LINES RE-DRAWN: ENVISIONING FEMINISM AND ISLAM IN FRANCOPHONE FICTION (1980-2019)

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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What does it mean for a woman in or from an Islamic space to be *liberated*? My dissertation examines the works of five Francophone authors from Iran and Algeria—Marjane Satrapi, Négar Djavadi, Délphine Minoui, Assia Djebar, Swann Meralli—who question the invisibility or misrepresentation of women in national histories of Iranian and Algerian revolutions. These writers shed light on women's perspectives on revolution and on the violence in which they participated and to which they were subjected. Official narratives by Iranian and Algerian governments and media about their respective national revolutions have underreported the role of women who fought for their countries. In addition, France's relationship to Iran and Algeria, its politics of "laïcité," and its policing of the Islamic veil have created additional challenges these Francophone authors expose.

Each of the author reckons with French stereotypes regarding an alleged "backward oppressive Islam" that dominate public discourse and do not make space for nuances and alternatives. At the same time, they address their own respective countries' lack of representation of women in their national histories. Their writing creates a space for a diversity of women, thus opening a discussion on what it means to be an Iranian/Algerian woman refusing to reduce identities to the meaning modern France seeks to impose on the Muslim veil. Decolonial feminism inspires my project as I address how islamophobia and violence impact francophone

Muslims in France and the enduring legacy of France's colonial past that crafted xenophobic, orientalist narratives about the "Eastern Other." The Francophone Iranian and Algerian writers in my corpus work to dismantle the separation between constructions of gender, race, and religion. In creative and intersectional ways, they are rethinking womanhood under Islam, explicitly or implicitly, and its representation both in France and in their respective countries. My project analyzes representative works and various genres, including graphic novels, to showcase these authors' audacity in writing their own narratives in the face of misrepresentations and erasure.

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I. INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, LIFE, FREEDOM

"Zan, Zendegi, Azadi." Women, Life, Freedom. This is the slogan of the ongoing revolution in Iran which began on September 16, 2022, when twenty-two-year-old Mahsa Amini died at the hands of Iran's "morality police." Amini was arrested three days earlier on September 13th for showing too much hair under her headscarf and was beaten so intensely while held in custody that she fell into a coma and died shortly after. Her death sparked the outrage of the Iranian public who demanded accountability by the Iranian State and began protesting outside of the hospital. Iranians around the globe soon joined in support, with thousands coming together to protest the theocratic dictatorship in Iran, chanting slogans such as "zan, zendegi, azadi" ("women, life, freedom") and "marg bar dictator" ("death to the dictator") as women burned their headscarves and cut off their hair in protest. These demonstrations continue into 2023: what began as a protest of unfair treatment of a young Kurdish woman soon turned into a full-fledged revolution. But why is the death of one young woman the sudden spark of an entire revolution? The Iranian government's mistreatment of women is not a new phenomenon. Amini was not the first to be arrested because of her head scarf, and she certainly was not the first to be beaten or killed by the morality police. Maggie McGrath writes in *Forbes Magazine* that Amini's appeal was that she was an ordinary woman to whom so many people could relate. She quotes Hadi Ghaemi, the founder of the Center for Human Rights in Iran, who argues that Amini's relatability is what grabbed the attention of thousands of Iranians: "[Amini] wasn't an activist. […] Her face and her experience were very intimately and tangibly familiar to every family in Iran, because every time their mothers, sisters, and their daughters go out of the house, they have

been harassed by the morality police, or detained or even beaten."[1] With Amini's face on countless posters as a symbol of every Iranian woman who has been harassed, Iranians around the globe are contesting the Islamic Republic of Iran, which oppresses not only its women but its people as a whole, demanding that the Iranian State be held accountable for the deaths it perpetrates.

This dissertation project ties closely with the presently unfolding revolution in Iran, which raises the question of female liberation in Islamic spaces: what does it mean for a woman in/from a Muslim country to be *liberated*? This is a question that is often misconstrued by the West which does not fully understand what is at stake when it interferes, basing its understanding on Western female liberation whose context cannot be applied to an Eastern country's societal norms and regulations. The French State, for example, has a long history of using secularism, the separation of Church and State, to deny Muslim women autonomy over their self-expression in certain public spaces such as public schools. In *Un Féminisme musulman, et pourquoi pas ?* (2017) Malika Hamidi returns Orientalism as a source of Muslim women's objectification: "Dans l'imaginaire occidental, l'Orient a longtemps évoqué *les Mille et Une Nuits* et le monde des harems dans lequel la femme est totalement soumise, presque reléguée au rang d'objet" (40). In this project, I have chosen works from two generations of authors who respond to the false representation of "oppressed" Muslim women symbolized by an allegedly backward veil. Writing in French, for a Francophone audience, these authors implicitly confront the matter of *laïcité* and its desire of universal community, which ultimately leaves out previously colonized peoples in discussions about their existence. Universalism aspires to the "assimilation" of marginalized individuals with the idea that it is "helping" them. There exists a sort of French

[1] Maggie McGrath. "Mahsa Amini: The Spark That Ignited a Women-Led Revolution." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 19 Dec. 2022.

obsession with the veil, and yet ironically there is so much missing from the general understanding of its purpose and application. A new generation of Francophone female writers, some of whom turn to graphic novels as a form of self-expression, openly rejects the notion of political power over their bodies and existences. Each of these writers participates in a project of rewriting histories and reformulating or reconsidering Muslim womanhood in a decolonial mindset. This project thus asks how women from Muslim countries such as Iran and Algeria, with a divergent but strong Francophone background, can reimagine womanhood and educate readers to make space for a new unapologetic generation of women who demand rights over their own bodies and experiences. With a critical lens on French *laïcité*, these authors shed light on the lack of agency granted to women in and from Islamic spaces—both by their own governments and in France, a country of adoption that struggles to make space for them to exist in their own rights. These authors propose for readers an opportunity to redraw, resee, reevaluate, and thus reimagine the image of the "oriental woman": no longer are women in Islamic spaces to be depicted as exotic and fetishized others without a voice. These authors are a part of a generation that echoes the voices of the women in the Iranian and Algerian revolutions, yet which now insists on a new agency, on being a part of conversations and decisions about themselves, and on telling the truth about their complex identities and experiences that have otherwise been censored.

Three preoccupations drive this project: Islamophobia, decolonial feminism, and violence. These preoccupations intersect, as the fear of Islam is at the root of present-day violence done to Muslims in France, which reflects France's colonial past and its treatment of Muslims as both lesser and frightening individuals. Decolonial feminism highlights the pertinent role that gender plays in questions of religion and race, and my chosen writers seek to dismantle

the notion that gender is a separate issue. Though *laïcité* is at the epicenter of the French obsession with the veil, my project does not seek to define these authors solely by whether they are for or against secularism. What interests me, rather, is the way in which they redefine Algerian and Iranian women's existences via literature in a society that only speaks *for* these women instead of making space for them. I push back against the practice that a Muslim woman's right to wear the veil is only up for public debate among the greater white, French citizenry, without the inclusion of the very women French laws seek to police. Similarly, under the governance of Iranian and Algerian rulers, women are left out of historical discourses though they are participants in national history and are told how to carry themselves in the public sphere. At the base of this project is thus the question of how a woman in/from an Islamic space can be liberated, and what this looks like versus the Western imagination of what it ought to look like. In conjunction with this question of liberation, the writers I have chosen re-imagine for readers the very basis of what it means to be an Iranian or Algerian woman, both within her country of origin, and as she exists in France and abroad.

This project highlights two generations of authors who work to reclaim and rewrite Iranian and Algerian women's histories as a response to women's witnessed violence and global misrepresentation in the broader Western media. The first generation of authors includes Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000). This first generation is essential to the project, as these authors lay the groundwork for future authors to consider amplifying female voices in Algeria and Iran. Assia Djebar (1936-2015) and Marjane Satrapi (1969-) represent a foundational generation of women writers from Algeria and Iran who turn to literature as a means of truth telling and rightful representation, in spite of their respective governments denying the validity of women's experiences in relation to

their respective revolutions. Djebar was known as a voice of reform in the Muslim world and worked critically on the question of women's rights. Her first work, *La soif* (1957), was the first novel published by an Algerian woman outside of Algeria. Though generations apart, I pair Satrapi with Djebar in this first generation of authors because of her similar work as an influential or pioneering author. In 2000, Satrapi published her groundbreaking semiautobiographical graphic novel *Persepolis* in which she explores the Iranian revolution of 1979 through the eyes of a girl coming of age. This text is fundamental to my project because it opens the door for several women authors to enter the world of comics. As a minority in the highly masculine world of Francophone comics and graphic novels (both as a woman and as an Iranian), Satrapi's work inspired several other female authors to speak out on violence. In her article "(Not) Lost in the Margins: Gender and Identity in Graphic Texts," Marjorie Allison writes about the role of Satrapi's gender in her reception, and states: "in July 2004, Charles McGrath wrote in the *New York Times* that […] 'the graphic novel is a man's world, by and large.'"(74) Satrapi's publication of *Persepolis* defied these gender norms and inspired future female authors to tell their stories "in a form that was itself originally marginalized, the comic" (Allison 73).

Not only does Satrapi's *Persepolis* inspire other women to enter the world of comics, or for others to write comics exposing women's hardship (such as the case in Swann Meralli's *Algériennes*), but her work also inspires other Iranian women to write about their experiences in relation to the Iranian Revolution, such as the Iranian women authors that I have also highlighted in this project. They make up a second wave or generation, in addition to Marjane Satrapi's second title *Broderies* (2003): Negar Djavadi's *Désorientale* (2016), Delphine Minoui's *Je vous écris de Téhéran* (2016), and Swann Meralli's *Algériennes* (2018), all of whom question female

liberation in Muslim countries and what it means to radically reconsider the womanhood of marginalized individuals. Together, these texts from two generations share two points: exposing Iranian and Algerian women's silenced/censored trauma in the face of revolution and reimagining for readers what it means to be a liberated Iranian or Algerian woman.

