who rejects his autochthonous culture because colonialism has alienated him from his own identity, and who attempts to show the privileges of the coloniser through the acquisition of French, Ahmed's mother wants to dislocate her child from her identity as a female, and encourages her to learn the language of masculinity so that she may enjoy the elevated status accorded to men. As Ahmed's body matures sexually and menstruation commences, the project of masquerading as a man becomes more problematic: "C'était bien du sang; résistance du corps au nom; éclaboussure d'une circoncision tardive. C'est un rappel, une grimace d'un souvenir enfoui, le souvenir d'une vie que je n'avais pas connue et qui aurait pu être la mienne (46).

With the flow of menstrual blood, the undeniable evidence of her biological sex, Ahmed realises that she has a female body which cannot be totally eradicated through the acquisition of the language of masculinity. At this stage, Ahmed's self is split in two: her masculine identity on the one hand, her sexually mature female body on the other. This split becomes untenable. The onset of her period shows "the résistance du corps au nom," both the male name and that of the father. Ahmed calls her first period "circoncision tardive," and then goes on to write, "Ce mince filet de sang ne pouvait être qu'une blessure. Ma main essayait d'arrêter l'écoulement" (47).

This stage of Ahmed's development also marks the beginning of her contestation of her father's authority. Her developed masculine voice makes her wonder whether she is in fact a mere creation of her father:

> Je suis et ne suis pas cette voix qui s'accommode et prend le pli de mon corps, mon visage enroulé dans le voile de cette voix, est-elle de moi ou est-ce celle du père qui l'aurait insufflée, ou simplement déposée pendant que je dormais en me faisant du bouche à bouche. (45)

This metaphor of El Hadj infusing his son with a masculine voice and identity reinforces the notion of the enormous power invested in the father. But while the father uses his authority to create his son's masculinity, Ahmed remains without a penis, the ultimate marker of virility and power in North African society: "Je me suis souvent tenté d'organiser mon petit cimetière intérieur de sorte que les ombres couchées se relèvent pour faire une ronde autour d'un sexe érigé, une verge qui serait mienne mais que je ne pourrais jamais porter ni exhiber" (44). Because North African society has invested so much in phallic sexual power, Ahmed's 'castrated' body destroys her aspirations to true manhood. In *La plus haute des solitudes: misère sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains* (1977), Ben Jelloun notes that in North African society:

> La sexualité (le pouvoir sexuel) est du ressort de l'homme: elle est puissance et virilité. Le sexe est valorisé, il est la base même de l'exercice des autres pouvoirs [...] Perdre ce pouvoir [...] c'est perdre son statut social et sa raison d'être dans une société où il n'y a pas de place ni de rôle pour un homme 'mutilé' sexuellement.[9]

Therefore, in order to protect her identity as a man, Ahmed must keep her sexual impotence a secret from the world. As a result, she is condemned to a life deprived of sexual or affective relations: "Il est une vérité qui ne peut être dite, pas même suggérée, mais vécue dans la solitude absolue" (*Enfant* 43).

This notion of the castrated son is significant in the context of cultural identity. Indeed the metaphor of castration is a common one in North African literature in French and is used to convey the impact of colonialism on the identity of the North African people. As Joan Phyllis Monego states, "the indigène saw himself as a 'bastard' son, neither Maghrebian nor French, 'castrated', 'alienated', 'dispossessed', an 'outcast', an 'exile' in his own land."[10] Like the colonised who buries his cultural identity to make himself into the image of the Frenchman, Ahmed has buried his female sexual identity in order to make herself into the image of a man. But without the penis, the literal marker of manhood and the symbol of colonial power, Ahmed belongs neither to the world of men nor to that of the French coloniser. Alienated from her sexual and cultural identity as a female and as a Moroccan, Ahmed is dispossessed of both her sexuality and her culture.

Ahmed's questioning of her father's authority soon turns to rebellion. Instead of living her life according to her father's plan, Ahmed decides to take absolute control, much as her father did in the formation of his 'son.' As she makes the decision to get married, she brings it to its perverse yet logical conclusion: "Père, tu m'as fait homme, je dois le rester. Et comme dit notre prophète, 'un musulman complet est un homme marié'" (51). Meanwhile, Ahmed becomes authoritarian and despotic in her familial relations:

> Ahmed était devenu autoritaire. A la maison il se faisait servir par ses soeurs, ses déjeuners et ses dîners. Il se cloîtrait dans la chambre du haut. Il s'interdisait toute tendresse avec sa mère qui le voyait rarement. A l'atelier il avait déjà commencé à prendre les affaires en main. Efficace, moderne, cynique, il était un excellent négociateur. (51)

In this way, Ahmed rejects her father but appropriates his authority and uses it for her own ends. By choosing to marry Fatima, her sickly, epileptic cousin, and to inflict a cruel destiny upon her, Ahmed dominates in her turn. It is at this point that the novel begins to present Ahmed and the reader with characters who show similarities to Ahmed or who cause Ahmed to question herself. The most obvious double for Ahmed is Fatima. Fatima, although she is a passive woman and "a rien du tout" (77), is not fooled by

Ahmed's social identity and knows that she is a woman, and that, like herself, she is alienated from the rest of society and is wounded:

> Nous sommes toutes les deux neés penchées sur la pierre au fond du puits sec, sur une terre sterile, entourées de regards sans amour. Nous sommes femmes avant d'être infirmes, ou peut-être nous sommes infirmes parce que femmes [...] je sais notre blessure [...] Elle est commune. (80)

Reading the question of sexual identity as a metaphor for cultural identity in a colonial situation, Ahmed's rebellion against the father's authority represents the insurrection of the colonised against the forces of colonisation. Ahmed's initial suspicion that her voice --traditionally associated with self-identity-- belongs, in fact, to her father, has its parallel in the realisation of the colonised population that its identity is no longer its own but is moulded by the *métropole*. The subsequent rebellion of the colonised against the forces of French cultural and military domination represents the son's rebellion against the law of the father, and his demand for self-determination. However, like so many decolonised African nations which threw off the yoke of French or British colonial domination only to replace it with a dictatorship, Ahmed rebels against her father only to install her own repressive regime. In this way, Ben Jelloun's narrative vividly enacts the dangers inherent in a mere reversal of power. Like Khatibi, Ben Jelloun shows how a reversal of power does not allow for an 'affirmation of difference' but leads to new justifications for the denial of difference and the continued oppression of the other, either sexual or cultural. For instance, once El Hadj dies, Ahmed summons her sisters and provides a new rationalisation for their inferior status:

> A partir de ce jour, je ne suis plus votre frère: je ne suis pas votre père non plus, mais votre tuteur. J'ai le devoir et le droit de veiller sur vous. Vous me devez obéissance et respect. Enfin, inutile de vous rappeler que je suis un homme d'ordre et que, si la femme chez nous est inférieure à l'homme, ce n'est pas parce que Dieu l'a voulu ou que le prophète l'a décidé, mais parce qu'elle accepte ce sort. Alors subissez et vivez dans le silence. (66)

Whereas the discourse of colonialism justifies the domination of the colonised by constructing them as inferior, just as El Hadj naturalises his daughters' inferior status by attributing it to divine will, Ahmed blames the victims for their own oppression.
After Fatima's death, Ahmed is tormented by fears which she cannot express:

> Je marche pour me dépouiller, pour me laver, pour me débarrasser d'une question qui me hante et dont je ne parle jamais: le désir. Je suis las de porter en mon corps des insinuations sans pouvoir ni les repousser ni les faire miennes. Je resterai profondément inconsolé, avec un visage qui n'est pas le mien, et un désir que je ne peux nommer. (88)

There is "un désir que je ne peux nommer," just as her body at puberty was portrayed as "une vérité qui ne peut être dite." Finally, worn out by this alienation, she decides that her masquerade as a man has lasted long enough and that she must begin the long journey back to her female self: "Aujourd'hui, je cherche à me délivrer...Il est temps de naître à nouveau. En fait je ne vais pas changer mais simplement revenir à moi" (111). Ahmed then leaves her family once she has decided to recover the identity obscured by her male persona, suggesting that a return to her female self is impossible within the male dominated family of her society. Inveighing against its repressive structure, Ahmed repudiates the family as a social institution: "Sachez mon ami, que la famille telle qu'elle existe dans nos pays, avec le père tout-puissant, et les femmes reléguées à la domesticité avec une parcelle d'autorité que leur laisse le mâle, la famille, je la répudie, je l'enveloppe de brume et ne la reconnais plus" (89).

As Ahmed sets out on the path of "retour vers l'origine, vers les droits de la nature" (90), the debilitating effects of the ambiguity of her own identity are exemplified by her response to the old woman who refuses to let her pass until she answers her question "Qui es-tu?:" "J'aurais pu répondre à toutes les questions, inventer, imaginer mille réponses, mais c'était là la seule, l'unique question qui me bouleversait et me rendait littéralement muette (113). Ahmed's inability to respond, to classify herself as 'un homme ou une femme' is also the problematic position of the North African intellectual who

belongs to two cultures but cannot completely identify with either. Furthermore, having been raised to identify with misogynistic attitudes in a society which regards women's sexual pleasures as a sign of moral degeneracy, Ahmed feels shame as a result of her female sexuality and the pleasure she experiences when the old woman caresses her breast:

> La sensation physique que j'éprouvai aux caresses de cette bouche edentée sur mon sein fut, même si elle ne dura que quelques secondes, du plaisir. J'ai honte de l'avouer. La nuit je dormis dans une chambre d'hôtel luxueux pour essayer d'oublier. (115)

The masturbatory scenes which take place after the encounter with the old woman illustrate Ahmed's attempts at awakening her female sexuality and at turning her shame into acceptance of her female body: "les caresses devant le miroir devinrent une habitude, une espèce de pacte entre mon corps et une image, une image enfouie dans un temps lointain et qu'il fallait réveiller en laissant les doigts toucher à peine ma peau" (116).

In this way, Ahmed's original revulsion at the sight of the female genitalia is gradually replaced by an acceptance of the female body and the pleasure it affords her. Female masturbation is represented as a liberating activity which both paves the way to self-acceptance, and subverts the denigration of a woman's body and censorship of feminine desire in Islamic society. Just as the narrative points the way in which women must reclaim and elaborate their own images in order to give voice to their desire, so too must the colonised recover and value their own idiom, both cultural and linguistic, if they are to escape the alienation and self-hatred wrought by colonisation and the denigration of their culture, language and traditions. In this way, the colonised can throw off what Albert Memmi calls the "mythe négatif imposé par le colonisateur,"[11] and which the oppressed has so far internalised. To regain its cultural specificity then, the North African people must look toward its history, language and culture for the images with which it can reconstruct an identity obscured by French rule and the imposition of the language and history of the *métropole*.

However, the recovery of the past identity, like Ahmed's attempt to recover "une image enfouie dans le passé," suggests a potential danger. If the colonised population blindly embraces every aspect of Arabic Islamic society, it runs the risk of developing a "countermythology," as Memmi observes:

> Du coup, exactement à l'inverse de l'accusation colonialiste, le colonisé, sa culture, son pays, tout ce qui lui appartient deviennent *parfaite positivité*. En définitive, nous allons nous trouver en face d'une *contre-mythologie*. Au mythe négatif imposé par le colonisateur succède un *mythe positif* de lui-même, proposé par le colonisé [...] A entendre le colonisé, et souvent ses amis, tout est bon, tout est à garder, dans ses moeurs et ses traditions, ses actes et ses projets; même l'anachronique ou le désordonné, l'immoral ou l'erreur" (166).

Thus, while the narrative stresses the importance of self-acceptance in the construction of sexual and cultural identity, it recognises that any model of identity is impossible to embody; it does not merely reverse the binary oppositions. Ben Jelloun does not valorise the feminine over the masculine. In fact, as opposed to early Ahmed, and consistent with her later development, *L'Enfant de sable*, in its resistance to phallo-nationalism, may also be read as anti-Oedipal; it goes beyond gender binaries.

Ben Jelloun's novel locates a space in which masculinity and femininity co-exist in a non-hierarchical relationship. This space is the circus which travels from town to town, a space in which the circus people are described by the circus manager as "nomades" wandering on the ambiguous territory between truth and falsehood: "Nous sommes des nomades, notre vie a quelque chose d'exaltant" (120). The nomads' way of life is 'exaltant' because it is unlike the geometrically ordered patterns of society. Through nomadism, these nomads elude the fixity of the identity categories by which society attempts to define them. Nomadology itself, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, is a process which constantly resists the sedentary, the fixed. Ahmed gets a job to perform as both man and woman: "tu te déguiseras à la première partie du spectacle, tu disparaîtras cinq minutes pour réapparaître en femme fatale" (121), explains the ringmaster. It is here that

Lalla Zahra, as Ahmed comes to be called, is at liberty to don the clothes and signs of both femininity and masculinity:

> Son corps trouvait une joie et un bonheur d'adolescent amoureux. Elle se cachait pour écrire [...] Tantôt homme, tantôt femme, notre personnage avançait dans la reconquête de son être. Il ne dormait plus avec les acrobates mais dans la roulotte des femmes; elle mangeait et sortait avec elles. On l'appelait Lalla Zahra. Elle aimait bien ce prénom. (126-7)

In this way, the narrative points to a conception of sexual identity in which masculinity and femininity would no longer be restrictive gender roles constructed on male and female bodies, but, instead, would be characteristics found in each sex. Although Ahmed/Zahra, as demonstrated in this novel, draws on traditional definitions of femaleness and maleness as elements of reference, she is shown to be liberated by her choice of a nomadic identity located between two other fixed positions of either masculinity or femininity. Cross-dressing thus offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, interrogating the categories of 'male' or 'female,' whether these categories are considered biological or cultural. This critique creates what looks like a "third term," but, as Marjorie Garber points out in *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (1992), the "third term [...] is *not a term*. Much less is it a *sex* [...] The "third" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge" (emphasis in original).[12] Ahmed/Zahra's 'transvestism' at the 'cirque forain,' is intended by Ben Jelloun as a creative strategy of resistance to binary thinking. As Lisa Lowe points out:

> Ahmed/Zahra devises an *alternative* transvestism, one which does not comply with the father's enforced transvestism which expressed the power of men over women under patriarchy, but which is rather a *representation of cross-dressing* which both exhibits this logic of forced transvestism, and ultimately makes use of further cross-dressing to deride the patriarchal logic.[13]

Zahra undergoes a long process of growth and interrogation of established assumptions that allows her to revalorise the feminine body, but also to choose to remain in a nomadic space between expected norms of male or female behaviour. *L'Enfant de sable*, in its allegoric scheme, challenges both fixed positions of either colonial domination or nativist reaction. One of the most vexed questions in postcolonial criticism is the agency of the colonised subject, or 'subaltern,' and whether it can be retrieved and represented by postcolonial intellectuals. This is an issue which Spivak has explored in her challenging essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?." Spivak states that "the subaltern cannot speak,"[14] and poses a challenge to the easy assumption that the voice of the 'subaltern' or oppressed subject can be easily recovered and restored to history. By this, she suggests that the subaltern is an effect of Western discourse and, therefore, it would be theoretically wrong to assume the existence of a sovereign or essential subaltern consciousness. At the same time, she takes seriously the desire, on the part of postcolonial intellectuals, to highlight oppression and to provide the perspective of oppressed people. In another essay, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," Spivak describes the work of these postcolonial intellectuals as "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (emphasis in original).[15] Spivak's influential notion of 'strategic essentialism' combines a philosophical scepticism about recovering any subaltern agency with a political commitment to making visible the position of the marginalised. Thus it is the postcolonial intellectual who must represent the subalterns without necessarily suggesting that they are agents of their own histories.

Several narrators in this novel try to fix Zahra's identity into an authentic identity, which would correspond to an attempt to return to the precolonial past. However, as Lowe suggests, *L'Enfant de sable* does not propose that Zahra should recover an 'authentic' female identity free from the experiences of her enforced transvestism, nor does it propose that Morocco should attempt to rehabilitate itself by attempting an unproblematic return to the precolonial past:

> The protagonist's nomadic cross-dressing suggests a relationship to sexuality in which there are no stable, essentialized gender sites, in which the undermined wandering from identity to identity, and desire to desire, is a

> strategy for resisting the fixed formations of either fixed masculine or feminine subjectivities, and allegorically, the overdetermined opposition of colonial rule and nativist reaction. (57)

Transvestism as a trope in this novel denaturalises and destabilises gender distinctions. Transvestism, as Garber defines it, is "*a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture*: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself" (*Vested Interests* 17, emphasis in original).

The narrative strategies of this text are as nomadic as the life of Ahmed/Zahra. In its subversion of fixed identities, *L'Enfant de sable*'s narrative strategies almost overdetermine the undecidability of meaning through alternative endings and beginnings offered by multiple 'conteurs' from different locations and points in time, and competing accounts of the end of Ahmed/Zahra's life. Instead of a consistent narrator presenting a stable chronology of events, we have a series of storytellers, each discrediting his or her predecessor and claiming to have irrefutable evidence of Ahmed/Zahra's life. There is no closure - i.e. no grand narrative - in this text as it rejects presentation of one absolute truth. This rejection is demonstrated through Salem, Amar and Fatouma, three listeners to Ahmed/Zahra's story, who have become narrators after the original storyteller disappears, and with him, the journal, of which most of his story was composed in the middle chapters of the novel. These three narrators claim to know the end of Ahmed/Zahra's story and offer conflicting versions of it.

Before Salem continues Zahra's story from the point of her involvement with the circus, a space of non-hierarchical gender difference, the narrative also demonstrates that such a conception of identity is far from existing in reality because at the circus "tout est faux" (120); and this conception of identity is essentially projected as a future possibility: "rupture avec le passé" [i.e. both the colonial and the culturally-determined past] [...] elle inventait des images folles [...] elle rêvait." (127). Men and women displaying the characteristics of the opposite sex are tolerated within the world of the circus only where there is no real ambiguity, just overt illusion. As the Moroccan sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba notes in *La sexualité en Islam*: "Le grand tabou sexuel

de l'Islam n'est pas tant de ne pas respecter un rapport de parenté que de violer l'ordre du monde, la bipartition sexuelle et la distinction du féminin et du masculin."[16]

Thus, while Zahra's performances clearly belong to the carnival tradition with its transgression of hierarchies, in this case those based on gender, they take place within a theatrical space which circumscribes such transgressions. Indeed as her experiences off stage make clear, the liberating possibilities suggested by the space of the circus are in stark contrast to the actual relations between the members of the circus. When Zahra's story is taken up by Salem, the son of a slave brought from Senegal, who sees Ahmed/Zahra as a victim of social abuse, we are oriented toward the veiled, subversive criticism of Moroccan society. He tells how the ring-master brutally attempts to rape Zahra, saying to her: "Donne ton derrière - ça va être ta fête. Tu fais ça toute seule, je vais t'apprendre comment on le fait à deux" (142). Here Abbas's words ironise the possibility of a sexual encounter between men and women based on anything other than violence and male domination, and indicate that female sexual self-sufficiency will be ruthlessly opposed as it opposes the status quo of sexual mores. Salem's version of Zahra's death is equally pessimistic: as she suspects that Abbas is returning to rape her again, Zahra places razor blades between her legs, a suicidal act of defiance which results in the death of Abbas as well as her own. The fact that the storyteller recounts Zahra's act of resistance suggests, perhaps, that political independence must also be accompanied by revolt against some indigenous forms of repression.

Read within the context of sexual violence experienced by Zahra, her earlier attempts to recover her female sexuality through masturbation indirectly suggest a valorisation of narcissistic self-sufficiency within a society in which relations between the sexes are based on domination and repression. Thus, although the text points to a Derridean notion of difference - beyond the assignment of sexual or cultural identity on the basis of gender or national identity - it also problematises such a notion of difference through the suggestion that self-acceptance and self-sufficiency must first be achieved by women, and by extension the postcolonial world, before such a non-binary relationship can exist between men and women or between the Arab world and European society. Salem's account of Zahra's ending depicts a binary world in which there are only domination and subordination, a world in which Malika, another circus impersonator,

declares: "Nous sommes des nomades, notre vie a quelque chose d'exaltant mais elle est pleine d'impasses" (120).

