



Feminist Identity between Alienation and Reconstruction: An Exploration of Contemporary Algerian Feminist Fiction

Dr. Tayeboun Faryal¹, Dr. HAMDIDI Boualem²

¹ Lecturer (A) University of M'Hamed Bougara Boumerdes, Algeria. Email: f.tayeboun@univ-boumerdes.dz

² Lecturer (A) University of M'Hamed Bougara Boumerdes, Algeria. Email: a.hamdidi@univ-boumerdes.dz

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Abstract

Feminist identity represents one of the most significant issues explored in contemporary Algerian fiction, as this literary production has sought to challenge the various forms of domination that have deprived women of their ability to freely define themselves, confining them to socially and domestically imposed roles. Consequently, women have been exposed to multiple forms of marginalization and violence, resulting in the fragmentation of their identity and the disruption of their self-perception. Feminist fiction has thus attempted to reshape women's awareness of themselves and their identities. This article examines several dimensions, including the representation of identity crisis and self-alienation through characters subjected to oppression and domination while confronting a repressive patriarchal society. It also explores rebellion as a mechanism of resistance against social reality and as a revolt against injustice. Finally, it addresses the assertion of selfhood and the destabilization of masculine authority, representing a phase of reconstruction through the recovery of identity and freedom and the deconstruction of patriarchal power. Accordingly, how has contemporary Algerian feminist fiction represented the dialectic of feminist identity between alienation and reconstruction? Has it succeeded in producing an alternative discourse on women and their identities?

Keywords: alienation, reconstruction, identity, fiction, feminism, masculinity, estrangement, rebellion.

1. Introduction:

The novel is considered one of the literary genres most capable of expressing human, political, and cultural transformations within society. It has effectively addressed various issues, including the question of women in the Arab world. Feminist writing emerged as a means of reconsidering the representation of women and reformulating questions related to their identity, body, freedom, and social relationships. Therefore, the significance of feminist fiction lies in its ability to give expression to women's suffering and inner struggles. This type of fiction is also significant because it seeks to deconstruct the conventional images imposed on women by patriarchal discourses.

The article *Feminist Identity between Alienation and Reconstruction: An Exploration of Contemporary Algerian Feminist Fiction* examines the experiences of Algerian women within society, where they fluctuate between the loss of selfhood and its restoration. The research is divided into two sections: the first is theoretical, providing a definition of feminism and examining its relationship with contemporary Algerian fiction. The second is an applied section, which addresses the crisis of identity and the alienation of the feminist self, and how these dimensions are manifested in several novels, including *The Letter of Shame* by Fadhila El Farouk and *Women Who Refuse to Leave* by Ould Seddik Miloud. It also investigates how certain female novelists adopted rebellion as a mechanism of resistance against patriarchal society, as illustrated by Assia Djebar's novel *The Gate of Memories*.

Finally, it explores how contemporary feminist novels have asserted the feminine self, questioned masculine authority, and restored female identity, with reference to works such as *Honored by Your Departure* by Firoz Racham and *Houaria* by Inam Bayoud. The analytical approach was adopted as it represents the most appropriate methodology for this type of study.

2. Concept of Feminism:

Feminism is an intellectual movement that seeks to achieve equality between women and men in terms of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, while challenging all forms of discrimination and inequality against women. Feminism aims to liberate women and restore recognition of their humanity and their active role within society.

“Feminism is a political, cultural, and social theoretical movement characterized by its emancipatory and revolutionary dimensions. It sought liberation from the authority of the patriarchal system and aimed to establish fundamental principles and mechanisms for defending women and their rights, while correcting cultural trajectories shaped by masculine biases, in order to restore women to their natural human context as active

participants.”¹ It therefore seeks to defend women’s rights to education, employment, and political participation.

Feminism does not seek to establish conflict with men; rather, it is founded on the critique of unjust social structures and aims to promote a balanced relationship between the sexes based on respect, equality, and mutual participation. The term feminism was first introduced in 1860 and later gained considerable prominence during the twentieth century in America, while it emerged in Europe after the Second World War and experienced significant development during the 1960s and 1970s in France.² Feminist thought has undergone substantial historical evolution over time, closely associated with social, political, economic, and cultural transformations.