I. Women at the forefront—from 1979 to today

If we return to the opening context of the currently developing revolution in Iran, the strength and dominance of women in numbers is pertinent: though men largely support these demonstrations, they are led by women—both in Iran and in the diaspora, which showcases the fact that "despite their marginalization in the historical narrative of modern Iran, women have always been part of the country's transformations:" [2] a presence and participation that are at the very foundation of this dissertation project. In 1979 when Iran went through an Islamic revolution, women played a crucial role in igniting the fire in the demonstrations against the King of Iran. For example, in one village case study, Mary Hegland highlights how village women were at the forefront of the demonstrations that led to the revolution, and that "women were the ones who initiated the regular, nightly demonstrations in Aliabad, beginning January 5, 1979."[3] In Aliabad, a village to the south of Shiraz, "it was primarily through women's networks that the village women played significant and unique roles in local level politics"(186). Tied to the domestic tasks in the home and neighborhood, women could spread information quickly by word of mouth to other women also part of the same networks. Women were not free to go wherever they pleased like the men, but they found ways to ignite protests in their village.

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[2] Nazanin Shahrokni. "Women, Life, Freedom." *History Today*, 11 Nov. 2022.

[3] Mary Hegland. "Women and the Iranian Revolution: A Village Case Study." *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 2/3, 1990, p.183.

Hegland explains that "men and older boys were afraid of being reported to the rural police if they demonstrated in the village, but no one would think of taking a village woman in for questioning. Apparently liminal, weak, and outside of the political arena, not counted as true political actors, women were actually able to take steps and play political roles which men could not" (189). Women thus used their perceived weakness as an advantage, to initiate nightly demonstrations against the monarchy. Hegland touches on an important aspect of Iranian women's existence in her study: they are *always* at the forefront of fighting for their rights, and yet they are often quickly disappeared by the men/people who speak for them; "Although women initiated the regular nightly demonstrations, when men saw no ill result, they began to join in, younger teenage boys at first. Soon after, the marches were taken over and administrated by men, with women as followers" (189). Though women had ignited this fire, it was men who then assumed the face of the demonstrations. Going forward, as demonstrations grew larger and the revolution was in full-force, no one necessarily considered this a woman-led revolution. But it was cases like that of the women in Aliabad (who were inspired by the women demonstrating in larger cities such as Shiraz) that indeed fanned the flame of the revolution. This small case study during the 1979 Iranian revolution gives readers an example of how Iranian women's efforts are often swept beneath the metaphorical rug of political activity—yet more importantly, it shows us that they have always been behind the fight for their rights. Even beyond this case study, "Iranian women's struggle for equality predates the establishment of the Islamic Republic. It figured in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, with instances of activism dating to as early as the nineteenth century."[4] Iranian women even obtained the right to vote in 1963 and the right to

[4] Mehrangiz Kar and Azadeh Pourzand. *Iranian Women in the Year 1400: The Struggle for Equal Rights Continues*. Atlantic Council. 2021. p.3.

divorce in 1967. The problem has never been Iranian women's readiness to fight for what they deserve. The bigger issue, and what I argue throughout this dissertation, is that Iranian women's voices and experiences are censored both by the State and by Western politics and media which miss the mark on female liberation in Iran.

When in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini (the self-appointed leader of the revolution and the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran) instated laws that insisted upon women covering their hair in public spaces among other oppressive laws, women spoke up. Shortly after the installation of the Islamic Republic and the application of new laws, on March 8, 1979 (International Women's Day), thousands of women and girls poured into the streets across Iran to protest Ayatollah Khomeini's edict that a woman must veil herself in public. One *New York Times* article from March 11 of the same year reads: "At the largest demonstration today 15,000 protesters took over the Palace of Justice for a three-hour sit-in. A list of eight demands was read. They included the right to choose the attire that best suited women and the country's customs; equal civil rights with men; no discrimination in political, social and economic rights, and a guarantee of full security for women's legal rights and liberties."[5]

The International Women's Day march received a great deal of attention, and feminists in the West publicly expressed solidarity. American feminist Kate Millett came to Tehran to speak at one of the rallies on this day to stand with Iranian women. Simone de Beauvoir was also outraged by Khomeini's ideas about women, so much so that she co-created the *Comité international du droit des femmes* (CIDF), which was directly inspired by Iranian women's experience: "les événements actuels d'Iran soulignent à quel point la condition des femmes reste partout précaire. C'est pourquoi des Françaises, des Britanniques, des Allemandes, des

[5] Gregory Jaynes, "Iran Women March Against Restraints on Dress and Rights." *The New York Times*, 11 March 1979.

Américaines, des Égyptiennes, des Suédoises (entre autres) ont décidé de créer le Comité international du droit des femmes."[6] Iranian women had fought hard for a revolution alongside their male counterparts—now, as one monarchy (which many deemed dictatorial) had departed, they found themselves blindsided by a new dictator who immediately began monitoring their public self-expression and policing their bodily autonomy. Feminists like Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir found themselves invested in standing with Iranian women's struggles and writing about their experiences, which was helpful with respect to media coverage, but ultimately did not change much at all. The issue with Western public figures' involvement in the revolution of 1979 is similar to the issue of the Iranian State itself in that neither makes space for Iranian women to exist in their own rights; neither steps aside to allow Iranian women's voices to shine through, to understand their lived experience. While feminists like Beauvoir and Millett wrote and spoke about Iran, even coming to Iran (or sending representatives, in Beauvoir's case) to stand with Iranian women during this time, they ended up doing more harm than good due to their lack of understanding of both the Iranian government (which perceived feminism as an imperial, Western and therefore evil threat) and Iranian women's daily lived experience. Not only did Western feminists not understand Iranian women's struggles, but they effectively worsened the situation: "the presence of Kate Millett and European feminists in Iran at that particular historical juncture allowed the ruling elite to argue that feminism was a Western phenomenon and that all feminist activity in Iran would be perceived as "counterrevolutionary" behavior. Iranian feminist activists were thus forced to choose between the two sides of a false binary: the West and Iran", of which they chose the revolution.[7] Following the 1979 revolution,

[6] Chahla Chafiq. *Le Rendez-Vous Iranien de Simone de Beauvoir*. Éditions iXe, 2018. p.66.

[7] Nima Naghibi. *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007. p.101.

women in Iran quickly learned that they had, indeed, been deceived. They had fought against the monarchy's imperialist obsession with modernizing the country, they had fought in favor of an alternative who promised a better life for everyone in the country (despite his exclusion of women's rights into the constitution)[8], but they were met with a theocratic dictatorship that sought to police their bodies. At the same time, Iranian women's issues were not being carefully considered by the Western media and Western philosophers who wrote and spoke about the revolution.

The headscarf became the epicenter of discussions both in and outside of Iran. In France, the veil became a demonized article of clothing that represented the violence of Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran as a terrorist state; Muslim women turned into symbols of a violent dictatorship that had nothing to do with them (not to mention the countless Muslim women who were not even from Iran yet who were being equated with terrorism). Iranian women's issues such as working conditions, abortion, and healthcare, among others, were not considered. In Iran, the focus was (and has remained) on whether a woman expressed herself publicly with *modesty*. In France (and in the West in general), the conversation became geared towards suspecting at best, vilifying at worst, Muslim women who chose to veil themselves. In short, the voices of women from Islamic spaces were and continue to be ignored or censored. The Iranian revolution did not start discussions on the veil in France, but it was this event that solidified ideas about terrorism and the vilification of Islam.

II. Unique Franco-Iranian Relations

[8] "Women's rights" are included in the constitution in so much as women are protected as mothers in order to withhold the sanctity of the family unit.

Franco-Iranian relations date to the Middle Ages. The political ties between France and Iran were historically cordial, relying on one another for their profitable resources. Unlike Algeria, Iran has never officially been a colony of France or of any other country. However, strong influences of other countries and particularly France have remained present in Iranian culture: in its language and school structures, Iran continues today to reflect a strong French cultural influence, which is largely due to the last King of Iran's attitude towards modernity and westernization in the twentieth century, a point to which I return in chapter two. In *Napoleon and Persia: Franco-Persian Relations Under the First Empire* (1999), Iradj Amini writes that "the earliest contacts between France and Persia go back to the Middle Ages, but it was under Louis XIV and [Jean Baptiste] Colbert that they assumed a political and commercial character."[9] Under Louis XIV, Colbert founded the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* in 1664, "a concession embracing all the countries and all the seas east of the Cape of Good Hope" (16) which also extended to the Persian Gulf. The following year, Colbert sent a delegation to go to Isfahan in Persia to encourage French relations with the Shah[10] of Persia, which was well received by the Shah, who "welcomed them warmly and granted them a three-year exemption from customs duties as well as the same privileges as the [British and Russian visiting delegates] enjoyed. He even declared himself willing to sign an official commercial treaty with France as soon as he would receive suitable presents from Louis XIV and the Company" (16). Franco-Iranian relations took pause for several years due to internal instabilities on both the parts of Persia and France and picked back up at the start of the eighteenth century, when Louis XIV sent an ambassador to Persia by the name of Jean-Baptiste Fabre, a merchant from Marseilles. At the

[9] Iradj Amini. *Napoleon and Persia: Franco-Persian Relations Under the First Empire*. Mage Publishers, 1999. p.16.