Salem's story sees Zahra killing her rapist Abbas at the 'cirque forain.' Amar, by contrast, refers to Zahra by the male name Ahmed, and claims to have "le manuscrit que nous lisait le conteur" (144), in which the 'cirque forain' episode never took place. Ahmed, according to Amar, renounces his transvestism, finds peace in religious texts and dies at the family home in "une grande douceur" (159). Allegorically, Amar describes Ahmed's ending as a return to a precolonial state. The third storyteller, Fatouma, gives yet another version, claiming that she herself is Zahra. She says that her story "date d'avant l'Islam" (168), that she has visited Mecca "plus par curiosité que par foi" (168) and that she has lived in different countries, and has travelled extensively: "Je viens de loin, de très loin, j'ai marché sur des routes sans fin; j'ai arpenté des territoires glacés...Des pays et des siècles sont passés devant mon regard. Mes pieds se souviennent encore." (168). When she comes back to Morocco, she does not go home because "J'abandonnais sans regret ma chambre et mes livres" (169), and thus moves away from the ambivalence of her past dilemma. She continues to travel from village to village and, in the process, rids herself of her past and embraces a new role:

> Il fallait quant à moi me débarrasser de ce que je fus, entrer dans l'oubli et liquider toutes les traces. L'occasion allait m'être donnée par les gosses, tous ces gamins des bidonvilles, renvoyés des écoles, sans travail, sans toit, sans avenir, sans espoir. Ils étaient sortis dans les rues, d'abord les mains nues, ensuite les mains pleins de pierres, réclamant du pain. Ils hurlaient n'importe quel slogan. [...] Ils n'en pouvaient plus de contenir leur violence. [...] des femmes et des hommes sans travail les rejoignirent. J'étais dans la rue, ne savant quoi penser... je n'avais pas de raison de manifester avec eux. Je n'avais jamais connu la faim. L'armée a tiré dans la foule. Je me suis trouvée mêlée aux gosses presque par hazard. J'étais avec eux, face aux forces de l'ordre. Je connus ce jour-là la peur et la haine. Tout a basculé sur le champ. (169)

Traditional gender-ascribed roles are overturned in Fatouma's narrative as men and women assume new roles and new lives born out of solidarity and struggle against domination.

Later, we read that Amar and Salem "méditaient encore l'histoire de Fatouma"(171). These different versions of the end of Zahra'story are superseded by the man in the blue turban's version which closes *L'Enfant de sable*:

> Lorsque le livre fut vide de ses écritures par la pleine lune, j'eus peur au début, mais ce fut là les premiers signes de ma délivrance. J'ai moi aussi tout oublié. Si quelqu'un parmi vous tient à connaître la suite de cette histoire, il devra interroger la lune quand elle sera entièrement pleine. Moi, je dépose là devant vous le livre, l'encrier et le porte-plume. Je m'en vais lire le Coran sur la tombe des morts! (208-9)

The man in the blue turban's version does not answer the questions raised by other storytellers'versions of Zahra's life. It goes back to the beginnings of Ahmed/Zahra's story, and tells us how the writing in the book disappears and, with it, Ahmed/Zahra's story that remains unresolved, and whose resolution is repeatedly undermined throughout the course of the novel.

Do these endings blur, or clarify, or amplify any 'truth' about Ahmed/Zahra's life? Do they answer the protagonist's question, "Who am I and who is the other?" when she declares, "Je sentais le besoin de me guérir de moi-même, de me décharger de cette solitude lourde" (46)? No single 'truth' can emerge from the plurality of versions concerning the life of Ahmed/Zahra. The only 'truth' that emerges is the search for identity by a protagonist who has "deux vies avec deux perceptions et deux visages mais les mêmes rêves, la même et profonde solitude" (55). It is this form of double consciousness that remains ambiguous and unresolved not only for the protagonist but also, allegorically, for the question of cultural hybridity in the Moroccan nation. The choice of narrative form as well as the de-gendering, ungendering and cross-gendering of the protagonist, wandering from culture to culture, implies an ideological stand in this novel. It suggests an alternative response to reterritorialisation, by deploying nomadic

hybridity as a strategy for creative resistance to the structure of colonial domination, and to the logic of an essentialised precolonial order. It thus unsettles and questions the logic of the binary world of the protagonist, a world in which there is only domination and subordination. *L'Enfant de sable* is a subversive text in its questioning of the patriarchalism of Moroccan society, in its refusal to mythologise the national identity of Morocco, and in its portrayal of Zahra's suffering and determination to resist and subvert the naturalised order in her society: "Etre une femme est une infirmité naturelle dont tout le monde s'accommode. Etre un homme est une illusion et une violence que tout justifie et privilégie. Etre tout simplement est un défi. Je suis las et lasse" (94).

Maps

Maps is a departure from the focus of Farah's previous trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983). His depiction of the corruption of life and the struggle against the General (Siyad Barre, the dictator who ruled Somalia from 1969 to 1991) is put aside in this novel for a look at the devastating effect of political divisions on the Somali sense of personal division. *Maps* is, in this sense, just as political if in a deeper sense, since it focuses on a searching reflection on what created the landscape of the first trilogy. The title is thematic: it presents a European colonial frame of reference, a frame reinforced by the text itself in references to the maps created by European colonialism, and the lasting negative consequences of the colonial division of Somali occupied lands into five parts: former British Somaliland and former Italian Somaliland which joined at independence to form the Somali Republic, but French Somaliland remains a separate country Djibouti, while both Kenya and Ethiopia have substantial Somali-speaking populations in the areas of these countries contiguous with Somalia.

Farah, like Ben Jelloun, is a writer living in exile, and his country is a major concern in his fiction. Somalia has a unique character, especially within an East African context: the multiplicity of its cultural and historical influences. Somalia is connected to other East African countries through the experience of diaspora (a large number of Somalis live in parts of Ethiopia and Kenya); it is also connected, through its geographic

location at the Horn of Africa, to the Arabian peninsula and the Indian Subcontinent. It is also a Muslim country. Both British and Italians colonised Somalia, and its elite culture reflects the influences of these imperial powers. Against this background, Farah's fiction is a living testament to the cultural hybridity that has become a common feature of the colonial and the postcolonial world. *Maps*, his novel of the 1976 war in the Ogaden, dramatises the resistance to this phenomenon by resurgent ethnocentrisms and their reified belief in absolutist ideas of the 'ethnic nation' that has no room for the foreign within or minority cultures, and induces the reader to think again about accepted wisdom: what is national identity if it does not lie in territorial borders, in language, in the blood? In this section I want to analyse Farah's handling of the resistant process of nationalism and the implications of internal colonialism, as well as his exploration of the connections between national identity, gender identity, and narrative form. First, a short summary of this complex text will be useful for the reader, although it does not have a straightforward content that can be summarised.

The first section of *Maps* is set in the Ogaden, the Somali section of Ethiopia, and the second section takes place in Mogadiscio, the capital of Somalia, at the height of Somalia's ill-fated but initially successful attempt to reclaim the Ogaden in 1977-78. *Maps* is the story of Askar, the novel's protagonist, an orphaned Somali child from the disputed Ogaden, and his shifting relationship with his adoptive mother Misra, an Oromo woman from the Ethiopian Highlands. His father died before his birth, fighting in a guerrilla struggle against the oppressive Ethiopian administration, and his mother died giving birth to him, leaving behind only a journal which Askar never read in its entirety. The ambiguous position of Misra, as Askar's surrogate mother and non-Somali, is a commentary on Somali ethnocentrism. She teaches Askar the Somali language, Somali stories and the art of storytelling, yet in spite of her acculturation as a Somali and being the surrogate mother for the Somali child, she is never entirely accepted nor well treated by the Somali community, a key dilemma for Askar, who in childhood sees Misra as his "cosmos" (*Maps* 10). As the Somali liberation of the Ogaden becomes a possibility, the differences between Misra and Askar become apparent to him, since he grows up thinking of her as his mother and speaking a Somali influenced by her less-than-perfect pronunciation of the language. As the villagers grow hostile to her because of her non-

Somali origins, Misra talks with Askar about it and prophesies: "One day you will identify yourself with your people and identify me out of your community. Who knows, you might even kill me to make your people's dream become a tangible reality" (95). This conversation is indeed prophetic as it anticipates the narrative movement and the denouement of the novel. Askar leaves Misra and moves to Mogadiscio to live with his uncle Hilaal and aunt Salaado, away from the complex and confused landscape of identity in which he has lived until this point. Living in Somalia, a sign of an untroubled singular identity for him, he comes to understand himself as Somali. In Mogadiscio, he is torn between joining the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) to free the Ogaden from Ethiopian rule, or becoming a revolutionary scholar in the service of his people. Misra joins the refugee exodus from the Ogaden to Mogadiscio following the defeat of the WSLF forces and Ethiopia's reconquest of the Ogaden. She is doubtfully accused of betraying the Somali army to the forces of her homeland, Ethiopia. After a complex reunion with Askar, she is tortured and killed by the WSLF, of which Askar is (supposedly) a member, in somewhat unclear circumstances. Indeed, the novel ends with the police arresting and questioning Askar about Misra's death.

Instead of beginning with an idyllic childhood steeped in native tradition, *Maps* opens on a hybridised cultural territory, and is situated in a frontier culture, the Ogaden, a disputed territory between Somalia and Ethiopia. Farah does not start his postcolonial novel with the unproblematic birth of a unitary and complete 'Somali' subject, but instead must explore the interrelationships and complicities inherent in the nationalist construction of Somali nationality. Thus, in a specific way, *Maps* picks up where some earlier postcolonial novels leave off. The opening scene of the novel, for example, is closely comparable to the closing scene of a Francophone novel by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961). Near the end of Kane's story, Samba Diallo, recently returned to the land of his childhood (Senegal) from studying Western philosophy in Paris, appears to have given up the Islamic faith of his people. Although the moment is, as the title suggests, ambiguous, it is Samba's reluctance to pronounce the evening prayer that leads a loyal follower of the Diallobe's traditional teacher to strike him down, and, apparently, kill him. *L'Aventure ambiguë* finishes with Samba's death and a long hallucinatory scene where Samba's soul returns to its spiritual beginnings:

> -Tu entres où n'est pas l'ambiguïté. Soit attentive, car te voilà arrivé... Te voilà arrivé.
>
> -Salut! Goût retrouvé du lait maternel, mon frère demeuré au pays de l'ombre et de la paix, je te reconnais. Annonciateur de fin d'exil, je te salue.[17]

Kane's message about the mixed blessing of assimilation and the return of Samba's soul to Islam could be seen as the possible second stage of 'anti-colonial' fiction, as outlined by Fanon: the return to tradition.

Unlike *L'Aventure ambiguë*, to be caught between East and West or self and other is not an ending, but a beginning. It is the recognition of the break with a pure, contained 'native' identity that brings the postcolonial subject into being. In this sense Askar - a child without natural parents like the frontier territory of his birth, the Ogaden, which is cut off from the parent civilisation, Somalia - is not a unitary being and is, therefore, established as necessary to the development of the complicated, hybridised nation to come. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah was fairly explicit about his theory, according to which the structure of the family is reproduced in the national structure: "In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power."[18] The nation will fail until family relations in the society have changed fundamentally, and especially until gender construction and the treatment of women and children have changed.

The orphan figure allows Farah to develop questions of identity that are at the heart of his work. In a 1989 interview, Farah said, "The first and most important questions that all human beings ask themselves are 'Who am I?' 'Why am I who I am?' 'What is my place in this world?' and it is in answer to these questions," he went on to say, "that I have been writing, coming to [them] from different angles, using different characters."[19]As an orphan, Askar is obliged to take responsibility for defining himself and for choosing his ties. "You are a question to yourself," Askar reflects on the first page of *Maps*, and to answer that question, to determine his identity, he must inquire into his relationship with, that is his loyalty to, both Misra, the non-Somali surrogate mother to whom he owes his survival, and Somalia, the state that issues the birth certificate on

which he depends for his own advancement (*Maps* 3). The situation of Farah's characters, engaged in the delicate negotiation of autonomy and relationship, has resonance at the level of the nation. Their fragility as orphans is paralleled in the evident fragility of the nation, a parallel Farah made explicit in an interview in 1992: "Society is an orphaned baby, parentless, with no wise elder to guide it."[20] The postcolonial territory of Askar's birth, like Askar himself, is 'parentless'; it is an intellectual construct conceived by British, Italian, Ethiopian, and Somali cartographers. It is, as Askar describes himself, "a creature given birth to by notions formulated in heads, a creature brought into being by ideas" (3). Such creatures are, as Derek Wright points out, "adoptive beings with adopted identities defined by adoptive parents, and Farah sustains the analogue only by replacing Askar's real parents with a range of surrogates and guardians"[21] These are his surrogate mother Misra who nominally represents the Ethiopian occupier, his maternal uncle Hilaal, and aunt, Salaado, a Westernised couple who are both lecturers at the Somali National university in Mogadiscio, and who do not follow rigidly-defined Somali gender roles. Like Misra, they too are childless. Then there is his paternal uncle Qorrax, a brutal patriarch from Ogaden, and Aw Adan, a Koranic teacher who represents Islam, the religion of Somalia.

Askar's adoptive parents are an approximate guide to the colourful and diverse characters of Somalia. Both natural and adoptive parents have a role to play in Farah's investigation of national identity. Taken together, all these adoptive parents further the sense in which Askar/Somalia is the product of many influences. The free play in the adoption of parents is indicative of the novel's treatment of identity. Thus it is significant that Askar's natural parents exit the text early and turn out to be inconsequential figures in Askar's life. In Farah's 'postmodern' text there is a kind of cultural mixing and crossing over, not so that natural parentage does not matter, but so that it is overlaid with other claims and relationships. The various adoptive parents all have a part to play in one way or another in the multiple layering of postcolonial Somali experience. Movement and the constant exchange of parents underscores the hybridity and complexity of Askar's childhood and, by extension, points to the same features in the post-independence nation.

In *Maps* the analogy between family and nation is easier to trace if both its terms can be imagined as stable. But the fact that Askar was born an orphan, his mother

having died in childbirth and his father in the fight against Ethiopian colonisation, and the Ogaden wars which mutilate the body of the nation, make both nation and family drastically unstable; and these instabilities disrupt the content as well as the form of the novel. The novel begins with the boy Askar wondering who he is:

> You are a question to yourself. It is true. You've become a question to all those who meet you, those who know you, those who have any dealings with you. You doubt, at times, if you exist outside your own thoughts, outside your own head, Misra's or your own. (3)

And the novel ends with Askar asking, "Who is Askar?" (245). His journey to adulthood never answers this question for him, but suggests that there are multiple layers of 'selves,' conflicting voices jostling together, each claiming to speak for Askar. Farah creates three different narrative personae for the boy who tells his own story, assigning to each a different pronominal form: the first, second, and third person. Askar claims these as 'selves' all referring to him, to a story that ends, "And that was how it began - the story of (Misra [...] and) Askar [...] And time grew on Askar's face, as he told the story yet again. [...] Finally, allowing for his different personae to act as judge, as audience and as witness, Askar told it to himself" (246). Farah also uses dreams extensively to create the sense of another voice or 'self' trying to break into Askar's consciousness.

Maps begins with the pronoun 'you' and continues in second person narration for the duration of the first chapter. The next chapter is in first person narration and the following in the third person. These three narrative personae alternate in this order throughout the remainder of the novel. Farah, thus, explores not only second person narration, but also the potentialities for new meanings in juxtaposing different pronominal forms of narration, all of which are central to his treatment of identity in this novel. In *Maps*, Farah fully exploits the ambiguities inherent in second person narration in order to explore new territory in the construction of the self. The first chapter of *Maps* begins thus:

> You sit, in contemplative posture, your features agonized and your expression pained; you sit for hours and hours and hours, sleepless, looking into darkness, hearing a small snore coming from the room next to yours. And you conjure a past: a past in which you see a horse drop its rider; a past in which you discern a bird breaking out of its shell so it will fly into the heavens of freedom. Out of the same past emerges a man wrapped in a mantle with unpatched holes, each hole large as a window—and each window large as the secret to which you cling as though it were the only soul you possessed. And you question, you challenge every thought which crosses your mind. (3)

The emphasis on the repetition of 'you' gives rise to the questions: who is being addressed? And who is speaking? Generally, the pronoun 'you' applies to the person(s) being addressed, but throughout this narration there are no antecedents for this pronoun. The narration proceeds exactly as first or third person narration would; it would be possible to substitute 'I,' 'me,' and 'my,' or 'he'/ 'she'/ 'it' and 'his'/ 'her'/ 'its,' for 'you' and 'your' and the narrative would make perfect sense. It is apparent that the narrator is doing exactly this, in reverse, substituting the second person pronominal forms for the first person. 'You' as narrator effaces all signs of the narrating agency, as if the narrator wishes to remain invisible, not responsible for his own narration and detached from it. In fact, in one passage of the novel, Askar tells his uncle Hilaal that it seems as though another person - an older woman - is speaking through him, and what he utters are her words, not his own (151). The effect of narration in the second person is unnerving for the reader because it challenges the ordinary boundaries between 'self' and 'other,' subject and object.

There are several dimensions for meaning in second person narration, but one interpretation dominates. An implied narrator is speaking about himself impersonally as 'you.' 'You' then functions much the same as the impersonal 'one' functions in narration, adding a distant tone to the narrative. But 'you' is not exactly the same as 'one,' because it is more personal, referring to a specific (although here unnamed) person rather than the generic person. It also can carry an accusatory and a sceptical tone, which in the context of this novel is an important point. The speaker is Askar, who has been accused (and

perhaps convicted) of the murder of Misra, who cared for him when he was a child. On a first reading this opening passage is thus disorienting, but when we know the story it appears that Askar may be relating his thoughts as he sits in prison. Already, early in the text, Farah is asking us as readers to question how voice affects the validity of what is said. Askar, clinging obsessively to his 'secret,' questioning his every thought, seems to be a bit unhinged, overly paranoid, and the reader has every right to question his reliability as a narrator of his own story. Yet Socrates' voice, heard in the epigraph, states that "Living begins when you start doubting everything that came before you." These words of the authoritative Greek philosopher are probably skimmed over by readers, agreed to without question, simply because he *is* an authoritative Greek philosopher; but when we see Askar apparently following the same course of scepticism, he does not seem wise, but neurotic. This is typical of Farah's playful method in his texts.

I have already stated that the most obvious reading of the second person narration is that Askar is speaking about himself and his experiences. But other possibilities for interpreting these sections are also important. The second person passages can be read almost as if a person other than Askar - in this case Misra- were addressing him. Thus this narration represents those aspects of his psyche which he cannot separate from Misra, his mother figure and the person who had the most influence on moulding him as a very young child by "replacing [his] missing parents with her abundant self" (6). These passages could be Misra's voice as it has become internalised in the young man. As Rhonda Cobhan notes, "The 'you' voice... is clearly associated with the judgemental or accusatory presence in the narrative as it repeatedly challenges Askar to account for his actions and take responsibility for them."[22] Significantly, Askar uses this voice to relate events in his life of which he could not possibly have memories, such as the circumstances of his being found as newborn infant, lying next to the corpse of his mother. Only Misra could have had personal knowledge of this event, and Askar probably knows of himself at this stage only through her words. This is also true of his first meeting with his uncle Qorrax when he was a few days old, at which time he screamed until Qorrax left, and of many other experiences that occurred early in his life. How many of Misra's words have gone into Askar's construction of his identity? Can he trust memories of his past that have been passed on to him only indirectly? Can he trust

Misra's memories of him, when he cannot trust even his own memories of events? These questions preoccupy Askar throughout the narrative. The novel seems to imply, as will be discussed later, that Askar, despite his search for a unique Somali identity, cannot exorcise Misra's influence and, by extension, the divided and ambivalent society, which he himself best symbolises. Thus, the second-person narrator, the sceptical narrative voice, often reminds Askar of the bond between him and Misra, and always shows the gaps in Askar's memory about the relationship that narration cannot shore up.

A final disorienting element of second-person narration for the reader is that the boundary between character and reader, text and 'real' life is challenged. There is always a trace of feeling in these passages that 'you' refers to the reader, who is being addressed by an unnamed and unlocatable speaker. According to Cobhan, the reader feels implicated in the textuality of the text: the "you" voice's "outer-directedness also has the effect of challenging the reader, who feels uncomfortably included in the reiterative 'you'" (*Boundaries* 49). This adds a layer of meaning to Askar's search for his identity, for not only must he ask who he is and how he constructs his "selves," but readers are also drawn into this interrogation by the second person narrator, and must ask what their own role is in constructing the 'self' of a literary character.