Arab feminism emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, incorporating various intellectual concerns, including resistance to colonialism, social and educational reform, and efforts to reconcile women’s liberation with religious and cultural frameworks. Thus, “Arab feminist identity is shaped through concepts of penetrating and transcending the past on one hand, and through the search for its existence or being within the realm of writing, first and foremost, on the other hand.”³ Among its prominent representatives are Qasim Amin, Nawal El Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, and Huda Shaarawi. Similar to Western feminism, Arab feminism emphasizes awareness of social injustice and advocates equality while rejecting all forms of discrimination, domination, and oppression. Feminism, therefore, seeks to transform women’s social position and redefine their role within society.

3. Feminist Identity and Contemporary Algerian Fiction:

Within the literary domain, feminism refers to the study of women’s representation in literary texts through the examination of forms of marginalization and exclusion embedded within narrative discourse. “For some, feminist literature is the literature written by women, while for others, it encompasses all writings that address women and everything related to them, including their suffering, aspirations, ambitions, and dreams.”⁴

¹ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, Katara Publishing House, Qatar, 1st edition, 2018, p. 259.

² Maya Al-Rahbi, *Feminism: Concepts and Issues*, Al-Rahba Publishing and Distribution, Damascus – Syria, 1st edition, 2014, p. 14.

³ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 122.

⁴ Sawsan Abradcha, “Feminist Literature between Rejection and Acceptance and Its Beginnings in the Arab World,” *Ihalat Journal*, University Center of Maghnia, Issue 3, June 2019, p. 226.

The feminist discourse in Algerian fiction is not confined to an explicit demand for equality; rather, it emerges as a resistant narrative discourse that seeks to challenge dominant masculine authority and reconstruct the representation of the feminine self as an active and autonomous subject, rather than merely an object of desire, control, or oppression.

Arab feminist writings have developed according to two major orientations: the first depicts women as vulnerable figures, victims, and submissive individuals, whereas the second represents women as rebellious and transformative figures striving for liberation and self-determination. “When some Arab female novelists were asked the question: Why do you write? They answered that they write in order to free themselves from the burden of suffering that has accumulated throughout the details of their lives within a male-dominated society. Therefore, they write to practice challenge, resistance, and rebellion.”⁵

Contemporary Algerian feminist fiction emerges from a critical interrogation of feminine identity within society. It reveals women’s experiences of suffering while presenting them as conscious subjects and witnesses to their own realities rather than merely passive victims. Female writers employ narrative strategies such as self-representation, confession, and polyphony to explore the construction of identity through experiences of pain, memory, and resistance.

a. The Crisis of Identity and Self-Alienation:

The term “crisis-ridden female character” refers to a condition in which the self undergoes a profound existential or psychological crisis, placing its identity under fundamental threat. This state produces feelings of loss, anxiety, and instability, depriving individuals of psychological equilibrium and limiting their ability to determine their own destinies. It may also result in a diminished sense of belonging, fear of autonomy, or psychological collapse under the pressures of social reality, ultimately leading to the fragmentation of self-awareness.

Feminist alienation is regarded as a psychological and social condition experienced by women when they become disconnected from their authentic selves and their surrounding environment due to pressures generated by patriarchal social and cultural structures. “When we speak of spirituality, we direct the meaning against materialism, and when we associate it with femininity, we enter into women’s rejection of the male perception of them as empty consumer objects deprived of spiritual values. This drives them toward alienation within

⁵ Hussein Al-Manasra, *Feminism in Culture and Creativity*, Modern World of Books, Irbid – Jordan, 1st edition, 2007, p. 162.

this world burdened by inherited masculine authority.”⁶ In this context, alienation is not merely an individual experience of isolation; rather, it represents the consequence of a social system that marginalizes women’s voices and restricts their capacity for expression and self-realization, thereby pushing them toward social exclusion, self-estrangement, and a loss of existential meaning.