[10] *Shah* is the Farsi word for "king", both of which I use interchangeably in this project.

time, Russia and Britain also sought to make their mark on Persia, who "had just been unified under the auspices of a powerful monarch when another attack threatened its northern frontier. France, which was then an enemy of both Russia and Britain, wished to take advantage of the situation to establish a presence in Persia which might check the advance of the former and prevent the influence of the latter" (15). In the eighteenth century, Persia had favored its ties with France over Britain and Russia, and there were several delegates sent by Persia to France and vice versa, establishing positive political relations between the two.[11] The most notable is that of Mohammad Reza Beg, who was the mayor of Erivan (a city in Persia)[12] and who was chosen by the governor of Erivan to travel to Paris to "find out if France really had the intention of entering into commercial relations with Persia" (20). Beg was said by Louis XIV's sister-in-law to have "the maddest look one has ever seen" (20)—his personality, apparently also unusual, "inspired a number of writers, including Montesquieu and Voltaire, whose works, *Lettres Persanes* (1721) and *Zadig* (1747) respectively, catered to the passions of their contemporaries for *turqueries* on the one hand and a fanciful Orient on the other" (21). Beg remained in France for quite some time, maintaining ties between the two countries. Following Beg's presence in France, a long series of political back and forth between Persia and France continued up to now: envoys sent, treaties signed, relations formed, broken, and reformed. My interest here is not, however, to dive deep into the political exchanges between France and Iran. Rather, it is more pertinent to consider the anthropological significance of these exchanges.

Since the Middle Ages when France and Persia first began interacting, Persians and French people alike have long considered one another as exotic others. Aside from their political

[11] For a broader account for each voyage, see Amini's *Napoleon and Persia*.

[12] Present-day Yerevan, Armenia.

ties to one another, French and Persian peoples took turns exoticizing one another and using one another as a sort of depiction of the contradiction of their own cultures.

> In the nineteenth century Iranian political discourse, for example, identification with *heterotopic* Europe served as an oppositional strategy for the disarticulation of the dominant Islamicate discourse and for the construction of a new pattern of self-identity grounded on pre-Islamic history and culture. […] Iranian counter-modernists represented Europe as a *dystopia* and thus sought to preserve dominant power relations and to subvert this oppositional strategy of secularization and de-Islamization. […] Both the secularist Europhilia and the Islamist Europhobia constituted Europe as a point of reference and created competing scenarios of vernacular modernity.[13]

Traditionalist Persians viewed French and European people in general as a contradiction to their own identities. While French intellectuals painted Iranians/Persians as exotic others, this was reciprocated, so to speak, by Persia: "the formation of modern European discourses on the Orient were contemporaneous with Persianate explorations of Europe (*Farang/Farangistan*). Asians gazed and returned the gaze and, in the process of 'cultural looking', they, like their European counterparts, exoticized and eroticized the Other" (Tavakoli 36). Beginning with the voyages between Persia and Iran in the middle ages, Persia and France continuously gazed upon one another as an exotic other and thus created an alienating relationship in which neither understood the other and instead based their evidence on eyewitness: "Persianate accounts of Europe, like Orientalist narratives, based their authority on self-experience and eyewitness accounts of alterity. Exotic others were observed and witnessed either at home or abroad. […] Similarly, traveling Europeans ignited the imagination of the multitudes who viewed the exotic *Farangis* passing through their homeland" (37). Texts such as Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, for example, loosely based upon a Persian envoy in France, showcase this idea of basing one's accounts on the eyewitness. Further, beyond simply viewing one another as an exotic other,

[13] Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi. *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography*. Palgrave, 2001. p.37.

whether to be conquered or feared, women figured prominently in how the two countries and cultures viewed one another and determined the other's value.

The tokenization or weaponization of Muslim women's bodies can be traced back to these first encounters between Persia and France. In the nineteenth century especially, as more travel accounts were written, "the idealized women of the other became objects of male desire. Seeking the fulfilment of their fantasies, journeymen pursued exotic sex unattainable at home" (62). European travelers to Persia noticed women wearing a veil, or noticed women retreating to a harem, and desired to penetrate this private space: these were exotic women that European travelers sexualized and tokenized as a fantasy. On the other hand, Iranian modernists viewed European women as a favorable example of what a woman could be:

> For Iranian modernists, viewing European women as educated and cultured, the veil became a symbol of backwardness. Its removal, in their view, was essential to the advancement of Iran and its dissociation from Arab-Islamic culture. For the counter modernists who wanted to uphold the Islamic social and gender orders, the European woman became a scapegoat and a symbol of corruption, immorality, Westernization, and feminization of power. In the Iranian body politic the imagined European woman provided the subtext for political maneuvers over women's rights and appearance in the public space.[14]

Iranians of either side, both modernist and traditionalist, viewed European women as a symbol, either of their opposition or their desire. This *imagined European woman*, as Tavakoli describes her, became the justification for political action over women's outward self-expressions in the public sphere. Muslim men were warned, for example, "that if Iranian women mingled with European women, they would be tempted to dress like Europeans, dance in public celebrations, drink wine, and sit with men on benches and chairs and joke with strangers" (72). Essentially, in the eyes of Persian traditionalists, if Persian women became like European women and removed their veils and became more educated, this would be a threat to Persian society which relied at

[14] Tavakoli-Targhi, 54.

the time on male dominance based on the Qur'an. At the same time, Persian women were deemed by Europeans as exotic and mysterious, but as a symbol of backwards oppression: an idea that continues today, as I explain in the following paragraphs.

While traditionalist Persians viewed Europeans as a threat, however, Tavakoli argues that modernist Iranians were in favor of becoming more like Europeans: educating women, removing the veil became a pertinent function of the Pahlavi dynasty[15]. In the 1960s, Franco-Iranian relations were at an all-time high as Mohammad Reza Shah[16] held a monopoly on the oil industry, and the French government took an opportunity to take advantage of this. It was in 1974 that "Le gouvernement français [a signé] avec l'Iran du chah un contrat où [était] signifiée l'entrée de l'Iran dans 10% du capital d'Eurodif, le plus important complexe européen d'enrichissement d'uranium dont la France était le maître d'œuvre."[17] The French government profited off its arrangement with the Shah, yet this contract did not survive the Iranian revolution. At the time, the Shah was glad to be in an arrangement with France. Having studied abroad in Switzerland as a child, Mohammad Reza Shah was very interested in relations with France and made several advancements in Iran that mirrored his love of French culture: there were several French primary and high schools throughout Tehran, and the Iranian school system was loosely based on the French school system in general. The Shah equated modernizing Iran with westernizing Iran in the image of France: the streets contained casinos, nightclubs, high fashion, and the French language was an unofficial second language among the elite. This influence, in conjunction with the Shah's monopoly on the oil industry, was not approved by

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[15] The Pahlavi Dynasty was the last Iranian royal dynasty, ruling between 1925-1979.

[16] King of Iran 1941-1979.

[17] Constance Jamet. "Entre La France Et L'Iran, Des Relations Enfiévrées." *LEFIGARO*, 25 Sept. 2013.

Iranian traditionalists, who insisted that the Shah's desire for modernity and therefore Westernization of the country was evil. It was at this same time in the 1970s that Ayatollah Khomeini, the self-proclaimed leader of the resistance against the "imperialist" Shah, was welcomed by France to remain in hiding at Neauphle-le-Château until his victorious return to Iran following the Shah's abdication. Overall, France played a key role in the abdication of the Shah by allowing Khomeini to remain in hiding there, yet the political back and forth from the late twentieth century onward is complex. For example, France no longer wished to support Iran following the revolution during the Iran-Iraq war because of its allegiance to Bagdad. Politically speaking, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, France distanced itself more and more from Iran due to other political interests, sanctions, et cetera.

I have sketched above how political closeness between Persia/Iran and France has waxed and waned over centuries. Still, stereotypes about one another's cultures remained more or less the same. This is in large part due to a consistent patriarchal view of women as tokens or symbols of a society's propriety and value. Because Iranian traditionalists came into power following the revolution of 1979, the stance of Iran towards Europeans became one of distaste, largely due to the comportment of European women.[18] European women showing skin and not being "modest" is considered the antithesis to proper Iranian womanhood in the eyes of the theocratic government. In France, Iranian women are equated with a backwards oppression due to the veil (an obligation under Iran's law) and are thus symbols of a country who is behind modernity. Franco-Iranian political relations point to a long history of the countries being relatively cordial, with France often asserting a dominant influence in the country. Yet the

[18] I emphasize here that a large percentage of Iranians are in favor of more modern thinking and have no problem with removing the veil, hence the currently unfolding revolution. I am specifically speaking about the individuals in power and the traditionalists who feel more at ease expressing their ideas towards European women because of the acceptance of these ideals by those in power.

cultural and anthropological effects of these ties translate into a strange and often tense relationship between two cultures that do not quite understand one another, that consider one another to be exotic/different and outside of what they are taught is appropriate. At the time of the 1979 revolution, many Iranians (who could afford to do so) fled to France because it was familiar. They most likely spoke the language if they were elite, they were familiar with school systems and other cultural aspects because Iran was so influenced by French culture due to the Shah's desires for *Frenchification* and westernization. They quickly realized that they could never fully fit in, that they would never be French. France conflated Islam with oppression and an inability to meet modern standards. In the following section, I highlight the ways in which France focuses on the notion of *laïcité*, or secularism, and how it plays into the French equation of Iranians (and Muslims overall) with danger to the Republic. France's struggles with its colonial past and its insistence on *laïcité* prove harmful for individuals coming from Islamic spaces seeking asylum, only to find violent rejection.