For the most part, this novel of questioning boundaries, personal, national and sexual, is told by three distinct narrative personae, corresponding to the three pronominal forms. But as the story progresses there are moments when even these boundaries seem to dissolve. For example, one narrative persona may contradict what another persona has already said. Chapter Two begins with the first-person narrator explicitly contradicting what the second-person narrator had asserted in Chapter One: "Misra never said to me that I existed for her only in my look. What she said was that she could see in my stare an itch of intelligence - that's all" (23). But earlier the 'you' persona had related of Askar's discovery by Misra: "To Misra, you existed first and foremost in the weird stare: you were, to her, your eyes, which, once they found her, focused on her guilt – her self!" (6). Askar relates that Misra's lover Aw Adan also commented about his stare: "He commented on the look in your eyes: a look he described as 'wicked and satanic'" (11). Misra, however, defends Askar: "To have met death when not quite a being, perhaps this explains why he exists primarily in the look in his eyes" (11). Thus the different

pronominal forms of the narrator sometimes contradict each other, undercutting each other's authority, and causing Askar and his readers to question how and why the boundaries of 'self' and 'other' are determined and what can be learned from conflicting versions of the 'truth.'

The narrative machinery in *Maps* warns the reader about the difficulty of using narration as a way of establishing identity by underscoring the problematic of narrative sincerity. The first-person narrator, presumably Askar's voice, seeks to recollect himself and privilege his representation of events, but the second-person narrator always undermines his authority. Thus even at the level of narration, Farah foregrounds a contradictory sense of identity by using conflicting voices to destabilise the very ground upon which the reader can either interpret the story or fix Askar's identity.

The first-person narrator is the vehicle through which Askar attempts to establish not only his personal history, but also to reconstruct the history of his people as a way of establishing his position in Somali society. When he first became aware of the war, he noticed that Misra was viewed as different by the townspeople: "I remembered that she was different from us - that she wasn't a Somali like me and the others [...] And I, too, saw her in a different light. She wore a grim appearance and was ugly" (94). Askar tries to discover his identity by learning about his society, especially the history of the Somali-Ethiopian conflict: Haile Selassie's attempt at imposing Amharic on an intransigent Ogaden population (84), the short-lived Somali victory over Ethiopia, and the "tragic weekend" when "Soviet, Cuban and Adenese Generals [...] returned the destiny of the Ogaden and its people to Ethiopian hands" (155). "To live, I will have to kill you" (57), he says as he begins to develop nationalist aspirations to live a life independent of his surrogate 'Ethiopian' mother Misra. Whether Askar does murder Misra is never revealed to the reader (the identity of her killers is left unclear), but becomes the central question around which the entire narrative revolves, and Askar's probing and questioning of his own heart and mind. The central point is that Askar might well have killed her because killing her would be the logical outcome of the politics to which he has committed himself. Killing Misra, as she herself understood, will make the "dream" of nationalism "tangible" (95). Thus, the first-person narrator in this novel, like most early nationalists, has a special reverence for history, an "allegiance to [...] the notion of a

nationhood" (89). Neverthless, Askar's sense of his separate identity is continually undermined throughout the novel by the second-person narrator and by his long and deep intimacy with Misra: "You doubt, at times, if you exist outside your own thoughts, outside your own head, Misra's or your own"(3).

The third person-narrator, most often used in recounting Askar's dreams, provides a record of political events that run parallel to the story of Askar's life. In some instances, it provides the historical perspective, which may well be the voice of Askar's uncle, Hilaal, as Cobham argues: "Hilaal," to whose home in Mogadiscio Askar moves on leaving the Ogaden, "provides a socio-political gloss of events through which Askar may contextualise his experience" (*Boundaries* 90). Indeed, Askar's intellectual maturity and patriotic sentiments are partly moulded by Hilaal, especially after Hilaal makes the point that "Somalia is unique. It is named after Somalis, who share a common ancestor and who speak the same language [...] Somalis who have fought and will fight for the realisation of their nationalist goals" (148), and that Somalia is one of the few nations in Africa that can define itself in "specific" rather than "generic" terms:

> Ethiopia is the generic name of an unclassified mass of peoples, professing different religions, claiming to have been descended from different ancestors. Therefore "Ethiopia" becomes the generic notion, expansive, inclusive. Somali, if we come to it, is specific. That is, you are either a Somali or you aren't. (148)

Hilaal's definition of Somali and Somalia, as will be shown later, leaves Askar uncertain about his identity as well as that of Misra which is inseparable from his. It is likely that it is Hilaal's voice which Askar appropriates when he begins to look on education as a way of defining his culture.

By making the retrospective construction of events the central method of situating identity, *Maps* concentrates on the function of narration in self-definition. The first-person narrator, whom Cobham calls the 'I' narrator, is the voice that most approximates to Askar's naive nationalist dream of recreating history. Cobham rightly says that it is a "voice [...] through which Askar [...] plots his position as fixed, or at

least stable" (*Boundaries* 89). It is the voice that Askar uses to define his 'specific' Somali adult maleness against his 'generic' Ethiopian surrogate mother by having recourse to other strategies such as mirrors and maps in order to establish the distance from Misra, and from his repressed 'feminine' self:

> The one to reflect my visage, showing me whether or not I've grown a beard after so many disastrous beginnings--including, do you remember? My saying that if Karin's menopausal hair-on-the-chin was "manlier" than mine it was high time I did something about it; the other, i.e. the maps which give me the distance in scales of kilometrage--the distance that is between you and me. Which is to say that we are a million minutes apart, your "anatomy" and mine. (18)

Askar's 'I' voice also uses the image of a "third leg" to describe himself: "Misra who eventually tucked me into the oozy warmth between her breasts [...] so much so that I became a third breast" lying "somewhere between her opened legs [...] as though I was a third leg" (24). This image specifically likens Askar to the penis of Misra's lover, the crippled Aw Adan who removes his wooden leg - as "another between his legs came to raise its head" (31) - before having intercourse with Misra. Is it his desire to masculinise Misra and feminise himself? Curiously, it is the 'I' voice that also seems to articulate Askar's female self. It is possible that now in Mogadiscio Askar feels more comfortable acknowledging the feminine aspect of his being, probably because he is with an uncle who himself, in his own life, stretches the gender roles of his society. Askar explains to Hilaal that he feels that another person, an older woman, lives in him and that sometimes "I speak not my words, my ideas, but hers. And during the time I'm spoken through, as it were, I am she--not I" (151). Later in Mogadiscio, Askar tells Hilaal: " 'I menstruated one night when I was asleep. Just like women do. Just like Misra used to" (151).

The narrative voices intended to define Askar are shifting and unstable as they are shown to be unable to draw the line between gender and national boundaries. They are, indeed, turned into weapons that Farah uses to challenge and deconstruct the idea of

nation as having a stable and fixed status. Askar's anxieties about questions of gender and national identity are played out in Farah's introduction of the term 'misgenderer.'

Askar's nationalistic tutor Cusmaan introduced Askar to the concept of 'misgendering.' It is a term which appeared in the title of Cusmaan's doctoral thesis, although Askar is unsure whether he remembers it correctly; the word may have been 'mispronunciation.' 'Misgendering' refers to the replacing or displacing of the masculine third-person singular pronoun by the feminine pronoun (161), which tends to occur among non-native speakers of Somali. Farah provides analogues in the novel to this linguistic phenomenon. The best example is Misra's staging of Askar's 'menstruation,' which is an attempt to replace or displace the male body and experience by the female. (Is it coincidence that Misra is a foreigner who has problems pronouncing Somali?) Another analogue is Askar's dream of exchanging bodies with a young woman (60), and a third is the displacing of one person's voice by another's during episodes of psychic 'possession' which appear twice in the text. In the first instance, Karin reveals that she is possessed by a male spirit during the *cuudis* ceremony, which Askar witnesses. Askar comments, "They forced her to tell lies, heaps of lies. Otherwise, how could she give her name as the name of a man?" (102). He does not clarify whether this was his response as a child or his present attitude as the narrator. Later in Mogadiscio, he and Misra witness the *mingis* ritual which also deals with possession. In this instance, a woman is possessed by the spirit of another woman, and although Askar's attitude is that of watching an entertainment, at the ceremony's completion he seems more open to the possibility that the possession is genuine. Farah's use of gender confusion through the trans-sexual spirits of the *mingis*, as well as the misgendering of language brought by refugees from the Ogaden and elsewhere, are symbolic of the interpenetration of national and marginal cultures which come to constitute Somali identity.

Farah comments in an interview with Robert Moss (1986) that " everyone contains different things--the woman in the child, the man in the woman and so on."[23] Like the trans-sexual spirits of the *mingis* ceremony, the childless Misra from Ethiopia and the motherless Askar from Somalia cut across the novel's political landscapes and reach across the borderlines to live inside each other. Through the term 'misgendering,' *Maps* explores the territories of the fluid boundaries of gender and national categories,

the possibility of the overlapping of these categories and the displacement of one by another. The body, the novel seems to imply, makes "autonomous decisions" (221), and there are several references to Western body-literature ranging from Freud, Wilhelm Reich to Sylvia Plath and Gunter Grass (222). Wright rightly argues that Farah has written a great novel of the body, but at the same time suggests that the body can serve as a transcendental ground for identity, avoiding the problems of the nationality-ridden world of maps the novel raises: "The body seems in the novel to be an alternative way of constituting identity, more reliable than maps" (*The Novels of Nuruddin Farah* 118). Yet, the novel also seems to imply, the body is itself mapped by culture, and this process of mapping depends partly on the map of the national territory. In *Maps,* Farah's use of the body serves to represent the nation, but by reversals, he manages to rewrite the metaphor of nation as body in the light of Somali beliefs and consistent with Somali postcolonial history. As a male who menstruates, Askar is confused about bodily identities. Misra undergoes a mastectomy and, as a border woman symbolising the Ogaden, she is murdered and her body found with one breast missing and her heart torn out. Hilaal has had a vasectomy, and his wife salaado a hysterectomy. The novel has other characters with wooden legs, penises cut off; it is, indeed, a novel about "Stories with fragmented bodies! Bodies which told fragmented stories!" (154). The tension between the integrated and the disintegrating body is metaphorical for postcolonial Somalia.

The term 'misgenderer' seems to apply equally not only to Askar's unstable gender identity but also to his national identity which seems to him to be contaminated by his closeness with his non-Somali surrogate mother, Misra. As war escalates in the Ogaden, together with the general Somali distrust of non-Somalis of the Ogaden, the seven-year-old Askar begins to separate from the female world of Misra, by playing guerrilla-warfare games with a band of young male companions. Askar's first steps towards psychological independence from Misra lead him to forbid Misra to touch him or "to wash the dirt my body has accumulated when training to kill my people's enemy" (109). When he has finally distanced himself from Misra, following his move to Mogadiscio, the separation is complete: "What mattered, he told himself, was that now he was at last a man, that he was totally detached from his mother-figure Misra, and weaned. In the process of looking for a substitute, he had found another--Somalia, his mother

country" (96). Askar's nationalist narrative is, however, repeatedly interrupted by his menstruation or by his inability to differenciate between maleness and femaleness, between Misra and himself, all of which are central to Farah's critique of the resolute manliness of nationalist discourse. Farah emphasises Askar's mode of identity construction in order to question its stability and relevance for the signifier 'nation' within the Ogaden and for contemporary Somalia as a whole. As shall be seen in what follows, Farah undermines Askar's nationalist quest and expectations through his treatment of and emphasis on the linguistic heteroglossia, Askar's relationship to Misra, and the motif of maps.

Language in *Maps* is one of the fundamental tools in Farah's criticism of Askar's nationalist quest. Instead of the linguistic homogeneity which the Somalis of the WSLF claim is 'specific' and unites people, there is a more diverse and free coexistence of different linguistic groups in the Ogaden: Somali, Amharic, and Arabic, spoken by people who are, in reality, much more bonded than the Somalis of the WSLF. In Mogadiscio, for example, as Wright points out, the tutor of Cusmaan (one of a large group of Somalis scattered through Kenya and Tanzania), Askar's intellectual mentor, "when [...] not speaking Swahili," uses "a bastardized, ungrammatical form of Somali."[24] The linguistic 'specificity' of Greater Somalia is shown to be disintegrating. In another category, there is Misra, a non-ethnic Somali speaker (she represents a large Amharic- speaking population in the Ogaden) who, although she is fully assimilated and teaches Askar the Somali language, is marginalised and denied a place in what the Somalis of WSLF call a 'natural' or 'specific' Somali identity. It is, however, through the relationship between Misra and Askar that Farah foregrounds the role of language in the construction of identity.

Language and writing, argues Hilaal, were part of the coloniser's project, and have been used to dominate and denigrate the culture of the colonised. History, Hilaal tells Askar, "has proven that whoever is supported by the written metaphysics of a tradition wins, in the long run, the fight to power" (168). After this, Askar comes to understand the importance of sign-systems to his nationalistic project: "I thought to myself: write, write down your history in the name of the same civilization" (172). After listening to Hilaal's analysis and conception of the power of sign-systems, Askar affirms

that "every letter became a word. [...] all I have to do was to say 'cut' and it would cut the enemy's head" (168).

Askar links language and identity in an unproblematic way. Farah, however, using the language issue in an attempt to frustrate Somali cultural insularity, shows that the Somali national character, despite the criteria for Somali nationhood postulated by Askar, Hilaal and the WSLF patriots, lies in its diversity. In "Why I Write," Farah admits that although Somalia is "the only country in Africa that qualifies to be called a nation, [...] they [Somalis] have scattered themselves to the winds."[25] As such, *Maps* seems to imply, although Somalis do possess a single language, it does not exist in isolation from other languages. Cusmaan's tutor, for example, as mentioned above, "uses a bastardized, ungrammatical form of Somali" similar to that spoken by the Ogadenese marginal groups, the Oromo and Qotto. But it is through the Misra-Askar relationship that Farah reveals the impurity of the Somali cultural/nationalist text. When the "native" Somali Askar is born, he is adopted by a 'foreign' surrogate mother, Misra. Under Misra's influence, Askar inevitably draws on two cultural frames of reference, and puts to use two linguistic codes: Somali and Amharic. When Askar tries to distance himself from Misra and, therefore, from the otherness within him, the second-person narrator, the voice that Askar defines as "you who sit in judgement over me," questions him, and ironically reminds him of his special relationship with Misra: "There was something maternal about the universe Misra introduced you to [...] She was the one who took you back to the world-of-the-womb [...] replacing your missing parents with her abundant self which she offered generously to you" (6).

In *Maps,* markers of identity can no longer be used in a precise way. Although Misra has a great influence on Askar's identity, she herself does not represent any stable conception of identity. Misra, Wright notes, "is not a unitary being who can be comprehensively enclosed and defined by maps but represents the various parts of cultures and countries." (*Novels of Nuruddin Farah*, 133). She is the daughter of an Amhara nobleman seeking a male heir and an Oromo woman. As Misra was born a girl, both she and her mother were rejected. Then she was kidnapped and taken to a town by a Somali warrior, where she was left to the care of a wealthy Somali man who adopted her, and then made her his wife when she reached sexual maturity. She apparently killed this

adopted father (we know Misra's story only through Askar's narration) and wanders off into Kallafo where she becomes a servant and later a mistress of Askar's paternal uncle, Qorrax. Misra also has Qotto and Ethiopian lovers. She thus represents the hybrid spirit of the Ogaden. She is a border person with a choice of identities. She overrides the inwardness of the 'identité sauvage,' in Khatibi's sense, which Farah also decries in this novel. When she is accused of being a traitor by the WSLF patriots, for buying milk for her "people," the Ethiopian soldiers, she says, "the problem is, who are 'my people'?" (184).

In place of cultural purity or authenticity Farah, through Misra, argues for a recognition of hybridity and cultural mixing that would move away from ghettoisation. In this sense Farah is very much in the company of Salman Rushdie, another writer whose country has been partitioned. In discussing *The Satanic Verses* (1989), Rushdie writes in 1990:

> *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the pure. *Mélange,* hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it.[26]

Like Rushdie, Farah's *Maps* challenges the artificial fixity of identity and the restrictive containment of meaning. The role Askar's maps play in the novel is another important way Farah rereads identity.

Maps parallel Farah's rereading of identity in *Maps.* Commenting on the colonial maps of Africa, Farah said in an interview (1986), "We should redraw [them] according to our economic and psychological and social needs, and not accept the nonsensical frontiers carved out of our regions."[27] This is not, however, how Askar's cartographic project, in its initial phase, begins in this novel. Just as Misra introduces Askar to Somali language and folklore, so "it was she from whom he learnt how to locate and name things and people, she who helped him place himself at the centre of a world"

(*Maps* 54). After the *Ciid* ceremony, she arranges for him to be given his first "globe and a map" by his uncle Qorrax (91). Askar's use of the map, at its initial stage, occurs during the time of the war, a time when Askar was already playing guerrilla-warfare games, and when everybody was talking of the possibility of Somalia, the "mother," getting together with the "Ogaden/child separated from her" (97). To mark this possibility, Askar's map becomes another kind of narrative, of self-narration, with consequences for his identity as well as for Misra's:

> Askar noted the mother and the child's efforts on the map uncle had presented him with, just as he traced, on another mental chart, the uncoverable distance between Misra and himself. She began to lose weight; he, to grow it. She sat in a corner, sulking; he, as prominent as the map he read to the illiterates surrounding him, spoke knowledgeably, enthusiastically about the liberation war which his people were waging against Misra's people.
> [...] At least, he kept thinking to himself, staring at the map on the wall, there would be changes in the cartographer's view of the Horn of Africa. And so, with his felt pen, using his own body, he re-drew the map of the Somali-speaking territories, copied it curve by curve, depression by depression. (97)

In using his body to encode Somalia, Askar, perhaps, echoes one of his dreams early in the novel of a world where "most people they met along the way had their bodies tattooed with their identities: that is name, nationality and address. Some have engraved on their skins the reason why they had become who they were when living and others had printed on their foreheads or backs their national flags or insignia" (42). But this dreamworld is different from the real world in which Askar and Misra live, a world inhabited by "Stories with fragmented bodies! Bodies which told fragmented stories!" Askar's re-drawing of "the map of the Somali-speaking territories" which is based on the notion of linguistic and cultural "specificity" of Greater Somalia, overrides social, political and cultural divisions, just as colonial maps overrode linguistic and ethnic boundaries. Askar's map, then, is not itself an invention, but a projection of inventions. He uses the same arbitrary methods that the colonialists had used to carve out the

continent of Africa. The problem with Askar's map is that it claims to unite Somalis, currently split between Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti and the Ogaden, who have become diverse and inescapably hybridised, while it leaves him uncertain about Misra who is part of himself. What is a national identity if it does not lie in blood or lineage, in language, in a clearly demarcated territory? To answer this question, Askar starts to re-evaluate his map.

As discussed earlier, Hilaal uses the highly charged terms 'generic' and 'specific' to define national identity. Somalia is 'specific' because it has a common language that can unite people, whereas Ethiopia is 'generic,' because of its diverse tribes and languages. At first, Askar seems to accept this definition, but the situation (or lack of it) of Misra and Somali refugees within Hilaal's definition throws him into confusion. Misra speaks fluent Somali and has lived most of her life within Somali communities, and Somali refugees, because of political and economic necessity, live in Kenya, the Ogaden and elsewhere. For Hilaal, Somali-speaking people living outside the nation state are classified as "unpersons" (167), and cannot be admitted to a full Somali identity. Hilaal's definition of Somali identity leaves Askar in a state of uncertainty about where to draw the national boundaries and how to situate himself and Misra within them. After the confusion that Hilaal's definition creates, Askar admits that "I wish I had told him I didn't understand the concept" (167).