The novel *The Letter of Shame* by Fadhila El Farouk narrates the story of a courageous and rebellious female journalist who challenges both her family and society and leaves her hometown to settle in Constantine in pursuit of her chosen profession. She dedicates her writing to defending marginalized and oppressed women. She is deeply distressed after witnessing a father throw his daughter from a bridge because she had brought him shame:

“I discovered that the father was the one who threw his daughter from the bridge, while people forgot the collective rapes and began thinking only about Rima. He said that he had freed her from shame because she had been raped. The rapist was a forty-year-old man, a short and hunchbacked individual who lived in the same neighborhood and owned a small shop selling sweets, biscuits, and chewing gum (...) The hunchback was sentenced to ten years in prison because of the skill of his lawyer.”⁷

Society did not reflect upon the horrific crime of which the young girl was the victim; instead, it portrayed her father as a hero because, according to its perception, he had eliminated the source of shame. Through this narrative, Fadhila El Farouk seeks to expose the hypocrisy of a society that interprets religion according to its own interests: “Culturally distorted religion stands alongside men, reinforcing and consolidating their authority through the humiliation of women and the practice of violence against them (abduction, murder, and rape), with the complicity of the patriarchal society.”⁸

The protagonist continues her journey in the city of Constantine, where she visits a hospital to meet women who had been raped by terrorist groups in the mountains. There, she encounters one of them, who appears to have lost her sanity due to the psychological trauma she endured and the torture inflicted upon her:

“She lifted the sleeve of her robe and brought her mutilated wrists closer to me:

⁶ Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, *Femininity in Literature (Theory and Practice)*, Modern World of Books for Publishing and Distribution, Irbid – Jordan, 1st edition, 2016, p. 160.

⁷ Fadhila El Farouk, *The Letter of Shame*, Riyad El-Rayyes Books and Publishing, Beirut – Lebanon, n.ed., n.d., pp. 39–40.

⁸ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 292.

- Look... They tied me with a wire and did whatever they wanted to me. None of them had mercy in their hearts, and even God abandoned me, although I begged Him: Where are You, Lord? Where are You, Lord?

Her voice gradually grew louder until she began screaming. She started pulling her hair and tearing her clothes, while her cries continued to rise.”⁹

The young woman in the novel suffers from severe psychological distress that ultimately leads to her mental collapse. Through this character, the writer further portrays the tragedy endured by women during that painful historical period. Another woman, Raziqa, later commits suicide after being denied an abortion, while Yamina follows her after suffering from severe bleeding. Khalida leaves the hospital in tears, mourning the condition of her homeland and its women:

“Sleep, Yamina... If only you had not died bleeding alone, if only you had not died piece by piece, if only you had not died gradually, and if only Raziqa had not committed suicide, if only Rawiya had not lost her mind, I would have said that spring in Algeria was still alive. There are no more flowers in Algeria today... no fields.”¹⁰

Khalida chooses to leave her homeland for Marseille after losing hope in her country and after being deeply shocked by the injustice she witnessed there, particularly when religion became, for certain individuals, a means and instrument for suppressing, violating, and torturing women. Closely related to *The Letter of Shame*, the novel *Women Who Refuse to Leave* recounts the stories of Algerian women who find themselves confronting a harsh reality imposed upon them by society, including violence, civil conflict, and oppression. The novel presents the experiences of a group of women living in a village called Tala; each woman has her own story, suffering, and struggle with life, society, and family.

The novel opens in a hospital where a group of women, including Yakouta, are recovering after a devastating flood that claimed the lives of many villagers. In the same hospital room where Yakouta was staying, a pale-faced young woman was lying unconscious. According to the narrator, none of her family members or relatives had visited her. After several days in the hospital, she finally decided to reveal her tragic story to Yakouta: “She was the victim of a family conflict with her husband, who stabbed her fatally in her back and abdomen and left bruises on her face. She nearly lost her life had it not been for God’s will.”¹¹

⁹ Fadhila El Farouk, *The Letter of Shame*, Riyad El-Rayyes Books and Publishing, Beirut – Lebanon, p. 45.