III. The Matter of France's *Laïcité*

This dissertation highlights authors writing in French who shed light on the lived experiences of women in Iran and in Algeria. The necessity of hearing (and reading) their stories lies in the fact that that they are often left out of discussions that decide their fate, both in their respective countries and in France, where the concept of *laïcité* rules discussions around the veil. The separation of Church and State is at the very foundation of the Fifth Republic of France, and dates to 1905 when the law was first established.[19] The critique of "communautarisme" drives the notion of *laïcité*: to be different, to wear visible symbols that differentiate people into distinct

[19] Before this, in 1882, were the Jules Ferry laws which made primary schooling in France free, secular, and mandatory.

communities runs the risk of creating a division, of dividing the Republic, and being contrary to its constitutional principles. Wearing any “ostentatious” religious symbol in public school is not allowed, as it allegedly separates students by emphasizing differences. The French “affaire du voile” exploded in 1989 when three Muslim teenagers were forbidden from attending high school in a suburb of Paris (Créteil) if they insisted on keeping their head covering.[20] This opened up a controversy around “laïcité” or secularism among politicians, academics and the broader French public, which led ultimately to the ban of the Islamic veil in French public schools: in 2004, a law stated that “Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestant ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit.”[21] While this law is worded not to target a specific religion, its manifest intent is to ban the headscarf worn by Muslim women, which is evident in the ways in which non-Muslim symbols such as a yarmulke (or yamaka) are not as targeted by French media. Given that Muslim men do not wear as obvious of religious symbols, the target of the ban is implicitly Muslim women. In April 2011, France became the first European country to ban the full-face Islamic burqa in public spaces. Under the ban, no woman, French or foreign, is able to leave their home with their face hidden behind a burqa without running the risk of a fine. Nicolas Sarkozy, who was president at the time of the ban, said that burqas oppress women and that they were "not welcome" in France. More recently, in January 2022, “the French senate […] voted 160 to 143 to ban the wearing of the hijab and other ‘ostensible religious symbols’ in sports competitions following a proposed amendment from Les Républicains, a right-wing party who argued that

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[20] Youssef M. Ibrahim. “Arab Girls’ Veils at Issue in France.” *The New York Times*, 12 Nov. 1989.

[21] Loi N° 2004-228 Du 15 Mars 2004 Encadrant, En Application Du Principe de Laïcité, Le Port de Signes Ou de Tenues Manifestant Une Appartenance Religieuse Dans Les Écoles, Collèges et Lycées Publics.

headscarves can risk the safety of athletes wearing them."[22] Each time that it bans hijab in a public space, the French government claims it is doing so for the safety of their wearers. In reality, what is at stake is the policing and definition of national identity. The laws are intended to maintain a "universalism" whereby differences are subsumed by an ideal of common humanity. I will return in the next chapter to France's colonial history, its controlling who can be deemed *French*, and the concept of assimilation.

The laws surrounding "ostensible religious symbols" specifically target Muslim women: "this discourse stems from this colonial European approach where Muslim women are always depicted as women to save: from their families, their origin, who have to deny their identities to assimilate" (Woodyatt, 2022). France's colonial practices have long targeted Muslim women: in Algeria, French soldiers raped and targeted Muslim Algerian women[23] both as colonial subjects and during the revolution. French travelers in Iran objectified Persian women as "floating ghosts"[24] who existed only for men's pleasure. The recurring obsession with legislating the headscarf betrays deep-seated fears about female empowerment: "it is a continuation of a story of a European colonial power that asserts dominance, asserts that Muslim women submit, and considers them as inferior" (Woodyatt, 2022). In both the eyes of her State and in the eyes of French government, a Muslim woman must be told what to do and cannot simply exist in her own right. She cannot be the decider of whether she is oppressed—rather, she is told that she most certainly *is* oppressed, and at the same time she is censored from sharing her own so-called oppressed story.

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[22] Amy Woodyatt et al. "French Lawmakers Have Proposed a Hijab Ban in Competitive Sports. the Impact on Women Could Be Devastating." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 1 Feb. 2022.

[23] See chapter 3.

[24] See chapter 4.

My dissertation counters the systematic projection of Muslim women as (for all intents and purposes) minors, and documents that not only were women at the foreground of their respective revolutions, but their agency is complex and multifaceted. My dissertation thus pushes back against the equation of Islam with a backwards, oppressive terrorism that confuses government and politics with religion, and which is based upon a long colonial tradition in France. Media portrayals of the Iranian Revolution showed women in long, black chadors and men with guns, or images of Algerian women in the Algerian Revolution who held bombs under their chadors: Muslim women are equated with a terrorism and violence that does not reflect their general lived experience. The works examined in this dissertation also critique the policing of women's bodies and lack of autonomy when decisions are made about their public self-expression. Journalist Nadiya Lazzouni commented on the French politicization of the veil, stating that: "On nous parle de nous, mais on ne nous pose pas la question de la dimension qu'on donne en fait à ce hijab. Tout le monde théorise sur le hijab, et on ne donne pas la parole aux premières concernées."[25] The headscarf is at the root of an inconceivable amount of political violence in France and Iran. In Iran, Amini was one of many (the numbers unfortunately unknown due to the Iranian State's control of information) to be arrested and killed in 2022 alone because her headscarf was not secured tightly to the officers' liking. In France, the headscarf is politicized and de facto discriminates against Muslim women in the name of upholding the secular and universalist ideals of the Republic. The headscarf no longer ties itself to whether one is Iranian, Algerian, or from any other Muslim country, but instead symbolizes Muslims as a mass in the eyes of the French government; this mass is evidently threatening and unwelcome as

[25] "Nadiya Lazzouni 'Tout Le Monde Théorise Sur Le Hijab Mais on Ne Donne Pas La Parole Aux Concernées.'" *YouTube*, YouTube, 18 Oct. 2019.

demonstrated in France's successive attempts to legislate Muslim women bodies and in the stories examined in this dissertation.

IV. Lines Redrawn

The politics of the veil play heavily into my dissertation project. This is not because the protagonists in the texts I examine wear hijab themselves—in fact, most protagonists in these texts do not wear hijab. Why, then, would one need to understand the politics of the veil in order to understand this project? In various contexts, the veil represents power: in France, it is the power over colonial, and now post-colonial, subjects and the power to keep individuals out of France unless they assimilate. In Iran, it is the power to control a woman's bodily autonomy and ensure that she cannot control her own public identity and self-expression. With regards to Algeria, the veil is linked back to France's colonial fixation on, and fetishization of, Algerian women and the veil, as it was similarly thought of by travelers to Persia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the texts I examine, for example, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1978), is based upon Eugene Delacroix's famous painting (1834) of the same title. This painting was largely successful in France and was seen as the first orientalist painting; "French fascination with Delacroix's painting was also due in part to the fact that Delacroix was able to penetrate — with the help of the French military — a Muslim harem in Algiers."[26] Unveiling Muslim women and entering their private spaces was part of the French colonial practice and project: "According to [Frantz] Fanon, French colonial officials saw the veil as the barrier between the Algerian colonized society and the French colonial one, and believed that colonization could not be complete without conquering women, which included the removal of

[26] Ryme Seferdjeli. "The Veil in Colonial Algeria: The Politics of Unveiling Women." *The Funambulist Magazine*, 24 Mar. 2022.

the veil" (Seferdjeli, 2022). When we look today to the laws in France deeming it *illegal* for a woman to wear hijab in public schools and now public sports events, it becomes evident how this desire to conquer the (Muslim, female) other is still a fundamental factor in policy makers' decisions. When Iranian women came to France in 1979 following the revolution, they experienced exclusion and racism by virtue of being an outsider from a Muslim country—a treatment based on France's colonial ideas around Muslim women and solidified by what French people saw on the news regarding the Iranian revolution. What is overwhelmingly evident in discussions surrounding the veil is that Muslim women are seldom allowed to speak for themselves, to exist in their own rights, to have agency in their own stories and to determine what is or is not true about their identities. My project looks to writers who reevaluate the stereotypes surrounding women in Islamic spaces and who open a dialogue in which their suffering and strengths are echoed instead of ignored. These authors reevaluate the boundaries set for Muslim women—in other words, they *redraw the line* where a Muslim woman's identity begins and ends for the public (both in her country and in the West) and instead propose how much more complex and nuanced it is to exist as a woman in/from an Islamic space. I draw from Malika Hamidi's[27] *Un Féminisme Musulman, et Pourquoi Pas?* (2017), as well as Françoise Vergès's *Un féminisme décolonial* (2019), in which she writes that previously colonized women "sont acceptées dans les rangs des féministes civilisationnelles à la condition qu'elles adhèrent à *l'interprétation occidentale*[28] du droit des femmes" and that for Western feminism "[elles] restent inassimilables car elles démontrent l'impossibilité de résoudre […] les contradictions produites par l'impérialisme et le capitalisme" (79). Joan Scott, in *Sex and Secularism* (2017)

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[27] Dr. Malika Hamidi is a sociologist and specialist of Muslim Feminism.

[28] Emphasis my own.

and *The Politics of the Veil* (2010), has questioned France's ability to deal with its colonial heritage and allow Muslim women their autonomy and rights to their bodies. Scott writes in detail about the history of secularism and its use in French society and analyzes how gender is so tightly connected to the French laws of secularism. Nima Naghibi's *Rethinking Global Sisterhood* (2007) similarly asks readers to confront Western involvement in Iran beginning in the mid nineteenth century, especially highlighting the damage done to the women's feminist movement in the twentieth century in Iran following Western feminists' involvement. She points to Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) about "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 297) and argues that "western women also used the language of feminism, and of women's rights, to highlight the differences between their independent, capable selves and their subjugated colonial counterparts" (xxiii).