Askar begins to learn that the map is a false representation and a tool of domination. He remembers seeing " a map a German cartographer had drawn as his country invaded and conquered more and more of Europe" (217). He begins to realise that the map is as distortive of reality as the example he gives of "the Mercator projections of the world map and the image the cartographers imprinted on the imagination of billions of school-going populations everywhere in the world" (218). He finally accepts that maps as boundary markers distort, and that the arbitrary finds its way into all decision-making processes as national boundaries shift and names of countries change according to cartographic hegemony. He, thus, proceeds to re-evaluate his map as a boundary marker, erasing the "Ogaden" and replacing it by "Western Somalia" (217). When Hilaal saw this change on Askar's map, he asks, "Tell me, Askar. Do you find truth

in the maps you draw?" (216). Askar's reply is, as I read it, a challenge to Hilaal's view of identity that sees a symmetry between a map and a national territory:

> I identify *a* truth in the maps which I draw. When I identify *this* truth, I label it as such, pickle it as though I were to share it with you, and Salaado. I hope, as dreamers do, that the dreamt dream will match the dreamt reality - that is, the invented dream of one's imagination. My maps invent nothing. They copy a given reality, they map out the roads a dreamer has walked, they identify a notional truth. (216)

Askar's mapping of his land, as he admits, is an invention that has been performed several times before him to empower the map-maker. He thus 'pickles' his map and reimagines a world in which he would not wake from nightmares shouting, "Who am I? Who am I? Where am I? Where am I? Who am I? (93), a world in which he would be at one with Misra as well as his separate self. His 'notional truth' would allow the Ogaden to live out its hybrid identity while being part of Somalia. The 'notional truth' of maps in this novel, however, is a highly subjective kind of truth and is not conducive to a stable identity. "The question is," says Hilaal, undermining Askar's notional truth, "does *truth* change? [...] The Ogaden, as Somali, is truth. To the Ethiopian map-maker, the Ogaden, as Somali, is untruth" (217). Because maps are moveable and arbitrary, as Askar admits, Farah insists in this novel that there are no certainties or stable identities in the Somali situation or in its historical context. Through Askar's conception of maps as arbitrary and, therefore, transposable, Farah questions established national boundaries, and the stable identity presupposed by the map-maker. Boundaries must be seen as a contested construct, as imaginary. Askar, who is the human analogue of the Somali Ogaden, describes himself as "a creature given birth to by notions formulated in heads, a creature brought into being by ideas" (3).

Farah's comment in an essay (1995) that an entity such as a country or a nation exists simply in his imagination captures vividly this idea of boundaries as imaginary:

> I have dwelled in the dubious details of a territory I often refer to as the country of my imagination. I have always considered countries to be no more than working hypotheses, portals opening on assumptions of loyalty to an idea: a people pledging their eternal vows to a locality which happens to be where they were born and which they choose to call home.[28]

And he further adds, "At times though one's loyalty may be owed to another idea equally valid. During the long travel out of one hypothesis to another a refugee is born, who lives in a country too amorphous to be favoured with a name" (29). Upon the failure of one's country as a 'hypothesis,' Farah argues, one becomes another, a nomad or a 'refugee,' discarding the old reality and its logic, for a new country and a new logic. Thus, for Farah, breaking down national boundaries in *Maps* allows for a new configuration, but one that must be aware of its preceding spatial configurations, and forces a remapping of the terrain, paving the way for alternative groupings to the 'mess' that exists in Somalia and in Africa as a whole.

In Farah's use of the map, territory is 'vibratory;' and as such it evokes the Deleuze and Guattari rhizome-map; it is subject to "a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction [...] open and connectable [...] susceptible to constant modification [...] by an individual, group, or social formation."[29] In *Maps*, Farah maps a postmodern literary territory: spaces inhabited by composite characters, multiple presences, and different competing views, to show the idea of nation as having a shifting and unstable meaning. He thus moves away from the Somali or African nationalist discourse and its obsession with a fixed identity within its imagined sovereign space, to the creation of a semantic overdetermination and, indeed, to a dynamic and fluid notion of identity. As Wright observes, in "*Maps* everything is of transitional and indeterminate identity, melting from one form into another [...] sexual, national and ontological boundaries are straddled." (*The Novels of Nuruddin Farah* 19). The map, then, as a trope used to challenge previous modes of postcolonial identity discourse, enables Farah to implement another agenda: the blurring of ethnic and national boundaries as a potential space of creativity and empowerment is the alternative to the oppressive hierarchies of Africa's inherited modern nations.

The importance of Farah's *Maps* lies in the intervention it makes in the historical narrative of Somali/African nationalism, its refusal to mythologise the national identity of Somalia, and the challenge it poses to the modern African state as a whole. It does this by transgressing national and sexual boundaries in order to expose the shifting and unstable meaning of the nation, and by forcing or enabling a rhizomatic standing (a smooth space) of Somalia that would take into account the urgent question of a hybrid, mongrelised reality. Narration itself is problematic. Farah's narrator Askar, referring to himself in all three persons, is still asking at the end of the novel 'Who is Askar?' and is still unable to stabilise his sexual identity or the notion of national identity, all of which are metaphors for the instability of the signifier 'nation.' Deterritorialising the nationalist text is a good thing: "Someone was speaking nationalist rhetorics, in which plenty of Somali as enemy blood was shed" (*Maps* 126), and as a result of which Misra's body was mutilated. Farah's call is Misra's call: not to marginalise and kill the other to make our 'people's dream a tangible reality,' but to offer paradigms of sexual and cultural identity which move across boundaries and differences which may separate people.

Conclusion

In both *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps*, the blurring of identities parallels the blurring of frontiers, and the narrative strategies employed by Farah and Ben Jelloun parallel the nomadic state of their protagonists who reside neither here nor there, yearning to become. Both texts are ultimately tales of nomadic hybridity told by postcolonial literary nomads: it is not possible to fix the characters or the texts to one identity or meaning because, like the symbolism of sand or maps in these texts, meaning is shifting and unstable. The reader too is left in a nomadic state as the texts do not follow a linear trajectory, nor do they provide any sense of closure. Even the protagonists Ahmed/Zahra and Askar express a desire for closure and so do the members of their communities. Both texts frustrate this desire for closure by challenging the notion of absolute truth.

In *L'Enfant de sable*, the storytellers' versions of Ahmed/Zahra's ending seem to cancel out each other. Thus neither version has ownership of the 'truth.' At the end of the novel, the storyteller, delivering the story into the hands of the audience in the square,

undermines any sense of closure: "Si quelqu'un parmi vous tient à connaître la suite de cette histoire, il devra interroger la lune quand elle sera entièrement pleine. Moi, je dépose là devant vous le livre, l'encrier et le porte-plume" (208-9). Similarly in *Maps*, Misra's murder remains a mystery. Askar's arrest by the police is the only fact the reader has that suggests he may be implicated in her murder. The text provides no certainties, only gaps and conflicting assertions in the stories told by Askar's several selves.

It is possible to see in the absence of closure and non-linear narratives in these two texts the influence of orality. This can be read as an expression of resistance to the residual colonial influence, and, as Rhonda Cobhan indicates, to the imposed linearity of European narrative: "The modern novel, with its roots in the era that produced European nationalism and bourgeois notions of individualism, offers the African writer only limited scope for naming states of being beyond the parameters of modern Western cultural experience."[30] African novelists, creating in a genre and language of the former coloniser, are apt to seek alternative structures which suggest linear transgression. It is also possible that orality alone offers only "limited scope for naming states of being." John Erickson's article, "Writing Double: Politics and the African Narrative of French Expression" (1991), suggests that Ben Jelloun "counters the system of traditional narrative by rejecting the reductive ideology that underlies it."[31] Both *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps* reject traditional national and sexual identity by portraying protagonists who disrupt the fixed and the given and seek out alternatives. Certain attitudes come with certain national locations. Both Farah and Ben Jelloun live in exile and, like their protagonists, they are unsituated and confront the reader with the complexity of the situation of those who live in exile whether outside or inside their own culture.

Ben Jelloun and Farah resist fixed boundaries in their writing: reality is not presented as two-dimensional, and meaning is found through the juxtaposition of ideas. Neither presents fixed boundaries between men and women or Western and African references and ways of seeing. Some critics suggest that this makes them 'postmodern' or more 'postmodern' than postcolonial. To think that the discourses of postmodernism have no role to play in the discourses of postcolonialism is to think that postcolonialism can work with closed paradigms. It is important to note here that the recurrence of the term hybridity in my analysis of the two texts is not definitive of all postcolonial

writing/theory. Not all forms of postcolonial writing are centred on hybridity. As an important concept, however, hybridity deserves attention here to understand Ben Jelloun's and Farah's situation within critical and intellectual landscapes. Hybridity has become the defining characteristic of many postcolonial writers and theorists. In his comment on the traditional and concrete nature of hybridity in ex-colonised countries, Sanjeev Uprety writes:

> In the case of third-world identities, identity is not only a matter of choice, but more than in any other context an issue of survival. A third-world subject must memorize the history of other nations, learn other languages, and adopt other fathers if he/she is to acquire a proper place in the social and economic ladder.[32]

Homi K Bhabha and like-minded critics, however, have focussed their critical work on the liberating and empowering aspects of the trope of hybridity. These critical works on hybridity have been summarised in the same article by Uprety:

> In recent years there has been a tendency in contemporary theoretical formulations to consider hybridity not as a 'moral marker of... contamination, failure or regression' (Papastergiadis), but a positive concept that signifies the possibility of creative growth and understanding. Taking his cue from Rushdie, Bhabha speaks of the sense of empowerment, and 'migrant's double vision' in this space of hybridity and transformation, and Braidotti similarly describes the hybrid, 'nomadic' state in terms of empowerment and agency. For her the nomadic state does not consist in the literal act of travelling but in the 'subversion of set conventions.' Identities rooted in a hybrid space do not only occupy a privileged position of understanding at the crossroads of different cultures; their unique position also allows them to subvert and rewrite the cultural codes by using one cultural/symbolic system against another. From their vantage point of 'double vision', those with hybrid identities can perceive they can have an understanding of multiple cultures,

> and they can use that understanding to create new [...] forms of thought, new ways of aesthetic and political expression. (369)

The hybrid, in the case of Ben Jelloun and Farah as with Khatibi, can be considered a nomad for, as Braidotti suggests, the nomadic state consists not only in the literal act of travelling (nomadism has always existed in Morocco and Somalia) but in the "subversion of set conventions," emphasising the position of being in-between and beyond boundaries. Nomadic hybridity enables the understanding that the identity of the postcolonial subject is not only the composite of two cultures (European and African, for example, as with Achebe). It is rather an identity that is made up of multiple elements that are fluid, not fixed, and that continue to be created in the present independently from the rigid and fixed categories into which Ahmed and Askar were born. Nomadic hybridity, in other words, is a choice. The ambiguity and indeterminacy of Askar and Ahmed/Zahra are shown to be positive. The fluidity of their identities as well as the in-between space they occupy is celebrated in both texts. The issue, as Uprety notes, is "one of crossing the borders, of constructing an identity at the moment of rupture, and of dissolving boundaries" (368). A powerful allegorical connection is also to be found between artist and protagonist. Ben Jelloun and Farah's nomadic literary territory, like their identities as postcolonial subjects, is captured by Salman Rushdie's reflection about the identity of the postcolonial writer:

> Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.[33]

In light of my reading of *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps*, nomadic hybridity is, for Farah and Ben Jelloun, part of identity construction. Apparently, as has been seen in both texts, this is indicative of the larger blurring of boundaries in postmodern discourse that is finding a place in some postcolonial fictions. Postcolonialism and postmodernism have certain things in common such as, for example, the questioning of grand narratives.

Nevertheless, the position that this study takes is that postcolonial writers (not all by any means) may draw on whatever techniques and models in Europe or in their cultures to create space for a criticism that acknowledges differences and divergences, and to imagine an alternative subjectivity that is neither the universal nor the communal subject of modernist or nationalist discourse, respectively. An alternative such as this is one of the most important concerns in *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps*. Farah and Ben Jelloun, do not erase the experience of their people from their texts, and identify intimately with the human condition of their respective countries.

Notes

[1] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 11.

[2] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'Enfant de sable* (Paris: Seuil, 1985)

[3] Nuruddin Farah, *Maps* (New York: Pantheon, 1986)

[4] Aamir Mufti, "Reading the Rushdie Affair: An Essay on Islam and Politics," *Social Text* 19.4 (1991) 96.

[5] See Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, especially the chapter entitled "Double Critique."

[6] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La Nuit sacrée* (Paris: Seuil, 1987) 138.

[7] Jacques Lacan. *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) 278.

[8] Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1975) 138.

[9] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La plus haute des solitudes: misère sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains* (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 56.

[10] Joan Phyllis Monego, *Maghrebian Literature in French* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1984) 29.

[11] Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé précédé de portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995, originally published 1957) 166.

[12] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 11.

[13] Lisa Lowe, "Literary Nomadics in Francophone Allegories of Postcolonialism: Pham Van Ky and Tahar Ben Jelloun," *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993) 56.

[14] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the subaltern Speak?," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1988) 308.

[15] See Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1987) 205.

[16] Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *La sexualité en Islam* (Paris: P.U.F., 1975) 45-46.

[17] Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë* (Paris: Juliard, 1961) 190.

[18] Nuruddin Farah, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (London: Heinemann, 1980, originally published 1979) 97.

[19] Nuruddin Farah, "A Combining of Gifts: An Interview," by Maya Jaggi. *Third World Quaterly* 11.3 (1989) 184.

[20] Nuruddin Farah, "Nuruddin Farah," in Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock, eds, *Interviews with writers of the Post-colonial World* (Jackson: University Press of Mississipi, 1992) 59.

[21] Derek Wright, *The novels of Nuruddin Farah* (Bayreuth, Germany: Bayreuth University, 1994) 110.

[22] Rhonda Cobhan, "Boundaries of the Nation, Boundaries of the Self: African Nationalist Fictions and Nuruddin Farah's *Maps," Research in African Literatures*, 22.2 (Summer 1991) 49.

[23] Nuruddin Farah, "Mapping the Psyche: Interview with Robert Moss," *West Africa* 1 (September 1986) 1827.

[24] Derek Wright, "Parenting the Nation: Some Observations on Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*," *College Literature* 19.3/20.1 (1992/93) 182.

[25] Nuruddin Farah, "Why I Write" *Third World Quarterly* 10.4 (1988) 1597-98.

[26] Salman Rushdie. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta/Viking, 1991) 394.

[27] Nuruddin Farah, "Wretched Life," Interview with Patricia Morris *Africa Events* (September 1986) 54.

[28] Nuruddin Farah, "Bastards of Empire: Writing and the Politics of Exile," *Transition* 5.1 (Spring 1995) 28.

[29] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Originally published as *Mille Plateaux*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (London: The Athlone Press, 1988) 313-12.

[30] Rhonda Cobhan, "Misgendering the Nation: African Nationalist Fictions and Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*," in Andrew Parker *et al*, eds, *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 47.

[31] John Erickson, "Writing Double: Politics and the African Narrative of French Expression" *Studies in 20th Century Literature XV* (1991) 112.

[32] Sanjeev Kumor Uprety, "Disability and postcoloniality in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children* and Third-World novels," in Lennard J. Davis, ed, *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York; London: Routledge, 1997) 376.

[33] Quoted in Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998) 21.

Chapter Four

Women's Voice and the Postcolonial African Woman Writer in Assia Djebar's *l'Amour, la fantasia* and Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*

The 'radical' theories of national culture of Fanon, Anderson, and Albert Memmi contain no analysis of the role of women or of family life in the development of national culture. Albert Memmi's and Frantz Fanon's theories about the (ex)colonised intellectual and history argue that the first step in 'decolonising the mind' is the construction of a positive historical and cultural heritage in response to the denigration perpetrated against indigenous institutions and attitudes by the coloniser. In their essays, Fanon and Memmi assume that the 'colonised intellectual' is a male colonised subject; they might mention the role women have played in revolutionary struggles, but they do not envision the possibility that colonised women have specific concerns in regard to their relationship to history. When nationalist movements turn nostalgically to the past in search of cultural roots, the roles of women were even more limited. Mina Davis Caufield expresses the concern that nationalist movements "may perpetuate the oppression of women in the name of tradition and in opposition to Western influence."[1] George Mosse describes a similar phenomenon in connection with the position of women in the discourse of nineteenth-century European nationalism: "Woman was the embodiment of respectability; even as defender and protector of the people she was assimilated to her traditional role as woman and mother, the custodian of tradition, who kept nostalgia alive in the active world of men."[2] Jean Franco describes a similar pattern in Mexico:

> Women were especially crucial to the imagined community as mothers of the new men and as guardians of private life, which from independence onward was increasingly seen as a shelter from political turmoil. Two aspects of the recodification of gender deserve special attention; the carving out of a territory of domestic stability and decency from which all low elements were expelled, and the displacement of the religious onto the national, which once again made "purity" the responsibility of women.[3]

In the writers she studies, Franco finds that nationalist narratives with women as protagonists are rare. As she puts it, "Rewriting master narratives around a heroine is fraught with difficulty" (133) and "women's attempts to plot themselves as protagonists on the national level become a recognition of the fact that they are not in the plot at all but definitely somewhere else" (146).

In her chapter "Women and the Nation," Partha Chatterjee introduces the concept of inner/outer, home/world, in order to analyse women's issues in Asia and Africa. Her discussion of these dichotomies explains why women's issues have generally been left out of discourses of the nation:

> Applying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by profane activities of the material world--and woman is its representation.[4]

This quotation succinctly expresses the spatial limitation placed on women's freedom of movement: the space and role assigned to women is characteristic of gender roles in traditional patriarchy.

In a postcolonial context, women writers face a doubly difficult task: they need to restore the presence of women to a past as well as the specific concerns they have in regard to their relationship to history, and they need to restore a voice to women who have been reduced to silence by indigenous institutions and attitudes that prevailed both during and after the colonial period. As African women writers writing in the aftermath of colonialism in their respective countries, the Algerian Assia Djebar and the Nigerian Flora Nwapa occupy a doubly marginalised position. Subjected to patriarchal ideologies in their European colonial and African forms, and to the legacy of colonialism in post-independence Africa, these African women writers are situated at the crossroads of a

cultural and sexual colonisation. Djebar and Nwapa, however, are writing subjects with the power to contest, and subvert, the dominant ideologies which construct them as the sexual and cultural other.[5] Although of different religious and cultural backgrounds, both women writers were born into colonised societies, and both came of age during the last decades of colonial rule. Nwapa's first novel, *Efuru*, was published in 1966, the first novel published by a Nigerian woman and the first novel in English by an African woman writer. Djebar's first novel, *La Soif*, was published in 1957. Both women writers lived through colonialism, underwent schooling in European languages and literatures, and both attended universities abroad. In the works of Djebar and Nwapa, women's writing is shown to be an act of transgression as both writers have sought to locate a new discursive site of feminine difference.

Both writers depict the specific dilemma of the educated woman, who is obliged to walk a tightrope between, on the one hand, her expectations of liberation and her right to make her own choices, and on the other hand, family and social pressures that attempt to confine her within the established boundaries of modest behaviour for African women. As the social, political and economic context of both texts will show throughout this chapter, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985) and *One is Enough* (1981), present young women who are seeking to express their 'difference' from the previous generation's model of appropriate feminine behaviour: not standing out from the collective, not raising one's voice above anyone else's for fear of being seen as 'different.' The heroines in these two novels revel in their new-found possibilities to experience freedom of movement out of doors, to meet with men who are not members of their immediate families, and to engage in dialogues on the future of male-female relationships in an independent nation. This chapter will examine the effects of Chatterjee's concept of inner/outer, home/world on women's writing as well as presenting the struggle against the consequences of colonialism and the pressure of patriarchal domination. At the same time, it will examine the subversive strategies each of the two writers uses to recover women's voice and agency.

L'Amour, la fantasia

This section will explore Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* [6] in order to examine the ways in which it subverts the colonialist and patriarchal discourses which have silenced the voices of Algerian women and/or men. My reading will relate the oppositional strategies of Djebar's text to her use of autobiographical discourse in *L'Amour, la fantasia* in order to reveal the linguistic and political tensions inherent in the genre for this North African woman writer from postcolonial Algeria.

Published in 1985, *L'Amour, la fantasia* is the first volume in what Djebar calls her *quatuor romanesque* dealing with the Maghreb, and the first of her works in which she deploys some of the conventions of the autobiographical genre. It is also her only work which she openly designates as an autobiography. *L'Amour, la fantasia*, deals predominantly with the narrator's life and the history of her country - the French conquest in 1830 and the Algerian war (1954-1962). In this way, the narrator establishes links with Algeria's past and, more specifically, with women of the past giving written form to their forgotten heroic deeds. Her quest for an individual and collective sense of self begins with a valorisation of Algerian women's history and of the vital role they have played in the historical development of their nation since 1830.