¹⁰ Fadhila El Farouk, *The Letter of Shame*, Riyad El-Rayyes Books and Publishing, Beirut – Lebanon, n.d., n.ed., p. 93.

¹¹ Ould Seddik Miloud, *Women Who Refuse to Leave*, Mim Publishing House, Algeria, 1st edition, 2021, p. 21.

This young woman had been married at an early age, before reaching the age of sixteen. Her father had forced her into this marriage for financial interests involving his friend, a man thirty years older than her. However, over the years, conflicts intensified between her husband and her father, and she became the victim of this dispute, enduring physical violence, humiliation, and torture. She eventually discovered that her father had married her off in order to settle his debts. The woman adds, describing her own situation and that of women facing similar experiences: “We do not marry according to our own will, nor do we choose out of love, the young woman says; rather, we are forced into marriage without knowing the destination to which we are being taken.”¹²

This young woman suffered profoundly because of her materialistic and greedy husband, who wasted all his money on gambling and immoral activities. As for her, she had no alternative but to remain silent and endure her suffering in order to preserve her reputation and that of her father. This husband did not confine his actions to physical violence, insults, and humiliation; he went further by attempting to murder her and eliminate her after accusing her of disclosing family secrets to her neighbor Zakia.

Patriarchal authority has historically violated women’s bodies by claiming the right to control, discipline, and punish them. “Algerian women’s fiction has not hesitated to present the female body according to the logic of violation and desecration. It represents a cry rooted in a long legacy of masculine enslavement of the female body within a world dominated by patriarchal culture. This culture embodies a systematic and continuous tendency to establish the logic of appropriation and possession of the marginalized Other’s body (the woman) and to claim ownership over it.”¹³

The writer expresses the suffering of Algerian women through one of the female patients in the hospital, named Khayra, who recounts her tragedy, stating: “Many customs from the age of ignorance have been inherited from our ancestors. None of my sisters was allowed by my father to study or even to leave the house, like all families in the village, of course. We were almost like animals, or even beneath them in status. Our words were unheard, our opinions were disregarded, and we were not even consulted regarding our own destinies as human beings. We were usually married off to whoever pleased the father or grandfather, only to find ourselves eventually in the hands of people whose details and characteristics we knew nothing about.”¹⁴

¹² Ould Seddik Miloud, *Women Who Refuse to Leave*, Mim Publishing House, Algeria, 1st edition, 2021, p. 22.

¹³ Asmaa Khamkham, “Deconstructing the Centrality of Masculine Authority in Algerian Feminist Fiction (Selected Models),” *Afaq Scientific Journal*, University of Tamanrasset, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2025, p. 434.

¹⁴ Ould Seddik Miloud, *Women Who Refuse to Leave*, p. 29.

Thus, Ould Seddik Miloud portrays the suffering of Algerian women who are forced into marriage and compelled to endure pain, humiliation, and violence that may sometimes extend to the point of murder. They become victims of husbands, fathers, and restrictive social customs and traditions. However, despite their suffering, they remain resilient and maintain hope for a future capable of healing their wounds and restoring happiness to their lives.

Therefore, feminist fiction has represented alienation through female characters who experience oppression, struggle for freedom, and attempt to reconstruct their identities in opposition to social and patriarchal authority.

b. Rebellion as a Mechanism of Resistance:

Contemporary Algerian fiction relies on destabilizing the traditional image of the father as a symbol of absolute wisdom and authority by revealing his contradictions and weaknesses and by associating his power with violence, silence, and oppression. In contrast, the female character is constructed as a critical and rebellious subject who questions this patriarchal heritage and seeks alternative existential and human possibilities.