The women protagonists in my dissertation confront France's unwillingness to address its own colonial past (and how it conditions its present), and also face national erasure and censorship by their own countries. The Iranian government does not acknowledge its violence, especially towards women. It does not acknowledge the masses of people who left the country during the revolution due to this violence or out of fear, nor does it acknowledge its own responsibility in the current masses of deaths and incarcerations with the presently unfolding revolution. During the 1979 revolution, people who spoke up against the king and later against Khomeini were made to be disappeared by secret government agents, using forceful intimidation tactics such as imprisonment and torture. Many of the women authors and protagonists in my dissertation project had to leave the country or were raised away from the country because they were not granted the freedom to voice their opinions and coexist with the new theocratic government. The State does not only not acknowledge the violence that it imparted and imparts

upon the people, leaving many of them dead, arrested, or exiled, but it also imparts further violence upon those who share their stories and does not accept these personal narratives as truth. This censorship, in turn, creates a national history of the revolution that is partial and exclusionary. This is why those affected are compelled to tell their stories: to pressure the public to reimagine the national narrative told to them and to reconsider what they thought they knew. In *Women Write Iran* (2016), Nima Naghibi also highlights Iranian women's voices in their published narrative accounts of their experiences in Iran from the diaspora and the importance of hearing or reading their points of view. She argues that "the revolutionary trauma at the heart of the recent wave of diasporic memoirs […] is experienced largely by a population who suffered painful losses as a result of the revolution: the loss of family and friends, the loss of economic and social status, and the loss of their home country" (4), thus pointing to the necessity of reading and distributing the narratives of these women who not only face difficulty when moving into the diaspora in France, but who also mourn their lives and identities stolen from them with the revolution.

Algerian women face a similar censorship by their government. In chapter three, I explain the ways in which France has avoided admitting there was ever an Algerian revolution, as this would mean admitting the damage that France had done to Algeria as a colonial subject. It would also mean confronting its colonial history in general. The scholarship surrounding the Algerian revolution has been slow. This is why narratives that expose readers to the difficult truths of the revolution (such as drawing a scene in which an Algerian woman is raped by a French soldier in *Algériennes*) are crucial to this scholarship. In *Women Fight, Women Write* (2018), Mildred Mortimer explores the role of collective memory among women as they write narratives on the Algerian revolution and its aftermath. Mortimer also highlights the fetishized

stereotype of the young Algerian woman holding a gun, or the predatory desires of colonial/European men for Algerian women in the harem, signaling to readers the necessity of reconsidering how we view Algerian women both in their roles during the revolution and in general. In chapter three, for example, I consider how Djebar naming her text the same name as Delacroix's orientalist painting can be read as a reclamation of Algerian women's complex identities that have nothing to do with the fetishized image of what they have been made out to be by colonial men. In *Women Fight, Women Write*, Mortimer also discusses the transitory space of exile which, like Iranian women, was equally an issue for Algerian women during and after the revolution. If we return, then, to the title of this dissertation, "Lines Re-Drawn", it is evident that the Iranian and Algerian protagonists in the primary texts in this project detangle and reconstruct their own internal identities and in turn how the public views them, thus dismantling the stereotypes of women in Islamic spaces and contradicting their respective governments' denial of their lived experiences. This dissertation is about identity and loss: women who fought for their country, fought for their rights, only to be discriminated against or have violence inflicted upon them. The authors in this project attempt to showcase the parts of these stories that were never told—they were never told because they maintained a certain political agenda that benefited the West and Algerian/Iranian governments.

V. The Power of Graphic Novels

The dissertation title "Lines Re-Drawn" refers to a second meaning which is mirrored in the structure of the project. Each chapter pairs a graphic novel with a more traditionally structured novel, each of which serves a different purpose: quite literally, these authors *redraw* traumatic events that force readers to reconsider their preconceived ideas of Algerian and Iranian

women's experiences, or in other words to *re-see* a different narrative. Most obviously, the graphic novel shows readers the story *visually*, thus manipulating how they might perceive of certain events, or emphasizing certain aspects of a character's experience over others. For example, in Swann Meralli's *Algériennes* (2018), the novel's artist Deloupy draws a scene in which a young Algerian woman, a soldier working for the FLN, is captured by French soldiers and raped by them. This scene is tremendously difficult for readers emotionally because of the ways in which the artist draws it. Reading through a rape scene would of course be difficult without a visual component, but the visual tactics that the artist employs add dimension to the scene that in turn force readers to *witness* a gut-wrenching violence from which they cannot look away to escape. These authors show readers difficult events such as rape in the case of Meralli's *Algériennes*, homelessness and near death in the case of Satrapi's *Persepolis* and sexual altercations between young women and their much older husbands in Satrapi's *Broderies*. Yet none of these authors show the totality of the trauma that the protagonists witness. Instead, it is the reader who must choose to build the bridge between one scene to the next, and it is precisely in this closure that the power of the graphic novel shines through in a discussion around trauma and identity. In *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (2016), Hillary Chute argues that "The essential form of comics—its collection of frames—is relevant to its inclination to document. […] In its succession of replete frames, comics calls attention to itself, specifically, as evidence. Comics makes a reader access the unfolding of evidence in the movement of its basic grammar, by aggregating and accumulating frames of information"(2). Viewing graphic novels as evidence, as a way of witnessing the unwitnessable, I examine several graphic novels in conjunction with more traditional novels in an attempt to shine light on different angles of the truth. At the same time that they bring readers into a space of witnessing,

these graphic novels also allow for authors, themselves, to return to the site of their trauma: Hillary Chute writes in her introduction to *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (2010) that authors "return to events to literally *re-view*[29] them, and in so doing, they productively point to the female subject as both an object of looking and a creator of looking and sight. Further, through the form their work takes, they provoke us to think about how women, as both looking and looked-at subjects, are situated in particular times, spaces, and histories" (2). My decision to include graphic novels is based on the ways in which the grammar of comics in relation to traumatic events highlights three points that showcase movement: (1) authors returning to the site of their own trauma, (2) protagonists moving through traumatic events, and (3) readers shifting their perspectives as they become witnesses. This movement is crucial in the broader scope of what these authors are attempting to counteract: in breathing new life into Iranian and Algerian women's stories, they suggest for readers to move away from their preconceived ideas based on mediatic and state-sponsored censorship.

VI. Thematic Organization

I have organized my study thematically in four chapters (including the current introductory chapter) centered on three broad themes: biculturalism and exile; testimonial writing and violent silencing; and private spaces. In each chapter, I pair a graphic novel with a more traditionally structured novel. The intersection of these genres creates a space in which readers and authors alike are provoked to redraw boundaries: how they perceive of certain groups such as Iranian and Algerian women or the French government, and how they perceive of themselves in relation to the trauma they witness. Through close readings of each text, I

[29] Emphasis my own.

highlight the ways in which each author counteracts the censorship that women have faced in Iran and Algeria, by exposing women's experiences with violence and trauma in relation to these three themes. Chapter two, "Exile and Biculturalism in *Persepolis* (2000) and *Désorientale* (2016)", focuses on the lived experience of Iranian women in the diaspora following the 1979 Iranian revolution. Living in Austria and in France, the characters in these two texts experience blatant racism towards Iranians because of the preconceived ideas about Iran following the 1979 revolution. In *Persepolis*, readers witness Marjane going to Austria and France, trying to figure out who she is in the midst of the political uprising and revolution in her country. The graphic novel follows Marjane as she negotiates her identity as an Iranian girl coming of age during a chaotic moment in which her liberty is taken from her in her own country and she must decide to go into exile and remain there. *Désorientale* is published sixteen years later: the protagonist, Kimia, must leave Iran at the age of ten to live in exile in Paris. She, like Marjane, is confused and disoriented (hence the title), unsure of how she fits in in the world, let alone in a foreign culture. Both texts demonstrate young Iranian women being pushed away from both cultures with which they identify and being left in a limbo in which their identities cannot be fully defined (French or Iranian). The play on disorientation is present in both texts—each girl must first "deorient" herself (that is, detach herself from her Iranian culture) in order to "reorient" herself, or assimilate, within French culture.

The second chapter explores biculturalism as these individuals must reconsider their identities both as girls coming of age, and as Iranians who are ultimately disoriented as they are torn between two cultures, feeling left out on both fronts. Through the lens of the graphic novel, readers witness the innerworkings of young Marjane's imagination and how she processes the violence that she witnesses. Together, *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* demonstrate the

consequences of political exile in children and also the intersection between gender and power. In this chapter, I demonstrate that for exiled Iranian women, writing is a way of coming to terms with and understanding the trauma of their past, of the Iranian revolution: lost childhoods, assassinated family and friends, being forced to adopt a new language, culture and identity. Furthermore, writing is, for them, a way of counteracting the censorship of Iranian women's voices which I explained earlier in this introduction. Nearly two decades apart, these texts express very similar ideas of what it means to be disregarded or forgotten all while simply trying to exist.

Chapter three, "Testimonial Writing and Violent Silencing in Swann Meralli's *Algériennes* (2018) and Delphine Minoui's *Je vous écris de Téhéran* (2016)" explores the institutional violence engrained in the aftermath of revolution and the treatment (or lack thereof) of women as fundamental in movements of resistance. Delphine Minoui's *Je vous écris de Téhéran* (2015) is a semi-autobiographical novel in the form of a posthumous letter to her deceased grandfather. In Meralli's *Algériennes*, readers follow a French reporter, Beatrice, who travels to Algeria in search of answers regarding her father's past as a French soldier fighting in the Algerian war. Instead, she uncovers stories of women who fought in the Algerian revolution and the violence that ensued from the French military. Similarly, in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, Franco-Iranian Delphine works as a reporter for *Le Figaro* and returns to Iran in 1998 to report on the political status of the country following a presidential election[30]. Her interest in Iran is sparked by her grandfather's death, which leaves her with unanswered questions about her home country. Like Beatrice in *Algériennes,* Delphine discovers the lives of women who rebel against the State and who face institutional violence and torture as a result. In both stories, two women

[30] Mohammad Khatami became President of Iran in August 1997.

are connected to the national histories of Iran and Algeria, respectively, with which they are not familiar—yet ultimately, it is their work as women journalists that bridges the gap between past and present, both for themselves and for their readers. Most importantly, it is their work as journalists which sheds light on the fact that so many women were involved in Iranian and Algerian revolutions and yet information on their participation is either withheld or manipulated by the State to feed nationalist ideologies.