During the past two decades feminist critics have repeatedly drawn attention to the underlying assumptions behind much of Western thought in the areas of history and autobiography. Domna C. Stanton, Sidonie Smith, and Shari Benstock have brought a new level of critical understanding to women's (autobiographical) writing, and to the oppositional character of women's autobiographies with respect to traditional autobiography and the latter's imbrication with power and authority. In their "Introduction" to *De/colonizing the subject: Gender and the Politics of Women's Autobiography*, Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith define traditional autobiography as follows:

> One of those "master" discourses that has served to power and define centers, margins, boundaries, and grounds of action in the West, traditional autobiography has always been implicated with and in the old imperial "self

of essences." Certain presumptions of meaning circle around this notion of "self." Its core is understood to be unitary, irreducible, atomic; its boundaries separating inner from outer well-defined, stable, impermeable; its relationship to the world unencumbered. A Cartesian "self," its vision is rational, totalizing, and appropriative as well as uncontaminated by the anarchies of embodiment. [...] The "I" of autobiography is the marker of the "self of essences" [...] But that "I" is gendered and it is male. Fundamentally, the "self of essences" is what Alice A. Jardine describes as the "self" of the "paternally conceived ego," or what Jane Gallop describes as "the self of the same, that is of man." (2-3)

Consequently, women's incursion into the genre has been read as an attempt to construct a female subject. As Domna C. Stanton explains: "In a phallocentric system which defines her as the object, the inessential other to the same male subject [...] the **graphing** of the **auto** was an act of self-assertion that denied and reversed women's status."[7] Furthermore, the subject constructed in women's autobiography has been read as different from the unitary 'I' of traditional autobiography whose boundaries are distinct. Instead, the female 'I' is seen as constructed through its relations with other people, with no absolute separation between self and other. Stanton notes that "the female "I" was thus not simply a texture woven of several selves; its threads, its lifelines, came from and extended to others. By that token, this "I" represented a denial of a notion essential to the phallogocentric order: the totalized, self-contained subject present-to-itself" (16).

While women from Europe and America have made use of the autobiographical genre in order to challenge the phallocentric order of patriarchal society, this genre has also been widely adopted by writers, both men and women, from the postcolonial world. Michelle Cliff, Huda Shaarawi, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Leila Khaled, are among those who have explored autobiographical discourse in order to contest the hegemonic historical narratives of both French and British colonialism through an articulation of the hitherto silenced voices of the colonised. Smith and Watson describe this "explosion of post-colonial autobiographical activity" as follows:

> And so despite their 'subjection' as the colonial Other, women of the first, second and third worlds have begun writing autobiography in increasing numbers. They too have pursued the discursive economies of self-narrative. And they have done so because they are not merely overdetermined pawns of a post-colonial world but also creative sign-makers, not merely 'subjects' of ideology interpellated inside discourse but agents of contestation. The ideologies of the Other may attempt to script difference (sexual, racial) according to 'nature' or 'God-given' distinctions, but those cultural distinctions remain vulnerable to destabilizations that rupture their coherence and hegemony. [...] To write the life is to resist the total inscription by the colonizer, the imperialist, whether white or male, whether white and male. But to write autobiography is also to enter into a tradition of colonial practice. To write autobiography from the Other's position of subjection is to contest the colonial regimes governing the constitution of subject peoples. (4-6)

Belonging to this proliferation of postcolonial autobiography is Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*, with its contestation of French colonialism in Algeria, and of the patriarchal order of Algerian society. It begins with a recollection of her father leading her along the path to school: "Fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école, un matin d'automne, main dans la main du père" (11). Toward the end of the book, Djebar returns to this image of herself as a little girl hand in hand with her father making their way to the French school in a village of the Algerian Sahel. To convey the fraught nature of the relationship she now entertains with the French language, the narrator refers to it as a "mariage forcé" (239). In the same way that traditional Muslim fathers abandoned their prepubescent daughters to unknown men in marriage, so too did her father give her away to the language of the conqueror: "Ainsi, le père, instituteur, lui que l'enseignement du français a sorti de la gêne familiale, m'aurait "donnée" avant l'âge nubile - certains pères n'abandonnaient-ils pas leur fille à un prétendant inconnu ou, comme dans ce cas, au camp ennemi" (239). While the vexed nature of her subsequent relation with the French language is suggested by the emphasis on the part played by the authority invested in the father by society, the narrator also speaks of her "cohabitation avec la langue française"

(239). In contrast to the traditional, authoritarian overtones of the forced marriage, the metaphor of cohabitation connotes a modern, egalitarian partnership, thereby suggesting the advantages of speaking the enemy's tongue: the opportunity for a girl to be educated beyond puberty, and, in Djebar's case, the chance to become a writer. In the following passage, the narrator observes that it was her childhood initiation into French that saved her from the veil and from sequestration, and afforded her entry into the street, the 'public' sphere reserved for men in traditional society:

> Moi qui, devant le voile suaire n'avait nul besoin de trépigner ou de baisser l'échine comme telle ou telle cousine, moi qui, suprême coquetterie, en me voilant lors d'une noce d'été, m'imaginais me déguiser, puisque, définitivement, j'avais échappé à l'enfermement--je marche, fillette, au dehors, main dans la main du père. (239)

She never had any doubts as to the courage of her father's decision to send her to the French school, but she vividly remembers how the neighbours peered out of their windows at her as she walked by with her father. The women in particular observed her from their homes and prepared their words of censure for a future date. Surely, they thought, the time will come when the father will have to recognise his mistake, for fathers who allow their daughters to go out in public, even in order to receive an education, were courting disaster: "Le malheur fondra immanquablement sur eux. Toute vierge savante saura écrire, écrire à coup sûr 'la' lettre. Viendra l'heure pour elle où l'amour qui s'écrit est plus dangereux que l'amour séquestré" (11). The reason for the neighbours' dismay, as Djebar describes it, is that writing empowers women to express their desires. For this reason, it is assumed that society must sequester women, so they will never experience a sense of control over their own sexuality and write 'the' letter, the text of feminine desire.

Many of Djebar's anecdotes in *L'Amour, la fantasia* are related to the theme of women and their writing. By emphasising this theme in a work that purports to be an autobiography, she is suggesting that Algerian women's subjectivity needs to be presented to the public in terms of the way it represents an integral expression of their

sexuality. Women's writing is shown to be an act of transgression. This desire to express a pure female subjectivity is not different from some Western women's writing; it particularly evokes Hélène Cixous who was herself born in Algeria. In her "La Venue à l'écriture," Cixous says:

> Tout de moi se liguait pour m'interdire l'écriture: l'Histoire, mon histoire, mon origine, mon genre. Tout ce qui constituait mon moi social, culturel. A commencer par le nécessaire, qui me faisait défaut, la matière dans laquelle l'écriture se taille, d'où elle s'arrache: la langue. Tu veux écrire? Dans quelle langue?[8]

As this passage illustrates, external forces sought to prevent Cixous from finding a "lieu d'où écrire" (23). With recourse only to a masculine discourse, the problem of *écriture féminine* developed in Cixous's essay revolves around woman's inability to express her *féminité* in the paternal language: "'Je suis ... qui oserait parler comme dieu?" (24). Both Djebar and Cixous have sought to locate a new discursive site of feminine difference.

Whether in written or in oral form, such a project can, Djebar believes, liberate women's discourse from the taboos and constraints perpetuated by contemporary Algerian society. Her insight into this aspect of female subjectivity was initially triggered by her first encounter with her father's 'law' against receiving letters from boys. Her father intercepts the letter and destroys it in front of her. Following this incident, the seventeen-year-old protagonist embarks on a secret correspondence with this mysterious young admirer: "ainsi, cette langue que m'a donné le père me devient entremetteuse et mon initiation, dès lors, se place sous un signe double, contradictoire" (12). Ironically, the father's desire to prevent her correspondence produced an opposite effect to the one he had intended. He made the other's language seem more 'seductive' and hence more appropriate for romantic discourse. For this reason, she came to conceive of letter-writing as a form of self-empowerment and defiance of both the social and religious order, and women's silence. By 'usurping' written language, she could experience a forbidden knowledge of her own desires, and those of others.

Although French education and the freedom of movement in public space have liberated her from the female enclosure, the narrator comes to believe that this liberation has excluded her and thus separated her from the majority of Algerian women: "le dehors et le risque au lieu de la prison de mes semblables" (208). It is also as a result of her acquisition of the French language that the young girl is severed from her native Arabic, the oral language which the narrator repeatedly associates with her mother and her female ancestors. Although Algerian men also spoke Arabic, Djebar regards French as a paternal language, that is as "a source of power and dominance to which certain men (such as her father) had access during the colonial period and to which most women did not."[9] The conflicting demands of two cultures, and two languages, leads the narrator to characterise her position as the site of the battle between these demands:

> Après plus d'un siècle d'occupation française [...] un territoire de langue subsiste entre deux peuples, entre deux mémoires; la langue française, corps et voix, s'installe en moi comme un orgueilleux préside, tandis que la langue maternelle, toute en oralité, en hardes dépenaillées, résiste et attaque, entre deux essoufflements. [...] je suis à la fois l'assiégé étranger et l'autochtone partant à la mort par bravade, illusoire effervescence du dire et de l'écrit. (241)

By designating her own position as the site of this battle, the narrator conveys the tensions that we find in the situation of the postcolonial writer or the plural hybrid. As we shall see, this tension pervades the text of *L'Amour, la fantasia* and is closely related to the different forms of Djebar's contestation of the discourses of colonialism and patriarchy. As suggested in the above passage with its metaphor of domination, the narrator regards the French language as masculine and powerful - the tongue of the coloniser and of the father - and Arabic as the maternal, feminine language resisting this linguistic aggression.

In l'Amour, la fantasia, just as space has been sexualised in traditional Algeria--public space for men and private space for women - so too has language. The written account of the conquest of Algeria that she researches from the archives is French and male; the oral account that she records and transcribes from interviews with Algerian

women is Arabic and female. As she explains, Djebar's desire to write this autobiographical work had its origins in her desire to retrace her own exile from the mother tongue and to recover her previous experiences with both languages as a means of reconciling written and oral discourse in terms of their influence over the evolution of her self. Djebar's analysis of her relationship to French and to dialectical Arabic in *L'Amour, la fantasia* reveals the complex ambiguity of her own situation as a bilingual, Algerian woman writer. As she explained to Marguerite Le Clézio:

> A l'origine, dans mon enfance, mon rapport avec ma mère, avec le monde des femmes, se fait en langue arabe, un arabe dialectal, non destiné à être écrit, puisque l'on écrit en arabe dit littéraire. Donc, pour me résumer, un premier exil s'installe dans une langue qui m'est langue *d'en face*, et un deuxième exil est souligné par la question suivante, "Qu'est-ce que c'est dans la culture arabe qu'une femme qui écrit?" C'est un scandale. Ce n'est pas seulement très rare; pendant des siècles, ça a été étouffé. [...] Les femmes communiquent, les femmes s'expriment, mais elles s'expriment par une oralité nécessairement souterraine, tout au moins dans son dynamisme.[10]

Her remarks point to the fundamental paradox of her situation: as an Algerian woman, her closest ties should ostensibly be with dialectical Arabic, which she defines as 'woman's language,' yet because of her education in French schools, she feels that she has been 'exiled' from the mother'(s) tongue. The orality of women's discourse results from the fact that, traditionally, women have not had access to writing in their own culture.

Women's writing is scandalous in Djebar's culture because traditional society fostered the sexualisation of language and power. Because women in traditional society were separated from men at the approach of puberty, girls generally attended classes at the *m'sid* for a much shorter period than did boys. This situation represented the single most significant factor with regard to women's lack of access to written Arabic. When Djebar describes women's orality as 'underground,' she means that it is a discourse that remains 'hidden' from the public eye; the loci of women's discourse are inside their houses, inside the *hammam*, or on the rooftop terraces of their homes. Given the factors

that traditionally affected the relationship between women and language in Djebar's Arab-Islamic, Algerian historical contexts, her autobiography attempts to answer the question she herself had posed: "What does it mean to be an Arab woman who writes?" By tracing the itinerary that culminated in her 'coming to writing,' she explores her own identity and achieves a better understanding of her ambivalent feelings towards the paternal and maternal languages.

The first part of *L'Amour, la fantasia* is entitled "La prise de la ville, ou l'amour s'écrit." In this part of her narrative, she identifies the capture of Algiers as the symbolic origin of her own 'coming to writing' because the French conquest created the possibility of French education for Algerian children such as herself. The writing and reading of letters by Algerian women constitute one of the major themes running through this section. The image of women as recipients or instigators of correspondence reflects the author's belief that Algerian women can be empowered through writing - through a 'prise de la parole.'

As I pointed out earlier, Djebar came to think of French as *la langue paternelle*; in contrast, she associated dialectical Arabic with her mother and with her female relatives. French became her second language; it was spoken at school or with peers, but it was almost never used at home. She herself comments on her bilingual condition:

> J'ai vécu dès l'enfance ce que vivent beaucoup d'enfants d'émigrés à Paris. Le français devient la langue de dehors; quand on rentre à la maison, l'arabe reprend son rôle de l'intimité, du rapport à la mère, aux ancêtres. Dès l'âge de quatre ou cinq ans, j'ai vécu ce bilinguisme. [...] c'était un bilinguisme qui "boîtait des deux jambes," et ce n'est pas un choix. Je ne suis pas un écrivain parti d'une autre langue, qui écrit en français, par choix ou grâce à une évolution, qui l'a fait librement. Moi, j'ai été dès mon enfance, de par ma situation de colonisée, installée dans la langue française, parce que je fus colonisée. (Le Clézio 233)

The spatial distinction that colonised children are conditioned to make between the two languages (i.e. French outside the home, Arabic inside the home) has the potential to

trigger a sense of linguistic alienation. Associated with the interior of the home and with family life, the mother tongue can come to be seen as more suitable for the communication of intimate matters that are close to the heart. Conversely, French - the language of the conqueror - can become identified with life outside the home. This distinction helps explain why French tends to be regarded as the only viable means of expression for ideas and feelings that might be communicated (under the guise of fiction) to the outside world. Djebar stresses the fact that, like other colonised writers, she had no choice but to use the French language; however the psychological situation created by this absence of choice necessarily influenced the way that she conceived of self-definition/creation in the other'(s) tongue.

For the colonised writer, this linguistic duality might thus be regarded as a kind of physical handicap, but it also opens new possibilities for exploring the world outside the home. With the advantage of hindsight, Djebar portrays her French education as an agent of liberation from the restrictions that would have ordinarily confined an Algerian girl of her class and generation to the inside of her home. Although leading her into the outside world and away from the female collective, a French education allowed her to forge a bond between her self-image and the exterior world. Her knowledge of the 'langue adverse' empowered her with the ability to write, giving her a weapon that might never have been placed in her hands if she had not attended French schools. Because her movements outside the house gave her the impression of being free in public spaces, she associated her sensual self, her physical identity as a woman, with her ability to read and write French. Writing in particular becomes linked in her mind with the *jouissance* she feels at being able to 'invade' the public space that was generally reserved for men. She even feels that her freedom represents a triumph for all the women who had been denied this experience:

> Mon corps seul, comme le coureur du pentathlon a besoin du starter pour démarrer, mon corps s'est trouvé en mouvement dès la pratique de l'écriture étrangère. Comme si soudain la langue française aveuglait les mâles voyeurs de mon clan et qu'à ce prix, je puisse circuler, dégringoler toutes les rues,

annexer le dehors pour mes compagnes cloîtrées, pour mes aïeules mortes bien avant le tombeau. (*L'Amour* 204)

Her control over her own movements, and by extension over her own body, are thus clearly tied to 'écriture.' She feels empowered by her access to the 'Word' (the French language *is* power in this context), a power that 'blinds' the males who seek to curtail women's movements in public. At this point, she feels that she is free to continue on her path to self-awareness while remaining in contact with the rest of the female collective; her freedom of movement allows her to move between two worlds, placing her skills and unique experience as a woman writer in the service of the majority of Algerian women, thereby 'annexing' public space for all of them. Djebar thus ends the siege of silence that had been imposed upon her "soeurs disparues," noting that "Ecrire ne tue pas la voix mais la réveille, surtout pour ressuciter tant de soeurs disparues" (229).

In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar's sub-text is specifically motivated by the desire to re-inscribe women into Algerian history. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, a great deal has been written about the relationship of colonised peoples to their own history, but little effort has been made to include colonised women in texts that purport to renew the colonised subject's ties with the past. Western feminists have justified the need to 'restore' or 're-inscribe' women into history, since all too often historiographers have interpreted the past as a sequence of events experienced and brought about by men. In a postcolonial context, feminists face a difficult task as they are caught between the problems of race and gender in addition to the ambivalence vis-à-vis the language in which they write. Their situation is defined by Trinh Minh-ha's term the "triple bind": "Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties? On the other hand, she often finds herself at odds with language, which partakes in the white-male-norm ideology and is used predominantly as a vehicle to circulate established power relations. "[11] As a postcolonial woman writer, Djebar needs to restore the presence of women to a past that was appropriated as ethnographic data by the West, and she needs to restore a voice to women who have been silenced by Algerian patriarchal institutions and attitudes that prevailed both during and after the colonial period.

In her autobiographical project, Djebar hopes to make Algerian women more aware of the ties that link them to Algerian women of the past. Because an individual's sense of identity is linked to an understanding of past history, she seeks to make Algerian history an integral element in the contemporary Algerian woman's search for identity:

> L'histoire est utilisée dans ce roman comme quête de l'identité. Identité non seulement des femmes mais de tout le pays. J'aborde le passé du dix-neuvième siècle par une recherche sur l'écriture, sur l'écriture en langue française. S'établit alors pour moi un rapport avec l'histoire du dix-neuvième siècle *écrite* par des officiers français, et un rapport avec le récit *oral* des Algériennes traditionnelles d'aujourd'hui. Deux passés alternent donc; je pense que le plus important pour moi est de ramener le passé malgré ou à travers l'écriture, mon écriture de langue française.[12]

History and autobiography are presented as interdependent in this work because Djebar wants to demonstrate that both are integral components of the quest for a viable Algerian postcolonial identity. She offers Algerian women an analysis of their relationship to the history of their country to convince them that they too have a stake in the historical evolution of their nation. The women who will recount their experiences of the Algerian revolution need to know that they too have played a role in the history of their country. They need to know that their oral narratives are just as valuable as the chronicles that have been written down by men and passed on to posterity.

In cultures where women have experienced a double repression (as the result of both colonisation and indigenous institutions), their silence and invisibility in the annals of their nation's past mean that someone must undertake a thorough investigation of archival materials if their lost presence is ever to be unearthed. Djebar herself is a trained historian, and the focus of her research has been North Africa; thus, if her self-writing project is an investigation into her own past, it also leads her to search for the traces of Algerian women in her nation's past.

Muslim feminist scholars have begun this search, and the results of their research indicate that women's history in the Arab world has suffered the same neglect as

it has in the West. To rectify this situation, feminist scholars such as Fatima Mernissi have begun to restore women to history and to uncover the active roles they played in the development of Islamic society. Her studies refute the stereotype (held both in the West and the Arab world) that Arab women have always been cloistered, passive, and historically insignificant.

Women writers such as Djebar and Mernissi have encountered obstacles to their revisionist projects because of the way that history tends to be conceived in Arab-Islamic cultures. In "Women in Muslim History: Traditional Perspectives and New Strategies," Mernissi observes that modern Arab nations rely on historical tradition as it is conceived in an Islamic context (i.e. the traditions established by the word of God as transmitted through Mohammed). Despite the active role played by women during the first decades after the death of the Prophet, few histories of Arab societies mention women's contributions. According to Mernissi, conservative political and social institutions seek to control the dissemination of new ideas in the Muslim world.[13] Her observation could apply to any culture, but in societies governed by Islamic tradition, she points out, history is an especially powerful weapon because historical progression is regarded as a manifestation of divine will:

> History, the recorded memory of a culture, is never consumed directly like other products. Historical material goes through highly complicated processes, often tightly controlled and censored by those in power, before it is presented to citizens for selectively oriented consumption. Contrasting the wealth of historical evidence favorable to women with their lowly status in Muslim society leads to the inescapable conclusion that the forces shaping image-making in the Muslim world discriminate against women.[14]

According to her, negative views of Muslim women have been perpetuated because the male-dominated society has a vested interest in denying women access to information that would contradict many commonly accepted assumptions. Like Mernissi, Djebar's research into Algerian women of the past and her transcriptions of women's accounts of

the Algerian war challenge the notion that women have contributed little to the history of their nation.