“Women’s rebellion (...) emerged from awareness and knowledge of the other’s actions and dominance, which led them to adopt an apparent revolutionary act at times and a concealed one at others. However, this rebellion ultimately produced its effects by establishing selves that are largely liberated from authority, dependence, and domination.¹⁵” Feminist rebellion does not represent a rupture with identity; rather, it constitutes a process of redefining and renegotiating it. It represents a cry against masculine domination and patriarchal control.

The novel *The Gate of Memories* recounts the story of a girl who lived in Algeria during the colonial period, particularly before the outbreak of the liberation revolution. It reflects the condition of Algerian society during that era, especially the situation of women, who were subjected to strict restrictions that deprived them of freedom and severely limited their social existence.

The novel opens with the heroine’s childhood in a conservative traditional environment, where family life intersects with the strict customs and traditions of Algerian society, particularly those imposed on women. The novel includes numerous passages that clearly depict the authority exercised by both society and the father over the vulnerable female figure. Her father prevented her from riding a bicycle when she was only four years old,

¹⁵ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 315.

after she decided to learn how to ride it with the son of their neighbors. She was astonished when her father shouted at her and prohibited her from doing so:

“No, I do not want it, no, I do not want it,” he repeated loudly to my mother, who had also hurried silently—“I do not want my daughter’s legs to appear while she is riding a bicycle.”¹⁶

This situation led the heroine to question, with astonishment and disappointment, what was wrong with the legs of a young girl appearing while riding a bicycle. After growing older and reaching adolescence, she joined a girls’ boarding secondary school, where she encountered European girls who became her friends. She gradually moved closer to a sense of liberation, which enabled her to abandon the *haik* that she had always strongly disliked.

“Novels succeed in engaging with masculine customs and traditions, deconstructing them, and escaping their constraints. They also succeed in portraying and diagnosing the defect underlying these traditions. The result was rebellion against this legacy through a counterattack that exposed its contradictions.”¹⁷

Furthermore, she committed an act that was considered forbidden for Algerian women at that time: establishing friendships with men. She began going out with a male classmate and openly expressed this experience with pride in front of her female classmates:

“I could have walked endlessly beside him. I was not thinking about anything else, neither about the touching of hands nor about holding his arm. I felt peaceful in his company. My courage had triumphed in the courtyard of the secondary school before an audience of my classmates of both genders.”¹⁸

She continued her rebellious path and decided to permanently abandon the *haik* after traveling to the capital to complete her secondary education. She felt pleased and proud of this decision. The adolescent girl began moving freely, choosing her own clothing, and no longer covering her head with a scarf, whether she was alone or accompanied by her friend. However, she avoided speaking Arabic to conceal her identity, fearing the reaction of Arab men if they discovered that she was an Arab Muslim Algerian woman who did not wear the *haik* or the veil and refused to conceal her body:

¹⁶ Assia Djebar, *The Gate of Memories*, translated by Mohamed Yahiaoui, Ministry of Culture, Algeria, 2014, p. 63.

¹⁷ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 303.

¹⁸ Assia Djebar, *The Gate of Memories*, translated by Mohamed Yahiaoui, p. 294.

“I wanted, as I wore a short skirt, to confront all the men of my tribe: —I am from among you! I am like you! Of course, they would have mocked me or insulted me!”¹⁹

Through abandoning the Algerian *haïk*, Fatima attempted to liberate herself from the restrictions imposed upon her by her father and society. She sought to reclaim control over her body, “so that nudity becomes a form of breaking restrictions, elevating the value of the body, and a desire to immortalize it.”²⁰

Thus, the novel *The Gate of Memories* conveys, through the character of its heroine Fatima, the novelist’s ideological perspective, which embraces rebellious feminist ideas challenging paternal authority and the closed structures of Algerian society. She refuses to accept her imposed reality, rebels against its limitations, and persistently seeks to attain freedom and recover her confiscated identity.

c. Self-Assertion and the Undermining of Masculinity:

During the reconstruction phase, women seek to rebuild their identities through self-awareness and an understanding of their social environment, deconstructing stereotypical representations and reclaiming their voices, rights, and capacities for choice and self-expression. This reconstruction emerges through writing, everyday forms of resistance, and the redefinition of social roles in accordance with their authentic existence.