Violent silencing dominates both texts: by this I mean forced censorship. In the case of *Algériennes*, silence fills the pages of the graphic novel. Both texts demonstrate the ways in which male authority figures not only seek to silence women, but they also objectify them and deny them the chance to decide things for themselves. Guided by the intersections of these two texts, this chapter considers women's experiences in the Iranian and Algerian revolutions and the oppression and erasure that ensued despite their tenacity. In both *Algériennes* and *Je vous écris,* the authors challenge the double standards of patriarchal governments that glorify the work of men and refuse to acknowledge women as key components and pillars of society. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the significance of the erasure of women from national histories in which they took part. When they spoke out against injustice, when they tried to fight back against Iranian and Algerian governments, women were often met with severe torture as a threat to keep them quiet. These texts, however, give readers insight into another part of the national histories that they never got.

The fourth and final chapter titled "Lifting the Veil: Iranian and Algerian Women in Private Spaces" highlights the intimate spaces behind closed doors, which are still generally forbidden from the public eye, and what is at stake for the women in these private spaces, examining Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and Marjane Satrapi's

Broderies (2003). Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* is inspired by Eugène Delacroix's painting with the same title (1832) and depicts in a series of short stories the intimate lives of Algerian women both before and after the Algerian Revolution, demonstrating to readers a society in transition and within it, women's lived experiences shifting (or in some cases remaining stagnant). *Femmes d'Alger* follows several women who hold onto the traditional roles that they have in their homes (child rearing, tending to a house, etc.) and at the same time, they hold space for one another to exist in their own rights in community. This communal space, which also exists only in the private sphere, is shared in Satrapi's *Broderies* as well, and it showcases how women have and will always hold this tenacious, sacred, private space for community as they live through political shifts and violence. Over twenty years following the publication of *Femmes d'Alger*, Satrapi's *Broderies* achieves a similar goal in graphically addressing the private lives of women in the new (at the time) Islamic Republic of Iran. In *Broderies*, Satrapi draws herself as a young woman, roughly in her late twenties, together with her grandmother, mother, aunt, and their female friends who sit together and discuss their private romantic and sex lives: her grandmother and aunts tell stories of being young brides against their will, how to pretend to be a virgin on the wedding night by sewing up one's hymen, and how they escaped the violence of being teenagers wed to older men. Unlike *Femmes d'Alger* which follows mobile women, the women in *Broderies* do not leave the living room throughout the entire graphic novel, yet readers are mentally or visually transported to different times. The book is humorous and lighthearted, but it also touches on violence related to patriarchal ownership over women's bodies. The title plays on the older women explaining to Marjane how to pretend to be a virgin on one's wedding night by sewing one's hymen closed again, which implies serious and violent consequences if husbands' expectations of virginity are not met. Together,

Broderies and *Femmes d'Alger* offer snapshots of the intimate lives of women who are so controlled in the public sphere, who demonstrate immense tenacity in the face of (colonial and patriarchal) misogyny. In their representation of relationships with men, torture and fear, both authors demonstrate a radical rejection of political control over their lives and the lives of other women in their countries, turning to community to remain strong. In telling these stories, the heterogenous historiographies of both revolutions are more clearly pieced together and women's stories become an integral part of inclusion, as the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" boldly proclaims.

II. EXILE AND BICULTURALISM IN *PERSEPOLIS* (2000) AND *DÉSORIENTALE* (2016)

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution took the Western media by storm, showing images of women wearing black chadors and young men holding guns in the streets. This revolution solidified several stereotypes about Iranians that are still engrained in Western interpretations of Iran today, the most prominent being that Iranian women are oppressed and that the country is based in violence and turmoil. The image of the "oppressed Iranian woman" remains at the forefront of Western interpretations of Iranian culture, which is problematic because it takes away the humanity of Iranian women, many of whom endured severe trauma due to the revolution and its aftermath. With this revolution came the end to a Westernized way of life in Iran, turning a more secularized country into a theocratic dictatorship seemingly overnight. For those who were privileged enough, this meant having to leave the country, leaving their homes in order to protect themselves and their families, thus creating the Iranian diaspora as it stands today. Over forty years later, Iranians continue to process the results of this revolution. For many Iranians in the diaspora, writing became an outlet for processing the trauma, and especially for Iranian women who were young girls and teenagers at the time.

In this chapter, I consider a facet of the Iranian diaspora that is so engrained in Iranians' diasporic identities, yet which often goes unacknowledged by Western media: the lived experience of exile and (attempted) biculturalism, and how it creates rifts in their identities. I explore these ideas as they are lived and archived by women writers in the post-revolutionary Iranian diaspora, with two examples: Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000)[31] and Négar Djavadi's *Désorientale* (2016). These texts belong to two very different genres and were published nearly

[31] This version of *Persepolis* does not contain page numbers. Any further reference to the book will be referenced without page numbers.

two decades apart, yet they portray experiences that are in many aspects nearly identical. The works take part in a greater movement of exiled women writers in the diaspora which began in the early 2000s, which sought to reconsider and reclaim their power and identities as Iranian women after the revolution, and to tell the stories that were otherwise invalidated by their government and by Western media. Since then, there has been a continued surge of Iranian women writers turning to literature to give voice to the forgotten women of the Revolution of 1979 and their fight to start anew. Examples include Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and *Things I've Been Silent About* (2009), Shirin Ebadi's *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope* (2006), and Delphine Minoui's *Je vous écris de Téhéran* (2015). What these texts all have in common, as indicated in Nafisi's 2009 title, is that they account for women's experiences that were molded by the revolution, about which they were for so long silent or *silenced*. They tell stories of female strength and resilience, also of abuse and fear—simply put, these texts open an entire world to readers, a world that was for so long hidden by the revolutionary guard and the Islamic government of Iran.

In this chapter, I argue that for exiled Iranian women, writing is a way of coming to terms with and understanding the trauma of their past, of the Iranian revolution: lost childhoods, assassinated family and friends, being forced to adopt a new language, culture and identity. It is their ability to overcome this trauma which allows them to move forward, away from being trapped in the past. Writing is, at the same time, an act of rebellion: living in exile, these writers turn to different forms of autobiography as they fight against the patriarchal theocracy in Iran which denies them a voice and refuses to acknowledge them as equals[32]. Thirdly, as mentioned

[32] The Islamic Republic's constitution, created in 1979, reads that "the family is the primal unit of society and the essential center for the growth and grandeur of men. […] Women are emancipated from the state of being an "object" or a "tool" in the service of disseminating consumerism and exploitation, while reclaiming the crucial and revered responsibility of motherhood and raising ideological vanguards." In other words, the focus of the Islamic

above, writing their stories also becomes a way of disproving or reconstructing the Western idea of Iranians and specifically Iranian women. In *Persepolis* and *Désorientale*, Satrapi and Djavadi dive into the deepest corners of their trauma as young girls. Readers follow protagonists Marji and Kimia, both ten years old during the revolution, as they are forced to grow up quickly in disorienting environments that leave them with fractured identities. In my analysis, I focus on the aspects of biculturalism and exile that guide these narratives and how these women see themselves now because of these rifts in their identities.

The first section, *Iranian Revolution of 1979: a contextual analysis,* outlines the events and politics of the Iranian revolution which has for so long been misunderstood. This section serves as a contextual starting point for readers to understand the violence of Iran's 1979 revolution, as well as the connection between Iran and France. In the next section, *the Burnt Generation: the child's gaze in* Persepolis *(2000) and* Désorientale *(2016)*, I analyze the ways in which Satrapi and Djavadi portray the child's experience in witnessing violence. The Burnt generation refers to those who were children at the time of the revolution. Both authors draw on childhood violence to show readers the traumatic disruptions experienced by the Burnt generation. The next section, *Creative, Counter-Narrative Strategies*, examines the multiplicity of narrative modes that each writer employs to better portray the complexity of their experiences to counter the simplified mediatic representation of an oppressed woman. In the following section, *"C'était la mort ou l'exil"[33]: Exile in* Désorientale *and* Persepolis*,* I explore the initial journeys into exile for young Kimia and Marji and the rift that this exile creates as these girls are

government is not on women's rights for themselves, but on women's rights to bear children, and the cultivation of the traditional heterosexual marriage.

[33] Négar Djavadi, *Désorientale* (Liana Levi, 2016), 222.

forced to leave behind all familiarity and venture into the unknown. The last section, *The Consequences of Exile : Biculturalism and Entry into the Diaspora***,** considers the dysphoria associated with attempting assimilation in the West. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how Satrapi and Djavadi turn to writing to reclaim identities and stories misunderstood and misappropriated by official and media narratives, thus offering readers a counter perspective on the diaspora.