In search of women's contributions to Algerian history, Djebar studies both oral and written history. She turns first to the French texts of colonial history and subjects them to her own critical reading, deconstructing their original goal of immortalising the French (male) triumph by reading (often between the lines) for lost traces of 'les soeurs disparues' who, from the beginning of the French conquest of 1830, participated in the struggle against colonialism. In this way, she hopes to resurrect their presence and to ensure their immortality in the face of the brutality and neglect imposed on them by history. One of the men whose texts provided Djebar with the most fertile sources of information concerning the conquest and 'pacification' of Algeria is Baron Barchou. In his memoirs, for example, Djebar finds the following trace of Algerian women who participated in the fierce battle of Staoueli near Algiers in July 1830:

> L'une d'elles gisait à côté d'un cadavre français dont elle avait arraché le coeur! Une autre s'enfuyait tenant un enfant dans ses bras: blessée d'un coup de feu, elle écrasa avec une pierre la tête de l'enfant, pour l'empêcher de tomber vivant dans nos mains; les soldats l'achevèrent elle-même à coups de baïonnette. (28-29)

Djebar transmits these scenes of violence to contemporary readers in order to resurrect the memory of them. Her comments on the Barchou passages establish a link between these early victims of French brutality and the subsequent generations of Algerian women who metaphorically re-enact the second woman's gesture:

> Ces deux héroines entrent ainsi dans l'histoire nouvelle. Je recueille scrupuleusement l'image, deux guerrières entrevues de dos ou de biais, en plein tumulte, par l'aide de camp à l'oeil incisif. Annonce d'une fièvre hallucinatoire, lacérée de folie [...] Image inaugurant les futures "mater dolorosa" musulmanes qui, nécrophores de harem, vont enfanter, durant la soumission du siècle suivant, des générations d'orphelins sans visages. (28)

The 'life/death story' of the second corpse evokes a nightmarish link between the infant whose face has been crushed by its mother and the children who will be born to a 'faceless' existence in the colonial world. For Djebar, there is a bond between the dead mother and the anonymous mothers-to-be who will give birth to generations of 'faceless' Algerians (i.e. colonised children without a sense of national identity). When Djebar asserts that these two women have entered into a new history, she is suggesting that, although they might have been forgotten in a purely Algerian historical discourse, their immortalisation in the memoirs of a French officer allows them to be resurrected in a new Algerian, feminist history--one that unearths the ties of bravery, pain, and sacrifice that unite Algerian women throughout the ages. In this manner, she reaffirms the feminine presence in Algeria's past and forges a link among the twentieth-century women who speak out in the attempt to end their invisibility and silence. The women's presence in the liberation struggle, a reality with a historical point of reference, serves as a metaphor for Algeria. When Djebar subjects the letters of officers and soldiers to her own critical reading, she finds that the invaders were constantly frustrated in their desire to possess Algerian women: "Ces lettres parlent, dans le fond, d'une Algérie-femme impossible à apprivoiser" (69). Despite the military victory of the French invaders, the Algerian nation remains subversive.

A reporter for the *Revue des deux mondes* informed Parisian readers that the women prisoners who were forced to march in French victory parades would cover their faces with mud or excrement - whatever was at hand - in order to conceal their faces, to veil themselves from the foreigner's gaze: "Ces Algériennes s'enduisent le visage de boue et d'excréments, quand on les conduit dans le cortège du vainqueur... elles ne se protègent pas seulement de l'ennemi, mais du chrétien, à la fois conquérant, étranger et tabou!" (69). The journalist's interpretation of this gesture bespeaks his Eurocentric ignorance, for he sees their actions as proof of their 'backwardness.' Djebar corrects this superficial interpretation by hypothesising that the women's actions constituted a silent rebellion, a rejection of the coloniser and his presence: "L'indigène, même quand il semble soumis, n'est pas vaincu. Ne lève pas les yeux pour regarder son vainqueur. Ne le 'reconnait' pas. Ne le nomme pas. Qu'est-ce qu'une victoire si elle n'est pas nommée?" (69). The women's refusal to meet the gaze of the foreign invaders illustrates that their reaction to the

conquest was by no means passive. In fact, Djebar cites it to corroborate her thesis that Algerian women have maintained a line of resistance that stretches from the conquest of 1830 to the revolution of 1954-1962.

Because military officers wrote with an eye toward glorifying and legitimising the French invasion, Algerians depicted in their descriptions were meant to appear as faceless, barbaric masses who could only benefit by being subjected to the 'French civilising mission.' However, the report of the incident of *enfumade* that took place during the conquest did generate a great deal of criticism from opponents of the government. This incident was described in Pélissier's memoirs. In June 1845, a tribe loyal to the rebel leader Abdelkader took refuge from pursuing French forces in a series of caves linked by a network of underground passages. Pélissier (later governor of Algeria) ordered his troops to set the caves on fire, asphyxiating over fifteen hundred people. Djebar notes that, although Pélissier's memoirs describe the massacre, he himself feels no remorse for his fatal decision to undertake the *enfumade*. Nevertheless, she is 'grateful' to him for having immortalised these corpses and allowing her to complete her revisionist reading of the French discourse about the conquest of Algeria:

> J'oserais presque le remercier d'avoir fait face aux cadavres, d'avoir cédé au désir de les immortaliser, dans les figures de leurs corps raidis, de leurs étreintes paralysées, de leur ultime contorsion. D'avoir regardé l'ennemi autrement qu'en multitude fanatisée, en armée d'ombres omniprésents. (92)

Neither he nor those who read his description of the *enfumade* could simply dismiss the victims as an anonymous mob of fanatical Algerians. If 'official' French discourse pictures them as mere 'casualties of war,' Djebar resuscitates them as real, living people.

Just as Djebar uses the language of the coloniser to examine French official documents of the period in an attempt to find written evidence of women's participation in history and in the struggle against colonialism, so too will she employ French in order to contest and undermine colonial authority. In *l'Amour, la fantasia*, this contestation takes the form of a reaccentuation of the official discourse concerning the French

conquest of Algiers. The importance of language and discourse as weapons essential to the project of colonialism is commented upon by the narrator:

> Le mot lui-même, ornement pour les officiers qui le brandissent comme ils porteraient un oeillet à la boutonnière, le mot deviendra l'arme par excellence. Des cohortes d'interprètes, géographes, ethnographes, linguistes, botanistes, docteurs divers et écrivains de profession s'abattront sur la nouvelle proie. Toute une pyramide d'écrits amoncelés en apophyse superfétatoire occultera la violence initiale. (56)

This knowledge elaborated and amassed by French scholars belongs to what Edward Said calls the discourse of 'Orientalism' and was vital to the whole project of French colonialism in both Africa and the East.[15] Rather than allow the French reports of events between 1830 and 1848 to submerge the brutality and violence of the conquest beneath their detached and 'objective' style, Djebar uses the very language of the coloniser to expose what is veiled by the official rhetoric: "Langue installée dans l'opacité d'hier, dépouille prise à celui avec lequel ne s'échangeait aucune parole d'amour" (241). The narrator thus rescues this chapter of Algerian history from the oblivion of the official archives by giving voice to an account of the suffering of the North African population in order to offset the omissions of the authorised reports: "Et l'inscription du texte étranger se renverse dans le miroir de la souffrance, me proposant son double évanescent en lettres arabes, de droite à gauche rédevidées" (58).

Through this juxtaposition of the official *comptes rendus* and the officers' correspondence with Djebar's competing interpretation of the conquest and the authorised accounts of it, the French language becomes a weapon in the arsenal of the postcolonial writer. Another oppositional strategy in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, is the subversion of the traditional autobiographical 'I.' In her essay "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice,"[16] Susan Stanford Friedman argues that the "individualistic concept of the autobiographical self" is the bedrock of traditional autobiography. As part of her critique of Georges Gusdorf's seminal essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1956), Friedman argues against such constricted definition of autobiography, claiming that this

individualistic concept "raises serious theoretical problems for critics who recognize that the self, self-creation, and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-Western peoples" (34). Friedman claims, furthermore, that Gusdorf's emphasis on individualism does not take into account the importance of "a culturally imposed group identity for women and minorities" and ignores "the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process" of such disenfranchised groups (34-35).

Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* exemplifies this shift from an individualistic paradigm to the construction of a collective identity defined by gender and ethnicity. The formal organisation of the text is the most overt indication of this shift: Arranged like a Maghrebian cavalcade, *la fantasia*, the successive charges of the cavalry are represented by the female voices in "Les voix ensevelies," the third section of the text. From Sherifa's account of her activities as a female militant, to *tzarl-rit*, the ritual chanting and strident cries of the *aieules* as they exorcise their suffering or signal joy, these diverse voices emerge from the silence of the past and speak in turn, each giving way to the testimony of the next woman. In an interview with Mildred Mortimer, Djebar explains the organisation of her autobiography: "Cette structure 'en fantasia' permettait d'entrelacer ma propre voix avec les voix des autres femmes" (Mortimer, "Entretien" 203). In contrast to the unitary subject of traditional autobiography, split only between the narrated 'I' of the past and the narrating 'I' of the present of discourse, the subject of *L'Amour, la fantasia* is made up of multiple voices with the narrator conceiving of herself as part of a larger community, her voice only one among the many which have preceded her, and will follow her: "Dire à mon tour. Transmettre ce qui a été dit, puis écrit" (187). At the same time, Djebar's construction of a collective identity explodes the conventional notion of the autobiographical self revealing itself through language. Despite the narrator's attempt to convey the 'truth' of her own identity, to 'unveil' herself in autobiography, she comes to realise that her own identity is inseparable from the identity of the collective group of female ancestors: "Croyant me 'parcourir', je ne fais que choisir un autre voile. Voulant, à chaque pas, parvenir à la transparence, je m'engloutis davantage dans l'anonymat des aieules!" (243). This desired transparency, however, is thwarted by the fact that the

identity of the female subject, and in particular that of an Arab woman, straddles the individual and the collective realm. Friedman explains it in the following way:

> In taking the power of words, of representation, into their own hands, women project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor is it purely collective. Instead this new identity merges the shared and the unique. In autobiography, specifically, the self created in a woman's text is often not a "teleological unity," an "isolate being" utterly separate from all others, as Gusdorf and Olney define the autobiographical self. [...] Instead, the self created in women's autobiographical writing is often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness - an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny. (40-41)

L'Amour, la fantasia can be regarded as a 'plural autobiography' because Djebar presents the stories of other Algerian women as well as her own. Rather than speaking for Algerian women, Djebar joins their narratives with her own and with those of Algerian women who had, until she resurrected them, survived only in androcentric, French accounts of battles and conquests. In contrast to writing, to male French narrative of the conquest, Djebar presents orality, rural women's narrative of the Algerian revolution. The testimonials of rural Algerian women from the Chenoua region of Djebar's maternal family are reminiscent of the atmosphere of the women's gatherings that Djebar remembered from her childhood. By coming together, by raising their voices together, the women experienced a cathartic release: "Chaque femme, écorchée au-dedans, s'est apaisée dans l'écoute collective" (176). Djebar's return to the Chenoua region also gave the women the chance to end their silence and to find solace in a collective 'hearing' because she had come to interview them about their experiences during the Algerian war. The collective setting enables them to find the courage to 'unveil' their life stories.

Djebar focuses on women's personal testimonies of activism during the Algerian revolution because she desires to refute stereotyped notions about their lack of involvement in the struggle. She wants to 'rewrite' Algerian women back into the

discourse about the war for liberation, just as she had sought to resuscitate the presence of Algerian women who had fought and suffered during the nineteenth-century French conquest. The testimonies that she records prove that women were active in the events of the revolution and that they had a direct impact on the historical outcome of the struggle. Because the women Djebar interviewed might not have been able to read and write about their experiences (history has generally been legitimated by its inscription in written discourse), Djebar translates their words from dialectical Arabic into written French. Lest anyone interpret her gesture as a desire to 'speak' for or 'in place of' these women, she defends her project by stating that: "Ecrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de soeurs disparues" (229).

All of the women who tell their stories in Djebar's text have rural backgrounds. Several were very young when they joined the *maquis*; others were already elderly women with sons in the resistance when they contributed to the struggle by feeding fighters, by sewing uniforms, by hiding weapons in their homes. The farms and homes of all people suspected of aiding the resistance were burned by the French troops. Each of the women interviewed by Djebar had been subjected to this punishment. The fact that many rural Algerian women had survived in this fashion, frequently assuming responsibility for their entire clan during the absence of the male members, was virtually ignored at the end of the revolution. After independence, Algeria's constitution placed women in a state of legal dependency upon men.

Despite the hardships suffered by Djebar's interviewees, they recount their stories in voices that betray little emotion. For example, Chérifa tells her narrative in a detached manner, displaying no hatred for those who have inflicted pain on her. She had followed her two brothers to the *maquis* when she was thirteen years old. Her younger brother had been killed before her eyes, and she later returned to the spot to bury his body. Captured by the French, she was tortured and placed in solitary confinement. The sobriety and terseness of such oral narratives contrast with the more inflammatory tone of nationalist discourse. Djebar denies that this neutral tone of women's oral discourse results merely from the translation/transcription of these narratives from Arabic into

French: "J'ai remarqué que plus les femmes avaient souffert, plus elles en parlaient sous une forme concise, à la limite presque sèchement" (Mortimer,"Entretien" 202).

However, the extent of the personal suffering implicit in Chérifa's narrative causes Djebar to reflect on the underlying assumption behind her project of recounting women's lives. She asks herself: how can her own use of French, the language of Chérifa's enemies, really convey the self of such a woman to readers? Is she herself veiling the woman's autobiographical narrative in the same opaque fabric of the 'langue adverse' that had allowed the dead and mutilated bodies of nineteenth-century Algerian women to be 'written' into French history? Lamenting her failure to capture the spirit of Chérifa's story in French, the narrator comments on the deformation wrought by translation: "Chérifa! Je désirais recréer ta course. [...] Ta voix s'est prise au piège; mon parler français la déguise sans l'habiller. A peine si je frôle l'ombre de ton pas!" (161). Removed from its oral, Arabic source, Chérifa's story is now as lifeless as the official French reports of the war:

> Les mots que j'ai cru te donner s'enveloppent de la même serge de deuil que ceux de Bosquet ou de Saint-Arnaud. En vérité, ils s'écrivent à travers ma main, puisque je consens à cette bâtardise, au seul métissage que la foi ancestrale ne condamne pas: celui de la langue et non celui de sang. (161)

Expressing her doubt that the French language can convey a true portrait of the Algerian female subject, Djebar points out that, despite her efforts to remove the veil, it will remain in place because a linguistic bastardisation results from her efforts to fuse the mother tongue and the other tongue. Consequently, the women's narratives in her text are not exactly a 'pure' translation. When Djebar transcribes the dialectical Arabic narratives into French, her translation will necessarily be a 'métissage' that disguises more than it communicates. She herself understands that the French language acts as a shield that places a certain distance between her and her fellow Algerian women. Although she sincerely desired to find a common ground with the women she interviewed, she eventually recognised that the French language is a double-edged sword. On one level, it provides a forum for presenting the women's stories to a larger audience. On another

level, her own bilingual condition separates her from the world of oral narrative and the female collective into which she had hoped to reintegrate herself. Djebar describes the resultant sense of alienation: "Mots torches qui éclairent mes compagnes, mes complices; d'elles, définitivement, ils me séparent. Et sous leurs poids, je m'expatrie" (161). Ironically, this difference between herself and illiterate Algerian women was precisely what she had hoped to overcome by interviewing them and by recording their stories.

However, it must be noted that although the narrator regards the translation of her compatriots' testimonies as a betrayal, she does, nonetheless, achieve a partial success by telling what had previously been repressed in the official reports of the Algerian war: the colonised population's version of events and the testimonies of those women who participated in the war. Moreover, by reproducing in French women's stories in Arabic, Djebar introduces another linguistic register very different from that of the narrator. Literal translation from Arabic is one of Djebar's most effective subversions of French. Chérifa will say, for example, "La France est venue et elle nous a brulés" (133), using *Françia* (France in dialectical Arabic) to mean both the French people and their nation. As the dialogue between the narrator and the testimonies of these rural women makes clear, Djebar refuses to privilege the educated voice of the narrator over that of her rural compatriots.

The importance of *L'Amour, la fantasia* lies in the intervention it makes in history. By revealing women's participation in the traditionally male public sphere, and by articulating the experience of the colonised, Djebar tells what has been silenced and repressed, and thereby transforms the historical narrative of French colonialism. Furthermore, by deploying the 'I' of autobiography, Djebar defies the taboo in Islamic society against a woman's assertion of her personal identity, and at the same time she creates a space for the voices of her Arab compatriots, women whose collective identity she also shares.

One is Enough

From *Ifuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970) to her novels, poetry, and short stories of the 1980s, Flora Nwapa's works are women-centred and reflect a conscious effort to represent economic independence as a significant dimension of Nigerian womanhood. Her protagonists are strong and independent women frequently contending with societal attitudes about childbearing and marriage. The need for uninhibited discussion of Nigerian women's sexuality as well as her changing marital and social role in the 'new' Nigeria is, in her opinion, of paramount importance. An effective male-female dialogue--one in which both men and women participate equally--is necessary before real social change can occur in Nigeria.

One is Enough[17] repeats many of the same concerns of both *Efuru* and *Idu*, but in a contemporary urban setting. The novel takes place after independence and the Biafran war, and it identifies many of the problems of postcolonial Nigeria. The protagonist, Amaka, is a competent woman, good at business, but is childless and in a marriage that restricts her. After being thrown out of her home in Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria, by her mother-in-law, Amaka decides to give up on marriage and move to Lagos. Her life in Lagos details her rise to power as she turns her skills to gain business 'contracts' in capitalist postcolonial Nigeria, and in the process finally becomes pregnant with a priest, Father McLaid, and attains motherhood. However, she decides, as the title says, that one husband is enough, and ends up alone and independent.

This novel is about transition. Amaka goes through a difficult life, struggle and humiliation, to eventually arrive at self-recognition and, by the end of the novel, she is satisfied that she has become a mother. She emerges from being silent and confined to the house as a wife, to become a part of the public space and to find her voice. However, she does not renounce the private, traditional space and values entirely; she is a successful businesswoman, but a proud mother with strong ties to Igbo values. In *One is Enough*, Amaka's exit from the private and emergence into the public domain is caused by the desire to speak freely and to live with dignity, without accepting the traditional role of a wife. This section will examine Nwapa's changing concepts of the private and the public, showing that what Amaka achieves, and what Nwapa stands for, is not the

reversal of the public and the private when it comes to women, but an integration of the private with the public, and an end to the public/private hierarchies and sexual stereotypes.

Flora Nwapa is a woman writer who has, with insight, dealt with women's roles as wife and mother in the Nigerian Igbo community. The central role as mother supersedes that of wife in this community. A barren wife is, therefore, regarded as a failure. In African culture, and in Nigeria in particular, barrenness is perhaps the worst affliction a couple can endure. In traditional society, a woman who lacks reproductive power lacks all power and is, indeed, deprived of her true identity and "raison d'être" in life.[18] In *One Is Enough*, Amaka starts off in a state of feminine submission and dependence. We find Amaka who has failed to produce a child in six years of marriage, grovelling at the feet of her mother-in-law, begging not to be "thrown away": "What is important is not marriage as such but children [...] a marriage is not marriage without children" (10). Amaka reflects on her fate, with negative thoughts which she later successfully rejects. "God had deprived her of the greatest blessing bestowed on a woman, the joy of being a mother" (11). But then she also asks herself, "Was that really the end of the world? Was she useless to the world if she were unmarried?" (11). Amaka's husband, like his mother, prefers an 'illiterate' to his educated and industrious wife because of her infertility even after six years of marriage. To release herself from the burden of proving her womanhood or self only through motherhood, Amaka leaves him in pursuit of economic freedom and independence.