Saeed Hamid Kazem states:

“Feminist writing has developed and acquired new dimensions among many female novelists, as their narrative structures have been woven in a different manner known as the spider-like narrative, which relies on weaving its delicate and deceptive threads around men in order to extract from them all their life necessities, and then ultimately achieve liberation from them, or more precisely, liberation from their authority that has surrounded women for a long time. It is now time for women to possess this authority. Liberation from men has become a prominent theme in feminist narrative.”²¹

Women have therefore begun to write about this female figure deprived of her will and, through their novels, call upon her to reclaim her identity and freedom. Feminist identity is not a fixed or predetermined condition; rather, it represents a continuous process shaped by

¹⁹ Assia Djebar, *The Gate of Memories*, translated by Mohamed Yahiaoui, pp. 405–406.

²⁰ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 78.

²¹ Saeed Hamid Kazem, *Experimentation in Iraqi Feminist Fiction after 2003*, Tammuz House for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, 1st edition, 2016, p. 92.

the tension between mechanisms of oppression and the aspiration for liberation, between processes of deconstruction and reconstruction.

The novel *Honored by Your Departure* by the writer Firoz Racham narrates the life of a woman named Fatima Al-Zahra, whose destiny places her within a family in which her two brothers belong to a terrorist group. They impose their oppressive authority upon her by preventing her from pursuing her studies and leaving the house, forcing her to wear the veil, and arranging her marriage to a mentally ill and abusive man. Her husband exploits her salary, betrays her, and subjects her to violence and mistreatment, alongside his family. Consequently, Fatima develops cancer and undergoes a mastectomy, causing her husband to reject her and divorce her. Nevertheless, she decides to reconstruct her life, ultimately succeeds in regaining her sense of self and recovering her health, and writes a book recounting her personal experience.

The novel begins with the ending, as Fatima Al-Zahra meets a journalist to recount her book, which constitutes an autobiographical narrative of her life. She begins by recalling her suffering within her family and the severe restrictions imposed upon her by her two brothers, Rachid and Fouad, particularly the latter, who constantly invented pretexts to assault and beat her:

“Uncle saved me from him while blood was flowing from my nose after the monster punched me in the face. I refused to enter my room and remained in the corridor screaming and repeating:

—Terrorist... murderer... butcher... Fouad was too dangerous and too powerful for three men to stop him. Now it has become certain that my grave will be dug today, or tomorrow at the latest. They separated us while he swore that he would kill me, and I swore that I would return to school.”²²

Fouad exercised his authority over his sister by restricting every aspect of her life, including his persistent attempts to prevent her from pursuing her education. His oppressive behavior gradually escalated until verbal abuse turned into physical violence, as he attempted to murder her simply because she insisted on continuing her secondary education:

“In the masculine mentality, education is considered a privilege reserved for men and an essential component of their identity. In contrast, women are deliberately deprived of it in some societies because a set of values determines its acceptance or rejection. Men realize

²² Firoz Racham, *Honored by Your Departure*, Fadaat Publishing and Distribution House, Amman – Jordan, 2nd edition, 2018, p. 58.

that education is a tool of enlightenment and awareness, and if women possess it, they will announce their departure from under his authority and domination.”²³

Shortly afterward, she was forced to abandon secondary school and enroll at the Technological Institute of Education in Reghaïa, following prolonged negotiations between her father and uncle to convince Fouad, who had threatened to kill her if she attempted to retake the baccalaureate examination. Moreover, he forced her to marry the brother of his extremist terrorist companion, marking the beginning of Fatima’s profound suffering. Nasser treated Fatima as an object rather than a human being. He showed her no compassion; instead, he subjected her to continuous physical and psychological abuse, beating and humiliating her on a daily basis:

“He beats me during the day and sleeps with me at night in the name of marital rights! On that evening when he beat me for the first time, I tried to stop him from touching me, but he silenced me with a pillow until I could no longer breathe, and then he took what he wanted.”²⁴

The theme of sexuality in feminist fiction has become a means of expressing condemnation and resistance, as well as exposing the oppression and violations inflicted by the other. This husband perceives women’s service and obedience as a natural obligation and an unquestionable duty. At times, he also attempts to prevent her from working or achieving financial independence, fearing the possibility of her liberation or resistance.