I. Iranian Revolution of 1979: A Contextual Analysis

As I briefly explained above, the global image of Iran shifted drastically when, in 1979, revolution broke out and the king, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (reigned 1941-1979), was overthrown to make way for a new leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who would almost immediately establish the Islamic Republic of Iran which stands today. Understanding this revolution, in both its internal effects as well as its effects on the global image of Iran, is important, especially as it contextualizes two stories, *Désorientale* and *Persepolis*, to which Western audiences might not relate. At the same time, contextualizing this revolution opens space for readers to reevaluate what they previously thought to understand about Iranians as a people. The political shift in Iran was the result of a longstanding dissatisfaction of the public with the monarchy, dating back to the king's father, Reza Shah Pahlavi.[34] With Reza Shah Pahlavi came the end to the Qajar dynasty (1789-1925) and the beginnings of a more prominent divide between secular/modernist and traditionalist values. Reza Shah brought about drastic changes in both social and political reform, the most relevant to this chapter being his desire to Westernize and secularize Iran. Stephanie Cronin writes in *The Making of Modern Iran: State*

[34] King of Iran, 1925-1941.

and Society under Riza Shah 1921-1941 (2003) that "this new state developed as an agent of change, implementing and enforcing the agenda of the nationalist elite without the help, and sometimes against the wishes, of traditional intermediary layers […], and incubating a society Europeanized in appearance and modern in modes of cultural and intellectual expression and discourse."[35] Reza Shah forced Iranians and government officials to dress in Western clothing, and at the same time prohibited women from wearing the headscarf in public, all of which were drastic compared to the traditional Iran of previous dynasties. He also implemented several laws in favor of women's liberation, such as a law stating that a man must have medical clearance before marrying a woman so that he does not spread sexually transmitted disease, or another law stating that all marriages must be documented so that a woman is able to refuse marriage to a man who is already married. In so doing, he slowly solidified the divide between modern and traditional, between secular and religious, in abandoning traditional routes of politics and ignoring the wishes of the clerics. This tension between secular and religious in Iran was an issue before Reza Shah, but with his focus on a secular and Westernized state, there came to be a strong public divide, even among secular-siding individuals: "Some secularly oriented, reformist thinkers of this time bitterly opposed Reza Shah and feared the authoritarian nature of his regime, and many religious-minded women from various classes never forgave him for prohibiting veiling in public."[36] With the anti-veiling law, the majority of women did not feel liberated. Rather, they felt violated for being forced to give up an age-old tradition in such a violent and forced manner—"scarves were being torn off women's heads by the police in the streets and alleys. There was much social and cultural violence and some suicides. […] The

[35] Stephanie Cronin, *The Making of Modern Iran* (Routledge, 2003), 1.

[36] Cronin, 165.

result was that, apart from the modern middle-class women, almost all women put on their *chadurs* again after the Shah's abdication" (Cronin 31). While many argue that the Shah's anti-veiling law fostered a more liberating space for women to feel free, women themselves did not appear to have been included in such a choice about their bodies in public spaces, and with such violence. This lack of agency for women, and more so the obsession with a modernist state, ultimately led to the Shah's abdication.

1941-1979: Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's Modernist Agenda

Reza Shah abdicated in 1941, having lost almost all public backing due to the extreme lengths he had taken for his nation to appear more European, which ultimately weakened the sociopolitical status of Iran. Taking his place was his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, who ruled from 1941 (at the age of twenty-two) until the Islamic revolution of 1979, when he was forced into exile. Both father and son had goals of modernizing the country, but Mohammad Reza Shah was even more invested in modernizing Iran than was his father. In his article "The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization' and the Consolidation of Power" (2001), Ali Ansari writes that "the Shah was anxious to be seen not only as a 'democratic' monarch, progressive and benign, always with the welfare of his people in mind […], but as a 'revolutionary' monarch" (3). Having watched his father's efforts, Mohammad Reza Shah felt responsible for creating a new order in Iran, to continue with what his father had wanted for the country, yet with a refreshed perspective to win over the people. Mohammad Reza Shah, who I will from here on refer to as the Shah, was seduced by the European image. Having learned French from his private Parisian tutor from a very young age and having studied abroad in Switzerland a few years prior to becoming king, the Shah had his own ideas of what it meant to

Westernize and modernize the country. For him, the most important thing was to build up his country continuously and tirelessly in a progressive image, often ignoring the consequences. Ansari writes that "'Modernism' and 'Pahlavism' were […] both synonymous and mutually dependent. Monarchy and modernism, perceived as contradictions by many, were thus rationalized into compatibility, even necessity, by the Shah, who saw no contradiction in drawing upon traditional myths of past monarchs, likewise considered initiators of 'just' orders" (3). The Shah wanted nothing more than for his reign to be associated with modernity and the West. But the rapid and enforced modernization ultimately drove the people of Iran to turn against him.

The Shah Versus the People Versus Ayatollah Khomeini

The Shah's 'White Revolution'[37] introduced the very man responsible for the Shah's ousting and the fall of the monarchy. Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989), known at the time as Hujjat-ul-Islam Ruhollah Khomeini, was the son of religious mullahs and an avid scholar of Shi'i philosophy and ethics. He did not appear under the monarchy's radar until 1963 during the White Revolution, at which time he publicly declared the Shah's reforms, specifically those pertaining to women's right to vote and land allotment, blasphemous. His public discourse inspired many other Shi'i scholars in his city of Qom to follow him, and soon this enthusiasm spread to people of differing political and religious beliefs, all of whom were upset with the Shah's greed and the state of their country. In 1963, Khomeini was arrested and sentenced to

[37] The White Revolution was a series of reforms that the Shah put into place to appease the public and avoid an actual revolution, geared towards aggressive modernization of the country. Ansari writes that "the 'White Revolution' was intended to be a bloodless revolution from above aimed at fulfilling the expectations of an increasingly politically aware general public as well as an ambitious and growing professional socio-economic group, and as such anticipating and preventing what many considered to be the danger of a bloody revolution from below" (2). The Shah used this opportunity to further emphasize the modernized nationalism that he hoped to foster in the country, yet this 'revolution' backfired; "in short, the 'White Revolution' not only undermined the structural foundations of the Pahlavi monarchy, but also crucially contributed to its ideological destabilization" (Ansari 2).

prison for speaking against the Shah, which resulted in riots by his followers in Qom. The following year, he was sentenced to exile from Iran. He settled first in Iraq, and finally in Paris, in Neauphle-le-Château (a point to which I will return), where he would remain until February of 1979 when he would return to Tehran in victory. Khomeini's message was, in a sense, simple, in that he wanted to return to traditional values and to move away from the Shah's obsession with Western imperialism. In *Le Rendez-vous iranien de Simone de Beauvoir* (2018), Chahla Chafiq writes that "l'imam y réitérait inlassablement le rôle et la place de l'islam dans la révolution et la poursuite des objectifs révolutionnaires, c'est à dire : combattre le grand Satan américain et ses alliés, mettre fin au système corrompu hérité des rois Pahlavi, réhabiliter la dignité du peuple pervertie par l'occidentalisation et établir la justice au profit des déshérité(e)s" (57). Against the backdrop of a resented Westernization of the state by the Shah, Khomeini's discourse became increasingly appealing to the masses. Soon, he was leading the start of a revolution from his exiled state, with anti-Western imperialism at the heart of his message.

Though the Shah had sent Khomeini into exile, the ayatollah (Khomeini) continued in gathering more and more followers: "From his home in Najaf, Iraq, Khomeini continued to lambast the Shah for his despotism, corruption, and dependence on foreign powers. But Iranians seldom heard his voice or were allowed to utter his name in public" (22 Tabrizi). On June 5th, 1975 in Khomeini's home city of Qom, "between four and five hundred seminary students had gathered [on the] anniversary of the riots that led to Khomeini's exile and defiantly called for Khomeini's return. [They] chanted "Long live Khomeini", "Down with Pahlavi". A large banner appeared […]: "Remember June 5, 1963, the day when […] Khomeini and his companions, rose up against tyranny!" (22 Tabrizi). These riots ended in a devastating attack from the Shah's secret police, the SAVAK, who threw students from roofs and beat them mercilessly to stop the

protests— “The police struck the protestors violently with electric batons and punched and kicked the wounded. They arrested more than 350 people, who later reported that, while in police custody, they were beaten mercilessly” (23 Tabrizi). This activity sparked even more of a following for Khomeini, as the Iranian public was upset that the Shah would do such violent things on such holy land. It became painfully obvious that the people were no longer willing to tolerate the Shah’s secular and modernist behavior, and that it was only a matter of time until he was overthrown. Most important to note is that this was no longer a case of secular versus religious: “contrary to general Western perceptions that the 1979 revolution was Islamic, it was supported and enabled by Iranians who held radically different political and national visions but who came together in their one shared desire: the overthrow of the shah.”[38] Most protestors were not shouting slogans of religion versus secularism, but they were protesting the Shah, himself.

Khomeini’s Victory Over the Shah and the Debut of The Islamic Republic of Iran

Similar political activity continued until 1978, when oppositional violence began to escalate even more, and the end of the monarchy was clear in sight. On November 5, Tehran was at an impasse as riots reached an all-time extreme—the city was on fire, and authorities were unsure of what to do. This violence went on until, on January 16th, 1979, the Shah and the Queen left Iran. Soon after, on January 20, Khomeini announced that he would soon return to Iran: “Le 1e février, Khomeyni revient dans son pays où il est reçu avec une fantastique allégresse populaire. La République islamique est proclamée le 1e avril et ratifiée par référendum. Le monde entier n’est pas loin de se féliciter de l’heureuse issue d’une révolution effectuée sans la moindre effusion de sang” (Roux 431). Once Khomeini returned to Iran in February, the

[38] Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.59.

atmosphere appeared to settle down. The Shah had left, there was no more need for violence in the streets, and people were well prepared to receive Khomeini as their new leader. However, the fate of women would soon be changed, an outcome no one saw coming.