The marriage institution is held with great respect in Ugwuta culture and every man or woman is expected to get married. Equally, parents and relations show concern when a young man or woman delays marriage. The mother-in-law in the above quotation makes a powerful statement about women's internalisation and perpetuation of the roles assigned to them by patriarchal tradition. Nwapa, however, sees marriages as a desirable state but she does not believe a woman should remain in a marriage in which she is oppressed or humiliated. If a marriage breaks down, it should not be the end of a woman's life. In *One Is Enough*, Nwapa becomes even more forthright in her encouragement of childless women to look for other ways of living a self-fulfilled and profitable life. Amaka's self-questionings - "Was a woman nothing because she was

unmarried or barren?" - later change to a strong resolution to divorce her husband and strive to be independent and successful. To make this point excessively clear, Nwapa deconstructs 'motherhood' by giving it a secondary position to women's empowerment and economic independence.

Nwapa advocates economic freedom above everything else for women. In *Women are Different* (1986), she states unequivocally the perspective from which society must view women:

> Chinwe had done the right thing. Her generation was doing better than her mother's own. Her generation was telling the men, that there are different ways of living one's life fully and fruitfully. They are saying that women have options. Their lives cannot be ruined because of a bad marriage. They have a choice, a choice to set up a business of their own, a choice to marry and have children, a choice to marry or divorce their husbands. Women are different.[19]

In *One is Enough*, economic independence is defined as a way for women to regain the freedom and power they initially lost under colonialism. Amaka, for example, the product of a mission-school education, wonders, when she is made miserable by her marriage, whether there was not "something traditional which she did not know because she went to school and was taught the tradition of the white missionaries" (10). Amaka's first step in her negotiation of freedom is to discard the values of "the good missionaries [who] had emphasised chastity, marriage and the home" (11). She then puts into practice "all that her mother taught her" (74). Amaka is thus able to break out of the definition of womanhood she has internalised in the course of her missionary education. Some of the skills colonial education teaches seem to be necessary for Nigerian women, but the values it transmits undermine the self-definition of the Igbo women as industrious and prosperous, replacing it with gender norms which define women as dependent. In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, Florence Stratton states:

> as feminist scholars in various fields have argued, colonialism is not neutral as to gender. Rather it is a patriarchal order, sexist as well as racist in its

ideology and practices. What these studies indicate is that women's position relative to men deteriorated under colonialism. They also show that, while pre-colonial women had more freedom than their colonized descendants, male domination was nonetheless an integral part of the societies they lived in. Under colonialism, then, African women were subject to interlocking forms of oppression: to the racism of colonialism and to indigenous and foreign structures of male domination.[20]

The history of women in Igboland in particular and Nigeria as a whole has not been adequately studied. Part of the problem springs from basic misconceptions about women's history and its relation to social and economic history as a whole. Bolanle Awe has noted that while building up their own picture of African society, as distinct from Western nations' picture of that society, African historians seem to have inherited a certain degree of western bias, in that they have perpetuated in their writings the masculine-centred view of history.[21] Thus Awe argues that the *Ground Work of Nigerian History*, the standard text on the history of Nigeria, made no particular mention of the role of Nigerian women in the development of their different societies. "In most parts of Nigeria", Awe maintains, "trade has traditionally been an important activity for both rural and urban women and they were not left out of the new international trade" (ix). Women gifted in trade who exploited their rich cultural heritage attained recognition and gained status in their communities. As Acholonu notes in *Motherism*, "enterprising women are better placed on the social ladder than poor unenterprising men."[22]

The female protagonist in *One Is Enough* consciously makes it her business to subvert the so-called structures erected to dominate women. There are two routes for women's empowerment in Nwapa's Egbo text: trade and education. Traditionally, the market-place was the exclusive preserve of women. Flora Nwapa, in a paper entitled "Priestesses and Power among the Riverine Igbo," confirmed this fact when she writes: "In Nigeria's economic and administrative history, trade was considered a woman's job and prominent women among the riverine Igbo sought to enhance their influence with foreign traders."[23] Nwapa also makes references in this essay to the powerful queen of the Onitsha market, who directly controlled all trading activities. In her quest for a viable

postcolonial identity, Nwapa, like Djebar, offers Nigerian women an analysis of their relationship to the history of their country to convince them they too have played a role in the history of their country.

By interrogating the images of African women as appendages to the male in Nigerian fiction of the past by some African male authors,[24] Nwapa dismantles the woman-as-object trope through her portrayal of Amaka as an intelligent, educated, and industrious woman, who is able to analyse her oppressive predicaments and choose courses which liberate and empower her. In an interview with Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Nwapa states:

> From my childhood I lived among very strong women: my two grandmothers and their co-wives. They were strong women. In my native Oguta it was the women who first started trading with the foreign companies. Trading was the job of the woman in the riverine areas. So the women gained economic power through trade before the men, and all this influenced my writing and that is why I project women as great achievers. I did not see women as second-class citizens.[25]

Education is another route that Nwapa's protagonist takes to advance social mobility, but for Amaka, it is only the stepping-stone to power and economic independence. After graduating and becoming a teacher, Amaka makes a professional shift into the trading and contracting business:

> Amaka went on with her business in Onitsha, supplying timber, sand and food. She was a contractor, one of the numerous female contractors who had sprung up during and at the end of the war. Before the war, she had been a teacher. At the end of the war, because she took part in the 'attack trade,' she rediscovered herself. (49)

Nwapa's ideology in this text is female autonomy, self-fulfilment, and economic independence. If women empower themselves economically, they will gain

independence from men. Amaka's role in this novel is to promote this new ideology. She acts out this role in her encounter with the new bride who was beaten up by her husband, reminding Amaka of a similar experience she had at the hands of Obiora during the early stages of their marriage: "Amaka learnt one thing from that incident and it was that she would never helplessly watch a man, least of all her husband, beat her. She must defend herself" (27). Having grown from this experience, Amaka fulfils her new mission of teaching and instructing the new bride about the politics and psychology of rebellion:

> He will do it again. Men are beasts, so watch out. Think of what it was that led to the beating and make sure that this trouble does not repeat itself. [...] But the trouble with men is their ego. They refuse to appreciate their wives. Mind you, they do appreciate their mothers and sisters, but never their wives. Your husband will always show you that he is a man. Your rightful place is under his thumb. He would like to control your every movement, and it is worse if you depend on him financially. (27)

Having left a husband who rejected her because of her failure to bear a child, Amaka runs away to the big city, Lagos. Although Amaka's initial displacement is forced by blame, guilt, physical and emotional force, this displacement is depicted as positive. In treating themes of motherhood, childlessness, marriage, female independence, and the reinvention of the Igbo woman in either a traditional village or a city, Nwapa discusses certain values that are fundamental to Igbo society. Village society favours and emphasises the importance of men and subordinates the role of women to that of mother and wife. In this light, Amaka's flight to the city seems to be liberating. In her works, Nwapa fashions a gender-based world view which provides a sharp commentary about women's existence in their respective environments. Nwapa writes primarily about the realm of women's experiences in their communities, and since there is an aspect of community life that is decidedly female, the perspective of such places where these lives take place is important. In few places in Nwapa's works is the attention to the city a more poignant aspect of her writing than in *One is Enough*.

One is Enough is an urban novel. What spaces can women be expected to occupy in urban communities and how do women see themselves as a part of the interaction which takes place there? These are questions which are pursued through the following analysis of *One is Enough.* As uninviting as the city may appear, in both fiction and in reality, people continue to call cities their home and express an affection for urban communities. Yi-Fu Tuan's explanation perhaps clarifies why such mixed emotions about cities exist: "A large city is often known at two levels: one of high abstraction and another of specific experience. At one extreme the city is a symbol or an image [...] to which one can orient oneself; at the other it is the intimately experienced neighborhood."[26] Tuan hypothesises that the higher the level of abstraction governing the perception of the city, the more despairing the portrait of the city and the more that perception of the city is dominated by myth or symbol. As will be shown later, Tuan's theory of perception is useful in explaining the representation of urban space in *One is Enough*.

While the general western perception of the city in literature is that of a place which alienates and destroys, for the West African, alienation and fragmentation are not necessarily synonymous with the city. Margaret Peil suggests in "Urban Contacts: A Comparison of Women and Men" that in certain urban areas which she studied, the communal values were not quickly abandoned; she adds that a low value is put on privacy and isolation. Thus "both men and women have high levels of involvement."[27] Since Peil does not consider how the city is represented in West African literary texts, an examination of Nwapa's representation of the city would complement her study. Are there female aspects of the urban experience that inform the woman writer's interpretation of the city? Tuan suggests that "where sex roles are distinct, men and women adopt different values and perceive different aspects of the environment" (246). The issue here is not so much biological differences in perception as it is in sociologically ascribed gender differences. Women's perceptions of the city are often shaped by other factors: the social and economic status of women, women's work, the education and training of women, women's geographical and social mobility, and women's groups and associations.

One is Enough is designed to show the bond of affection that exists between individual and place when the city is experienced successfully on a personal level. The

appeal of the city arises because, as a number of critics have noted, cities offer women a sense of freedom, more options for shaping their lives, and an opportunity to function without men as intermediaries in their lives. Women therefore become more independent agents who are in control of their lives. This is precisely the portrayal of the city that we find in *One Is Enough*.

From her extensive research on the depiction of cities in American literature, Sidney Bremer contends that two discernible patterns of urban imagery emerge here: "The novels that were written by men are mostly 'masculine' in their orientation to economic individualism [and] the novels written by women [were] mostly 'feminine' in their orientation to communal continuities."[28] What Bremer refers to as a 'masculine' orientation to economic individualism is depicted as common business activity among African women in *One is Enough*. Nwapa insists upon revealing this significant difference between African and Western women. Economic independence, as we have seen, is given high priority among African women. That the women situated in an urban environment would be preoccupied with exploiting opportunities for financial gain makes sense in Nwapa's society. From this frame of reference, one sees nothing 'masculine' in their activities even though urban space is generally male controlled and defined.

However, *One is Enough* reveals a measure of continuity with surrounding rural areas in which relatives are summoned for counsel and support, medicine men are consulted for physical ailments and childbearing problems. Surrounding rural communities, because of the protagonist's connectedness to her family and traditional values and customs, become merely an extension of the urban community. Achievements in the city are celebrated in traditional manner in the village. Urban space in this sense is not enclosed, neither does it trap the individual, isolating her roots or fragmenting her. In *One is Enough*, the protagonist enjoys a measure of success as a woman contractor: a three bedroom bungalow in Lagos and her Peugeot 504, the twin boys she will later have, her circle of friends, and her business deals. But nowhere is the city associated with displacement or alienation; bribery and political corruption exist, but only as pitfalls to avoid. Neither creates a moral dilemma for the protagonist nor leads to any loss of innocence or to corruption.

Although Amaka acknowledges that she has used "bottom power" (121) to experience such rapid and lucrative gains in her business, she expresses no guilt or shame over her behaviour. Instead, she is somewhat amazed at her unabashed use of such power. Since the community appears less inclined to impose the traditional double standard of sexuality on women, Amaka does not perceive herself as having done anything wrong. Catherine Frank questions Amaka's use of "bottom power" to gain success and access to wealth and freedom, and defines it in terms of moral laxity ("Women Without Men" 21). Stratton, however, resists this interpretation. In Nwapa's conception, she states, "it is men who are agents of social corruption," and further comments that "bottom power" for Amaka is "a strategy women have adopted for confronting male domination" (*Contemporary African Literature* 103). Stratton perceives this as a legitimate strategy for success within its cultural context. She rightly notes that this strategy is part of Amaka's move to find her identity and position of power as a businesswoman.

Desire and sexuality play a major role in Amaka's transition from the private to the public sphere. If she chose to stay in her marriage as a second wife because of her childlessness, she would never have experienced a sense of control over her own sexuality or expressed feminine desire. Economic independence and freedom empower women to express their desires. Amaka comes to conceive of desire as a form of self-empowerment and defiance of both the social and religious order as well as women's silence. Thus, the narrative voice underscores Amaka's newly found identity and power when she tempts Father McLaid and proposes sex to him, "She caressed him, she touched him, in a forbidden place, and he was aroused. They made love again" (74). At this point, Amaka realises what "she had sadly neglected because of what the spinster missionaries taught otherwise" (74). Throughout the novel, Nwapa maintains that, if Nigerian women hope to achieve liberation, they must first challenge the widely held assumptions that their bodies are not their own and that there is no place in Nigerian society for a woman who demands control of her own sexuality. She is, therefore, suggesting that Nigerian women's subjectivity needs to be presented to the public in terms of the way it represents an integral expression of their sexuality.

Urban space as represented in *One is Enough* is a community of women characterised by female support groups and values. Men are there, but are only incidental to the lives which women carve out for themselves, guided by a female 'doctrine' passed on from mother to daughter that stressed economic independence. Amaka lives life on her own terms, within the context of those traditional values and customs she has not rejected. She remembers, "Her mother brought them up to be independent, but [her mother] did not emphasise marriage [...] her emphasis was on self-determination and motherhood" (22-23).

Amaka moves in a circle of women--her sister, mother, female friends, and the women's business association, the "Cash Madam Club," a network of wealthy, property-owning contractors, many of whom were made widows by the Biafran war and others who were single or divorced. "They were the new generation of women contractors. There were about ten of them. Six were widows and four had left their husbands to start life again" (49). Cash madams were contractors who made substantial profits, bought or built homes, travelled, or spent money lavishly. They governed their lives independently, and as Nwapa writes, "All they cared for was themselves and their children if they had any" (50). In this sphere of women, men play rather limited roles: Father McLaid first serves as Amaka's route to lucrative contracts and later as the father of her children; her husband Obiora, whom she later divorces, provides just reason for her not remarrying. The positive image of woman as a dominant trope is a major concern in this novel. Nwapa creates an environment where women are liberated, where they are socially and economically empowered. The question is: do women, especially successful and powerful women, reproduce the oppressive norms which they often decry about patriarchy? The critic Catherine Frank, in her article, "Women without men," describes Nwapa as a radical feminist (read the kind of feminism that targets the wrong enemy of women's progress). Nwapa may be a feminist, but she is not a radical feminist. The remainder of the discussion of this novel will provide added clarification of Nwapa's reason for projecting women positively.

While the city as a place of business is generally associated with men, the focus in Nwapa's novel is on women's success in the world of contracts, cash, and cars. Amaka's presence in Lagos is motivated by a quest for identity: "She had come to look

for her identity, to start all over again. Nobody was going to mess up her life anymore" (45). Amaka sings the praises of the city not frequently heard by urban dwellers when she says to Father McLaid, "I am at peace in Lagos. [...] Its size intrigues me; its people, everything about Lagos seems to agree with me" (53). She launches into this new start with a loan from her sister and quickly learns the business through a female network. The narrative charts Amaka's success as she amasses wealth, builds houses, and uses men to gain more contracts as a supplier.

One is Enough is a success story of a woman living alone in Lagos after having accepted that marriage is not necessary for her happiness as a woman. She is a woman who, as her friend compliments her, is "about to conquer Lagos" (68). Although among this community of women marriage is not given the highest priority, motherhood is. It is the experience of becoming a mother that completes Amaka's state of success. With this dimension of womanhood complete, Amaka then feels that her life has been fulfilled. The city in Nwapa's novel is a female sphere of numerous options and opportunities which ensure financial independence and therefore a measure of power and control, even selfhood for women. A sense of dignity, self-worth, and self-esteem generally accompanies Amaka's experience in the city. In a place generally viewed as male-dominated, men serve as a backdrop for female-generated activities. The city becomes associated with images of success and escape. For Amaka, it is a place where she can seek anonymity. Rather than being in an enclosed and restricting environment, the protagonist finds that the city is boundary-free. Her transition from teacher to trade is an easy one. She may be as creative and aggressive in pursing her goals as she desires.

Life in this urban setting entails participation instead of passive existence on the periphery. The city appears as productive, fertile space. Amaka becomes pregnant there, witnesses the growth of her business, and acquires the finances to build a home, all of this in the midst of impending political turmoil. Economic success is not associated with domination of the city, nor is there any hint of a desire for domination, only to be in control of oneself or one's destiny. Any conquest which does take place is a personal victory for the protagonist juxtaposed against past failures. Armed with her mother's advice not to depend on a husband, Amaka is motivated to prove to her mother and to

herself that she can function independently of her husband and still succeed, to disprove "the erroneous belief that without a husband a woman was nothing" (24).

In her depiction of Lagos, Nwapa does not dwell on the corrupting influence of the city. Her characters accept what the city has to offer and merely continue with their lives. The city merely yields to or better still accommodates Amaka's needs and desires. In *One is Enough*, Nwapa's protagonist does not suffer the fate of being cut off from country/village while existing in an urban space. The rural and the urban are not placed in diametric opposition. There is never a severing of village roots because of Amaka's close relationship with her mother and her mother's pragmatic reconciliation of village ways with urban realities. For example, when Amaka gives birth in the city to two twins, she travels home for a celebration hosted by her mother in her village. Amaka is in no way the typical 'existential outsider' traditionally lost in the city and alienated from everyone. Her connectedness to the village is symbolised by the home she has built there.

Spaciousness and freedom of movement are associated with Amaka's living arrangements. In fact, she expresses a perference for Lagos, a place with space enough to provide her desire for anonymity. There is no imprisonment in boxed rooms or tenement buildings or references to suggest that the built environment in Lagos is composed of any such dwellings. References to home are those of acquiring land on which to have homes built, in, near, or outside the city. There are no images of prisons or violence. Lagos has room for anyone who needs it. For Amaka, the city's size and the lack of restraints imposed upon her are the key attractions.

The status of fulfilment, for Amaka at least, does not include a husband. In Lagos, Amaka is a woman who has unequivocally rejected the status of wife. Such a status is inconsistent with her newly found life as she plans to live it in Lagos, despite the promises of status and 'protection' that would accompany marriage to Father McLaid once he has received dispensation from the Catholic Church. Amaka explains to her sister, a woman who places a high value on being unmarried:

> I don't want to be a wife [...] a mistress, yes, with a lover yes of course, but not a wife. There is something in that word that does not suit me. As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. As a wife I am almost impotent. I am

> in prison, unable to advance in body and soul. Something gets hold of me as a wife and destroys me. [...] I am through with husbands. I said farewell to husbands the first day I came to Lagos. (127)

Interestingly, while the novel chronicles Amaka's material successes in the city and the reaffirmation of her self-esteem when the twins are born, this statement bears the essence of the meaning of urban space for some women. The city becomes a place where a woman can break free of socially designated space and experience a sense of freedom and control over her own life. While one cannot say that for Nwapa, the city is necessarily 'masculine' or 'feminine,' one can surely conclude that she creates urban communities in which women take charge of their lives.

One is Enough is a novel whose main concern is to give voice to Nigerian women, including Nwapa herself - to women who must resist traditional forces that seek to enclose them in veils of silence. When she describes women thinking and talking about themselves as 'individuals,' she is referring to women who claim the right to first-person discourse. There is certainly no mistaking the feminine presence in the text and the importance given to the movement of women within a masculine space. The heroine's awakening to her sensual self and her quest for a new order of existence that will satisfy her mind and body demonstrate her will to actively take her pleasures from the world around her. In doing so, Amaka acquires a sense of self; she assumes her feminine subjectivity fully and in a manner that challenges traditional expectations of women's reluctance to draw attention to themselves.

For the Nigerian woman to express her subjectivity, she must, Nwapa argues, find within herself a source of inspiration that will allow her to speak openly, first within the female collective (her mother, her sister, her girlfriends, and the 'Cash Madam Club'), then to the men in her circle (Father McLaid, the men she deals with in her business), and finally to the rest of Nigerian society. This source of inspiration represents a different type of womanhood, not one that is linked with oppressive traditions, but one that gives expression to the woman's voice, the voice that can narrate new stories about women's part in all spheres of society, a voice sustained by the strength of the collective. This voice underlies the plural nature of Nwapa's novel. One woman speaks about herself and

about what she has seen; she speaks to a circle of female friends and relatives, who in turn speak to other women until an unbreakable chain of (spoken or written) female discourse is forged. The woman who raises her voice and seizes speech has become empowered as a consequence of her having laid claim to the right to speak in the first-person, to express her feelings, and to question her fate: "I don't want to be a wife... As a wife I am never free." The one who shouts becomes, for Nwapa, a symbol of feminine presence-through-speech. Similar to the writer who leaves her mark on the world through her texts, the woman who refuses to veil her voice is affirming her presence in the world. Unveiling the voice, like unveiling the feminine presence, is to step out of the anonymity prescribed, by traditional patriarchy, for the 'good' Nigerian woman.