“The relationship between men and women generates a language of domination and oppression. At the unconscious (psychological) level, it may take the form of a harsh, unjust, and tyrannical figure who inflicts harm upon his victim and cannot perceive his own existence except through belittling, weakening, and enslaving the woman. On the opposite side stands the submissive and powerless party, whose balance can only be maintained by acknowledging, under coercion, her inability in relation to her oppressor, as a person defeated and deprived of choice. Here, the relationship between the two sexes, man and woman, becomes embodied.”²⁵

Soon, Fatima experiences a psychological and physical collapse, only to discover that, in addition to all her previous suffering, she is also afflicted with breast cancer. After undergoing surgery and leaving the hospital, she is shocked when her husband presents her

²³ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 296.

²⁴ Firoz Racham, *Honored by Your Departure*, p. 133.

²⁵ Chafika Ben Daoud, “Femininity in the Novel *The Letter of Shame (A Threshold of the Title or of Shame)*,” *Language and Literature Journal*, University of Algiers, Issue 30, April 2017, p. 414.

with a document authorizing his marriage to another woman. Because she refuses to accept his remarriage after he had consumed her youth and health, exploited her financial resources, and reduced her to a state of dependence, he subjects her to severe physical violence and divorces her with complete indifference once he considers her role fulfilled and no longer perceives any benefit in maintaining the relationship.

“Tomorrow, I do not want to find you here, and take your children with you if you wish! I answered him in the loudest voice I could: —Leave, leave, because I also want you to leave... Leave, for I am honored by your departure!!! (...) Between the moment I was honored to know you and the moment I was honored by your departure, eighteen years of slavery and humiliation passed.²⁶”

Although Fatima’s divorce constituted a painful and traumatic experience, it ultimately became a form of liberation from the human monster who had brought her nothing but suffering and torment. She then left the house, escaped the burden of her painful past, rented a home, and began a new life that she constructed independently, without external control over her destiny. Thus, Fatima embarked on a different existence in which she regained freedom over herself, her financial resources, and her personal choices. She also returned to her passion for writing and produced a novel narrating her life experience:

“I can say now that I have reconciled with myself and with my history, and that I have recovered from most of my psychological, mental, and physical illnesses. It was neither chemical medication nor psychological therapy sessions that healed me; rather, it was writing that cured me.²⁷”

Through this narrative, Firoz Racham portrays the experience of an Algerian woman who represents one of the countless women suffering within Arab societies, women who are compelled to remain silent and endure oppression for the sake of their children or due to fear of divorce and social judgment. Ultimately, many of them experience psychological, emotional, and physical disorders, with their lives often ending either in death or in unjust separation.

The recovery of the self and feminist identity in Algerian fiction constitutes one of the most significant themes that has occupied contemporary narrative writing. The novel has become a space for reconstructing women’s voices after prolonged experiences of marginalization and alienation.

²⁶ Firoz Racham, *Honored by Your Departure*, p. 228.

²⁷ Firoz Racham, *Honored by Your Departure*, p. 246.

The recovery of identity is achieved through self-awareness, whereby women move from a state of submission toward recognizing the meaning of their existence and their independent subjectivity. It is also realized through the deconstruction of patriarchal masculine authority by criticizing the social structures that constrain women and prevent them from shaping their own worlds according to their aspirations. “Through the opposition between writing and silence, feminist identity is achieved, an identity that does not fear confrontation nor hesitate before adventure, because it has decided to achieve victory in the field of narrative through its femininity.²⁸” Therefore, Algerian fiction becomes a space where women rewrite themselves, not merely as victims, but as active subjects engaged in processes of reconstruction and self-formation, transforming suffering into awareness and marginalization into centrality.

In the novel *Houaria*, Inam Bayoud narrates the story of a woman named Hana, who suffers greatly because of her husband, whose excessive jealousy develops into constant suspicion and control. His actions extend beyond this behavior, as he betrays her, brings his mistress into their home, and subjects both her and her son to violence and mistreatment until she decides to end this situation and seek divorce:

“I was not happy in this marriage, especially after discovering my husband’s relationship with his young office manager, a relationship that he did not even bother to hide. He began inviting her to have meals with us and asking me to cook whatever she desired.²⁹”

Hana experiences profound suffering because of her husband, who prevents her from pursuing education and employment, questions her honor, and physically abuses both her and her son. One day, she decides to request divorce despite having no professional activity to support herself and her children. However, she can no longer tolerate humiliation and degradation. She is surprised by her husband’s reaction, as he welcomes her decision with satisfaction and complete indifference toward their separation:

“When she informed her husband of her intention to separate and leave the house, he replied from behind the newspaper he was reading: —How wonderful your departure is...”

The following day, she packed her belongings and those of her two children and left after midday, before his return from the factory. She had nowhere to go except her father’s house. Her mother received her coldly while muttering: ‘Yes, you leave comfort and come to

²⁸ Bashira Al-Bustani, Hussein Al-Manasra and others, *The Arab Feminist Novel (Women in a Changing World)*, p. 238.

²⁹ Inam Bayoud, *Houaria*, Mim Publishing House, Algeria, 1st edition, 2023, p. 74.

misery? What is wrong with your husband? Doesn't he bring the groceries every day? Who will look at you now that you are dragging around with two unmarried children?³⁰

After her divorce, Hana worked in a sewing workshop and then resumed her studies until she became a judge before eventually leaving Algeria:

“After completing my studies and being appointed investigating judge in the city of Ain Benian near Algiers, I rented a small house with a garden overlooking the sea. I planted some climbing plants and a unique elder tree covered with white flowers. Before long, I found work with an international organization and crossed the sea.³¹”

Thus, Hana decided to put an end to her miserable life and request divorce. She then challenged herself by pursuing her studies, succeeding, and attaining high professional positions. Finally, she chose to leave Algeria for Europe, leaving behind her painful memories.

Thus, Algerian female novelists have transformed writing into a means of expressing their inner experiences and rejecting the customs and traditions that reduced them to mere followers of men. For women, writing represents liberation from social constraints and a breaking away from the eternal dependence on the Other through literary creation.

4. Conclusion:

At the conclusion of this study, it can be stated that feminist fiction has:

- Addressed women's issues and consistently presented images of oppressed women who aspire to liberate themselves from the domination of patriarchal authority.
- Defended women's freedom as a form of rebellion against a society that represses and marginalizes them. It has also sought to liberate the female body and transform it into a symbol of women's aspirations and their desire to free themselves from the customs and traditions of society.
- Represented women's troubled identities through the selection of weak characters deprived of their will and suffering from psychological and social alienation, as demonstrated in the novels *The Letter of Shame* and *Women Who Refuse to Leave*. It has also addressed rebellion as a mechanism of resistance and as an explicit call for liberation and emancipation from dependence on the Eastern man, as clearly illustrated in Assia Djebar's novel *The Gate of Memories*.

³⁰ Inam Bayoud, Houaria, p. 74.

³¹ Inam Bayoud, Houaria, Mim Publishing House, Algeria, 1st edition, 2023, p. 77.

- Addressed the issue of asserting feminine identity and undermining masculinity through women's awareness of themselves and their surroundings and through the recovery of their own being. Examples of this include the novels *Honored by Your Departure* by Firoz Racham and *Houaria* by Inam Bayoud.
- Generally engaged with a range of issues related to women's status within the family and society, including alienation, oppression, exclusion, masculine authority, violence, deprivation, and repression, as well as the resulting feelings of estrangement experienced by women. It has also called for the reconstruction of women's identities and the rebuilding of the self, moving from a position of submission and marginalization toward a position of agency and self-affirmation.

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