Nwapa's spatial representation in *One is Enough* expresses the author's awareness of the attraction that an urban space such as Lagos has for women, particularly educated women. As a public figure, Nwapa's knowledge that women can function in ways in the urban space that they cannot in traditional rural communities, and that women have choices available to them which are not available to them in traditional communities, informs her portrait of the setting in which she places her characters. In urban space, as represented in this novel, the traditional and the non-traditional merge--often clash - only to create a synthesis that affords women more rather than fewer options. When experienced intimately by single, independent women who see possibilities for advancement, personal success, and economic independence, urban space becomes the preferred space. Nwapa's representation of urban space and women's place in it suggests a need for women to reject the double standards that impose limitations on women's sexuality and thus on their freedom.

One is Enough is, in one sense, a radical departure in its emphasis on women's continuing subjugation in postcolonial Nigeria because of the limiting effects of patriarchy. In another sense, the same women use the strategy of education and economic independence to contest the discourse of patriarchy, and simultaneously transform their marginalised position into one of discursive strength. In doing so, Nwapa subverts the gender-based space: males take the professional and public arena; women are given personal and private roles. Nwapa questions the opposition between the private and the public: Amaka is controlled by patriarchy and tradition, but she has enabled herself to

break through these barriers, challenging traditional roles, and in the process, moving from silence to voice. Nwapa distinguishes between comforting haven, conducive to female success and solidarity, and threatening confinement, where woman is victim. Rather than substitute an inner for an outer space, Nwapa emphasises the importance of the public space, but redefines the term in an attempt to blur the distinction between them.

Some feminist critics of African women's literature have read this novel as more in the feminist framework than Nwapa's earlier work, since Amaka happily succeeds in both personal and professional life, and is a powerful and independent woman who rebels against tradition and embraces a Western life style. For example, Catherine Frank comments that the novel is "a painful, faltering, but ultimately successful movement of a woman from a traditional African world to a very different, Westernised urban life" ("Women without men" 18). The basic problem with this Western feminist scholarship is the binaries it creates: Western/modern versus traditional/third world other. In an essay entitled, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist scholarship and Colonial discourses," Chandra Mohanty examines the political implications of Western feminist scholarship. She argues that feminist authorship is "inscribed within relations of power" that place Western theory and "Third World" women it is imposed upon, at polar ends of a spectrum.[29] Mohanty asserts that Western feminist gender discourse is important, but it must be considered within the binaries it creates. Third World women are typically considered in terms of how they are affected by certain social institutions and systems, not in terms of their own agency, and not in regards to the specific cultural and historical contexts in which they live.

The fact that women's position in relation to men - loss of economic, political, and social agency - deteriorated under the constraints of European rule, as pronounced by Nwapa and her protagonist, is rarely examined by Western feminist theory. The public and private spaces of pre-colonial Africa are juxtaposed according to gender despite women's participation in both arenas. Catherine Frank's reading of the novel is rooted in the binaries that exist within Western feminist discourse. She juxtaposes men and women as well as polarising the uneducated, tradition-bound African woman with the educated, modern, white Western feminist. She places Igbo women in a double bind. There are

those who are traditional, domestic, and family oriented, and those who move "from a traditional African world to a very different, Westernised urban life."

Nwapa's novel is essentially aimed at undoing this colonial trope through her portrayal of Amaka as a sophisticated, modern woman with strong ties to her local tradition, that is a woman who is able to deal with the complex issues of her day. Amaka must recover Igbo feminist values in order to find happiness and prosperity in contemporary postcolonial Nigerian society. Traditional Nigerian women did not hear about feminism for the first time with Nwapa's publications. In pre-colonial times, women made substantial political, social, administrative, and spiritual contributions to their communities. In colonial Nigeria, in what came to be called in Nigerian political history the Aba Women's War between 1929-1930, women marched and protested against the taxation of unemployed women by the colonial office.[30] Feminism, therefore, was absent neither in traditional nor in colonial Nigeria. In neo-colonial times, African feminists do not only fight for equality between the sexes: the harsh economic, social, and political situation of Africa make racism, imperialism, and economic survival the very important factors of African feminism. As an African feminist who is committed as a writer, a woman, and a third world individual, Nwapa attempts to reflect all these factors in her novel and further demonstrates the various identities women assume in the larger society. Amaka's struggle, liberation, and self-fulfilment are informed by her multiple identities and experiences as a Nigerian woman. This is, indeed, what should define feminism: different cultures (including different African contexts) have different feminisms.

Conclusion

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, African women are generally portrayed as guardians of respectability, representatives of the home, or victims, voiceless, and powerless human beings. These representations and images show a total misunderstanding of the complexities of African women. African feminist writing and criticism continually contests and subverts notions of womanhood that have been naturalised in the discursive practices in which they have been represented. In doing so, African women writers and critics face a triply difficult task because they belong to more than one group simultaneously: as women in patriarchal discourse, as third world individuals, and as writers who, with ambivalence, have to unsettle the colonial and patriarchal structures in the language of the coloniser. These are factors that come into play when the African woman writer writes or speaks.

The study of Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Nwapa's *One is Enough* reveals that both women writers express shared commitments and present complementary voices. They both use their insider position in the home and in the new nation to subvert patriarchal/colonial discourses by challenging their objectification and the roles that they have been conditioned to play. In their view, to open the floodgates of women's discourse, is for women to discard their shrouds of reticence, to reflect upon themselves and their experiences in the world, and to disrupt established discourse. Female solidarity/collective, writing, education and economic independence, enable and empower the women who have been denied access to public space and speech. The narrator of *L'Amour, la fantasia* could not have escaped the sequestration in the family harem or become a writer had she not had the opportunity to go to school, nor could Amaka have rediscovered herself had she not had access to education. Similar to the writer who leaves her mark on the world through her texts, Amaka who refuses to veil her voice is affirming her presence in the world. Unveiling the voice, like unveiling the feminine presence, is to step out of the role prescribed by patriarchy for the silent African woman.

In contrast to Nwapa's overt condemnation of the repressive structure in Nigerian society, Djebar's novel is a relatively muted critique of this patriarchal order.

Perhaps, this reluctance to confront the sexual politics of Arab, Muslim society is inextricably connected to the subject position of the author, her use of the autobiographical 'I' and French colonial support for female emancipation in North Africa. As Djebar makes clear, the very act of writing an autobiography already represents a major transgression in relation to Islamic culture: "Comment dire "je," puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation collective?" (177). For the Algerian women in Djebar's childhood world, 'egotism' or a desire to 'stand out' from the collective was unacceptable, for the harmony and unity of the whole group were valued more than the individual accomplishments of its members. For a woman to speak out before she has reached old age--when women in Muslim society enjoy considerably more power - is an act which constitutes an even more serious transgression: "Comment une femme pourrait parler haut, même en langue arabe, autrement que dans l'attente du grand âge" (177). For a woman to write an autobiography, then, is to defy the dictates of Islamic culture, patriarchal society, and Algerian nationalism. Djebar reveals and celebrates instead women's participation and resistance in the traditionally male public sphere, and by articulating the experience of the colonised, she tells what has been silenced and repressed as well as transforming the historical narrative of French colonialism. Similarly, Nwapa condemns the colonial role in destroying matriarchal structures, but, unlike her previous novels, she seems to have something urgent to say, a clear statement to make about the struggle, courage, and heroism of a Nigerian woman in order to raise the consciousness of all Nigerian women.

In addition, unlike Nwapa, Djebar explores her relationship to the colonial language and reveals the tension inherent in writing in the coloniser's language. Speaking with Le Clézio, she indicates that, although she has always been 'at home' in French when writing fiction, she could not allow French to become too intimately linked with her innermost self in the way that language and the self become mutually interdependent in an autobiographical text. Explaining the link between Les *Alouettes naïves* (1967) and her decision to stop writing temporarily, Djebar declared:

> -Ce roman une fois terminé, je me suis arrêtée d'écrire parce que, dans le coeur du roman, sur quarante pages peut-être, pour la première fois dans ce

trajet-là, j'avais une écriture à la limite de l'autobiographie... Je me suis arrêtée.

-Parce que ça te bouleversait de reconnaître que tu laissais passer quelque chose de toi-même à ce moment-là?

-Oui, confusément peut-être, je refusais à la langue française d'entrer dans ma vie, dans mon secret. Ce n'est pas tellement un rapport à l'écriture; c'est un rapport à la langue française. J'ai senti celle-ci comme ennemie. Ecrire dans cette langue, mais écrire très près de soi, pour ne pas dire de soi-même, avec un arrachement, cela devenait pour moi une entreprise dangereuse. (Le Clézio, 238)

By dint of its adversarial nature, the colonised writer expressing himself/herself in 'la langue adverse' uses this language first as a shield, a smoke screen, because to do otherwise would be, in her eyes, to make herself vulnerable. There is a risk involved in opening oneself to a 'foreign' tongue, for the displacement of the mother tongue evokes the possibility of a second violation, mimicking the coloniser's initial invasion of the mother country. This situation is potentially even more problematic for a Muslim Algerian woman because her self-writing would represent a transgression of traditional exhortations to 'modesty.' Djebar views the coloniser's language with ambiguity and tension, whereas Nwapa does not, although she is fluent in Ibo and English. This is so, perhaps, because the French colonial administration - unlike the British system of indirect rule - was disturbingly effective in its repression of Arabic in Algeria, and its imposition of the French language upon the indigenous elite. This is one major reason why the problem of writing in French is articulated with particular force by most North African writers.

In conclusion, both Djebar and Nwapa, in their texts as in their essays, re-read master narratives in order to recover their voices. Both emphasise the commonalities between colonial and patriarchal structures in their texts. As Gayatri Spivak says in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and

object formation, the figure of the woman disappears...displaced...caught between tradition and modernization" (287). In expressing their individual and collective identities as they write to and for the subaltern women as well as themselves, Djebar and Nwapa, each in her own way, interrupt the discourses that rendered the subaltern woman mute and, thus, create a new space for challenging and disruptive voices.

Notes

[1] Mina Davis Caufield, "Imperialism, the Family, and cultures of resistance," *Socialist Revolution* 20 (October 1974) 70.

[2] George L. Moss, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) 97.

[3] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 81.

[4] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 120.

[5] For an analysis of the ways in which postcolonial women writers contest the discourses which marginalise them, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's "Introduction" to *De/colonizing the subject: Gender and the Politics of Women's Autobiography*, eds, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992)

[6] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: J C Lattès, 1985)

[7] Domna Stanton, ed, *The Female Autograph* (New York: Literary Forum, 1984) 15.

[8] Hélène Cixous, "La Venue à l'écriture," in Hélène Cixous, Madeleine Gagnon, Annie Leclerc, eds, *La Venue à l'écriture* (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1977) 20.

[9] Mildred Mortimer, *Journeys through the French African Novel* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990) 156.

[10] Marguerite Le Clézio, "Assia Djebar: Ecrire dans la langue adverse," *Contemporary French Civilization* 9.2 (1985) 232.

[11] Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 6.

[12] Mildred Mortimer, "Entretien avec Assia Djebar, écrivain algérien," *Research in African Literatures* 19.2 (1988) 201.

[13] Mernissi's *Le Harem politique* (1987) was banned in Morocco, her native country and place of residence. The censorship encountered by this book illustrates the point that Mernissi makes in her article with regard to the institutionalised control of information about women's active participation in society during the early years of Islam.

[14] Fatima Mernissi, "Women in Muslim History: Traditional Perspectives and New Strategies," in Jay Kleinberg, ed, *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society* (Oxford/New York: Berg/UNESCO, 1988) 342.

[15] In *Orientalism*, Said argues that the discourse of Orientalism is an "enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce- the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post Enlightenment period" (3).

[16] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," in Shari Benstock, ed, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)

[17] Flora Nwapa, *One is Enough* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1981)

[18] Catherine Frank, "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa," in Eldred Durosimi *et al*, eds, *Women in African Literature Today* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987) 20.

[19] Flora Nwapa, *Women are Different* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1986) 119.

[20] Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 7.

[21] Bolanle Awe, ed, *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* (Lagos/Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992)

[22] Catherine Acholonu, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (Owerri, Nigeria: Afa, 1995) 45.

[23] Flora Nwapa, "Priestesses and Power among the Riverine Igbo," in Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, ed, *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses and Power: Case Studies in African Gender* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1997)

[24] The question of the discrepancy between the roles women occupied historically, and those they are ascribed in male fictional works are addressed in Stratton's work, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*.

[25] Ezenwa Ohaeto, "Flora Nwapa: Interview with Ezenwa-Ohaeto," *ALA Bulletin* 19.4 (April 1993) 14.

[26] Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977) 224.

[27] Margaret Peil, "Urban Contacts: A Comparison of Women and Men," in Christine Oppong, ed, *Female and Male in West Africa* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983) 215.
[28] Sidney Bremer, "Lost Continuities: Alternative Urban Visions in Chicago Novels, 1890-1915," *Soundings* 64.1 (Spring 1981) 32.
[29] Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist scholarship and Colonial discourses," in Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991) 53.
[30] Judith Allen, "Aba Riots or Women's War?," in Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay, eds, *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976): 59-85.

Conclusion

This comparative study of writers from both north and south of the Sahara, and from Francophone and Anglophone contexts, shows that, despite their geographical and linguistic differences, they deal with similar issues. The themes of alienation, literary and linguistic decolonisation, cultural hybridity, internal colonialisms, gender and ethnicity as well the examination of subalternity and political representation are a common link between the writers studied in this thesis. They reflect the shared psychic and historical conditions across the differences distinguishing one society from another.

The ways in which these writers negotiate the tensions of their identities as men and women, and as European-language writers in once colonised countries, offers another point of unity. As has been seen throughout this thesis, The position of the postcolonial writer navigating a course between the conflicting demands of two (or more) cultures and languages, can be characterised as the site upon which the battle is fought between European and African grand narratives, the written language of the *métropole* imposed upon the colonised population, and the devalorised and repressed oral traditions of the African language. The position of the postcolonial writer, as the site of this battle, suggests, on the one hand, the tensions inherent in the situation of the postcolonial writer, namely the problem of writing in the language of the coloniser; the situation of the plural hybrid in the face of 'repressed' hybridity in nationalist discourse; the difficulty of addressing the question of women's emancipation (Djebar and Nwapa) without identifying oneself with the values of the *métropole*; and the transgressive nature of writing. On the other hand, the position of the postcolonial writer as the site of a battle also suggests the ability of the writer to resist and subvert the hegemonic language and culture of the coloniser as well as the marginalising and the representational logic within the (ex)colonised system itself. This tension pervades all the texts under consideration and is closely related to the different forms of the writers' subversion of grand narratives.

From one perspective the writings of Khatibi, Achebe, Ben Jelloun, Farah, Djebar and Nwapa, have been partly read as a critique of Western discourses about Africa and the 'third world' as a whole, and the way such discourses have embodied the interest of Western colonialism and neocolonialism. *La Mémoire tatouée*, *Things Fall*

Apart, *L'Enfant de sable*, *Maps*, *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *One is Enough*, are, in varying degrees, critical of simplistic or monolithic views of Africa, or the Orient, or Islam. This does not mean that 'writing back' is prevalent in these postcolonial texts. Although the issues of colonial history, colonial education and 'decolonising the mind' are more pronounced in some texts (Khatibi, Achebe and Djebar) than they are in the others, they are only one part of a wider set of concerns.

However, as this study attempts to show, there are other perspectives from which to view these writings. There is a profound concern with the cultural politics of Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria and Somalia. In order to read this literature fruitfully, one must understand the intertextual relation between literature and other parts of African discourse. The construction of national identities in once colonised countries can be associated with particular struggles and interests. Literary texts, as has been demonstrated throughout this study, participate in the making of national identity and thus are imbricated in the politics of the nation. Postcolonial writers in these societies understand the hybrid complexity of postcolonial nations and peoples that are non-Western and Western, modern and traditional. Furthermore, they all address the profound tension in postcolonial nations between the high hopes of national independence and the disappointment of persistent political corruption, underdevelopment, factionalism, sexism, and neocolonialism. Given the frustrating history of independence, it is not surprising that these postcolonial writers and others increasingly challenge monolithic state authority and its supporting myths of coherent national progress and unified national identity. As Amir Mufti points out in his discussion of Salman Rushdie, the critical consciousness of postcolonial writers is "double edged," "directed at both colonial culture and the myth of cultural authenticity and authority that replaced it" (100). Both North African and sub-Saharan writers have demonstrated the close link that obtains between colonial and national authorities. The novels investigated in this thesis participate in the questioning of received notions of identity, whether they be received from Europe or African nationalist leaders.

While these authors have in common a concern with the narratives of colonialism and patriarchy, the nature of their concerns differs according to the contexts in which the question is raised. Even as they are engaged in the same problematic,

authors from different countries have proposed varying responses to their common situation. The differences that exist are due to the differences in the political and cultural contexts. Literary texts and their contexts are mutually constitutive. It is vitally important not to presuppose that African experiences of colonialism are similar, or that African nationalisms, and the problems they encounter and create, are the same. This thesis proposes, therefore, that the authors discussed are not defined by their intertextual relations with each other, but instead through their interaction with the political and cultural discourses in their respective societies. Given the equally strong political and literary traditions in Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco and Somalia, in conjunction with the long-standing mutual involvement of these two spheres, the links found should not come as a surprise. What is surprising is the dearth of studies that try to establish such links and explore their significance.

Reading postcolonial texts from different literary, linguistic and cultural backgrounds makes it possible to come to a wider and better understanding of postcolonial identity, as well as the complexity and diversity of the postcolonial world. This horizontal comparison, then, offers the means of thinking comparatively about the various identities emerging from different colonial traditions and multiple cultural inheritances; and it also opens up a space for an exploration of the strategies developed by various writers for the construction of postcolonial identities. Khatibi's notion of '*bilangue*' and Achebe's figure of the 'crossroads of cultures' underline the potentiality of a cultural space that opens boundaries between cultures and among people within the same cultures. In their exploration of the artifice of gender construction and the formation of national identity in the new nation, Ben Jelloun and Farah remind us that margins contain their own centres. Both writers use the trope of nomadism, a potential space of creativity and empowerment, as an alternative to the oppressive hierarchies of Africa's inherited modern nations. The gender coding associated with the emergence of national identities in the new nation is exposed by Djebar and Nwapa. Both women writers depict the ways in which women are constructed as the sexual and cultural other by patriarchal ideologies in their European colonial and African forms. At the same time, they assert the centrality of women to the history of the nation, in which there emerges a resistant and dynamic female subjectivity that both extends and transforms African female roles. The

point of unity in these responses/strategies is the writers' determination to end facile oppositional practices, by suggesting new paradigms of identity, both sexual and cultural, which go beyond oppressive definitions. Their articulation of a heterogeneous national identity undercuts colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self, and is in keeping with the pluralism of the postcolonial world. Work that looks comparatively at postcolonial cultures and their literary production, as Bill Ashcroft *et al* put it, is indeed the way forward in the world in which we live:

> The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing into an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognise cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation [...] the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies. (*Empire Writes Back* 36)

Unlike traditional 'Eurocentric' comparative literature, comparison of forms and content across postcolonial literatures offers a wealth of possibilities. What it does not offer, as Bassnett puts it, "are clear cut answers and definitions" (*Comparative Literature* 86). This comparison, therefore, is in keeping with the plural identities, voices and choices of the postcolonial world. It is a challenge to any exclusive definition of the 'postcolonial.' The conclusions reached do not claim that the selected texts are emblematic of any unified theory of African writing or are representative or illustrative of all postcolonial writing. Nor do they claim that these texts are typical illustrations of their respective nations. This comparative study has highlighted the dangers of such claims, while at the same time asserting the important work carried out by these European-language writers: their common determination to change how their world is imagined. As I reach the end of this comparative project, I become convinced of the imperative of broadening the framework of comparison of European-language literatures. There is a need for further research to accommodate other voices from within African cultures. This can be done, for instance, by linking literary texts to other types of cultural production

such as film, newspapers, art and music. Only through a consideration of this polyvocality can one attempt to develop a more accurate understanding of postcolonial societies.

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