One month after the revolution, in March, "Ayatollah Khomeini announced that 'women should not be naked in these ministries. There is nothing wrong with women's employment. But they must be clothed according to religious standards.'"[39] Iranian women had fought for Khomeini as a leader because of his ani-imperialist sentiments and his promises for a brighter future away from the Shah's greed, not necessarily for his religious stance. Khomeini was insisting that the veil be worn by all women, first in these specific spaces. Soon the law required women to wear the veil everywhere outside of their home. Iranian women poured into the streets to protest the compulsory veil. The global sentiment was not anti-veil, but simply for it not to be compulsory. In fact, veiled and non-veiled women alike stood in solidarity in the streets, as it was a matter of principle and choice and not of the desire or not to wear the veil. From March 8th to 13th, 1979, women protested in the streets for their liberty and equal rights : "La mobilisation se fit spontanément, par le bouche-à-oreille, par des initiatives individuelles ou des décisions prises avec des amies ou des collègues. Les profils des contestataires étaient divers : des employées des services publics aux étudiantes et lycéennes, en passant par les femmes au foyer" (Chafiq 61). While protesting, women chanted slogans reminding Khomeini that they were at the backbone of the revolution, and that he had made promises to them regarding women's respect and freedom. One example of a slogan that Chafiq offers is "Ni occidentale, ni orientale ! République islamique !" (63), which refers to women's endorsing a homegrown "Islamic Republic" and rejecting both orientalism and Westernization. Women did not want to feel like

[39] Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood,* 59.

they fought their secular monarchy in order to be led backwards, which is clear in another slogan, “nous n’avons pas fait la révolution pour revenir en arrière” (Chafiq 63). Overall, the sentiment among women was one of anger and fear because of a great deal of deceit.

The Contradictions of France’s Role

One facet of the 1979 revolution that is often left undiscussed is France’s crucial role in Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to power and the contradictions this presented in relation to Franco-Iranian relations. It was the French government who welcomed Khomeini to stay in Neauphle-le-Chateau in 1978 and 1979 after living in exile in Iraq and Turkey. In France, Khomeini had his own private quarters in the Paris suburb, where he was able to continue spreading his revolutionary messages to Iranians via secret cassette tapes. This is important because without these stable accommodations, he would not have been able to successfully relay his message to the Iranian public and perhaps he would not have kept the momentum to overthrow the Shah. The contradiction here lies in part in the fact that the Shah had sent Khomeini into exile for publicly rejecting his Western desires for the country, yet it was in the West that Khomeini was being welcomed safely as he continued building an anti-imperialist empire. The French president at the time, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, defended the decision in a press conference in November 1978: ″L'ayatollah Khomeini est venu en France dans des conditions régulières, comme un étranger en résidence en France. Il lui a été indiqué à deux reprises que le sol de la France n'était pas un territoire d'où pouvaient être lancés des appels à des actions de violence."[40] Still, this arrangement remains curious, as many political opinions speculate that France used this opportunity to play both sides of the situation for its own benefit. That is, at the same time as

[40] Thomas Snégaroff. “Quand L'ayatollah Komeiny Faisait La Révolution Depuis Un Village Français.” *Franceinfo*, Franceinfo, 27 Jan. 2016.

they were housing Khomeini safely as he built up the revolution, French government officials were also keeping in contact with the Shah; "Valery Giscard d'Estaing sent a diplomat to Neauphle-le-Chateau and later an emissary to Tehran to meet with the Shah. The French offered to expel Khomeini, but the Shah said no, apparently not wanting the cleric to end up anywhere near Iran. The French emissary concluded that the Shah's days on the throne were numbered anyway, according to diplomats and press reports."[41] While the growing political activity out of Neauphle-le-Chateau became concerning for the French government, they did not pressure for him to leave because it was impossible to know what was about to happen in terms of Khomeini returning and imparting the Islamic Republic onto Iran.

The Ayatollah's four months in France are pertinent because they highlight the shift in France's viewpoint of Iran before and after the 1979 revolution. For the French public at the time, Khomeini's presence was curious, almost exotic, and intriguing. Olivier Da Lage, an RFI[42] journalist who was present during the Ayatollah's stay, recalls: "On ne voyait pas Khomeini parce qu'il restait dans son pavillon où il résidait […]. Il traversait une petite rue pour aller de l'autre côté, où un autre pavillon était loué. Dans le jardin, il y avait une tente qui servait de mosquée, donc plusieurs fois par jour, il s'y rendait pour la prière. On voulait voir ça."[43] This curiosity to see what Khomeini was doing in his tent of course had orientalist echoes: what was this man in the turban doing in his private mosque? Several accounts write about Khomeini as a meditative sage, as he played into this role: "at the time, the Shiite dignitary cultivated the image

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[41] Elaine Ganley, "Khomeini Launched a Revolution from a Sleepy French Village." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 1 Feb. 2019.

[42] RFI is a French news radio program.

[43] Roméo Langlois, and Mayssa Awad. "Iran : à Neauphle-Le-Château, Le Souvenir De L'ayatollah Khomenei Reste Très Présent." *France 24*, France 24, 11 Feb. 2020.

of an old sage in exile, sitting under an apple tree, welcoming journalists and Western intellectuals captivated by this persona."[44] Following Khomeini's return to Iran, however, there was a shift in ideas surrounding both Khomeini and his new Iran. In the months that followed his return, Iran's image in the eyes of the French drastically shifted to be associated with violence and backwards oppression.

A Woman's Body is Not a Token

For Khomeini, the law for women to always be covered represented what he had been fighting for all along, which is to say anti-imperialism. Iranians followed him through the revolution based on this ideal after watching how their king became greedy with money and power as he had focused on mimicking Western imperialism. Iranian people could not see until Khomeini took power that his religious stance meant that women's bodies needed to be regulated and tokenized. In both cases, under the Shah's reign and under Khomeini's Islamic Republic, women were tokenized: with no headscarf, they were a token of the "modern Iranian state." Then, with the compulsive veiling laws under Khomeini, they became a token of traditional values, of the "traditional Iranian republic." But under each ruler, women fought back: they fought when forced modernization ignored their real lived issues; and they fought a republic obsessed with a traditionalism that translated into policing women's bodies in public spaces. The Iranian Revolution was a long series of events that ultimately led to deceit. Iranians were exiled, killed, and arrested in the name of anti-imperialism. Iranian women were only thought of when it was convenient as a slogan, but little attention was paid to their rights or aspirations. This

[44] Olivier Faye, "The French Town Still Disturbed by the Memory of Ayatollah Khomeini." *Le Monde.fr*, Le Monde, 5 Feb. 2023.

revolution runs deep in the blood of Iranians, both for those still living in Iran and those in the diaspora.

The historical and political context of Iran's successive revolutions between the years 1921 and 1979 is crucial to grasp the significance of *Persepolis* and *Désorientale*, along with the events of 2022-23. In her chapter "Persepolis and the Cultural Currency of the Graphic Novel,"[45] Katherine Kelp-Stebbins argues for the importance of highlighting the geopolitical context of the publication of *Persepolis*. *Persepolis*, she argues, is so often presented as a *foreign* text by a *foreign 'Middle Eastern'* author, with little regard for its initial publication in France where the author lives a bicultural existence after being exiled there in her early adult years. I argue that understanding the Franco-Iranian implications of both the last Shah's regime and the revolution, as well as French ideology towards oppressed Iranian women highlighted in the introductory chapter to this project, together foster a clearer understanding of the nuances of *Persepolis* as a representative text for a complex identity: this is not a foreign book by a foreign author. Rather, it is a book written by a Franco-Iranian author in exile in France about what she experienced entering the diaspora as a young girl and the implications for her identity. This chapter showcases two perspectives on how the revolution broke apart and devastated families and friend groups. I do not claim that these stories are representative of every family's reaction to the revolution. Both Kimia's and Marji's families are extremely privileged, whereas most people did not have the option to escape in the ways that these characters did, nor did every family want to. There were still families who were more traditionalist and in favor of Khomeini's laws. Still, in following the coming-of-age stories of two young girls, readers gain a more humanizing

[45] Katherine Laurel Kelp-Stebbins, *How Comics Travel: Publication, Translation, Radical Literacies* (The Ohio State University Press, 2022), 104.

perspective of the nuance of what it meant to go through this trauma, both individually and as a people, and the fascism that Iranians face over forty years following the revolution.

II. The Burnt Generation: The Child's Gaze in Persepolis (2000) and *Désorientale* (2016)

This revolution did not only affect adults who understood the politics, but it had a grave traumatic impact on the children witnessing it. I chose *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* because these texts show readers what it meant to be a child at this time: confused and afraid, and at the same time still simply growing up. In both texts, readers follow young girls facing this confusion and fear while still coming of age. In Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*, published twenty years after the revolution, readers follow Marji,[46] Satrapi's autobiographical persona, as she witnesses the revolution through what little she gathers from the adults around her, as well as what she sees on the television. Marji witnesses daily fear and violence living with her politically active parents: she watches her mother fear for her life and change her appearance after being photographed during a protest against the Shah; she listens as her uncle explains in detail how he was tortured in prison; she witnesses the aftermath of a classmate being bombed in the street; she fears for her father's safety when he does not return home on time from photographing a protest on the frontlines. At the same time, Marji's life as a child carries on, despite the violence through which she lives: she plays with her friends in the street, begs to go out protesting with her parents, and gets in trouble for talking back to her ethics teacher at school. While the rest of the world watches Marji's country go through a violent revolution, she continues to play, learn, and grow. The only difference is that violence becomes a part of her childhood and is so intertwined with Marji's daily life that there is a point at which it becomes difficult, both for Marji and for

[46] From here on, I will refer to the author as Satrapi and the character as Marji or Marjane.

readers, to distinguish between her private life and the public political chaos of her country. For example, in the second chapter, “La Bicyclette”, the second panel features young Marji and two young boys dressed in clothing reminiscent of revolutionary warfare.

Figure 1

Young Marji announces, “Aujourd’hui, je m’appelle Che Guevara”, to which her friends respond, “et moi, je veux être Trotésky” and “moi, c’est Fidel”. The caption at the top of the panel reads: “L’année de la révolution en 1979, il fallait agir. J’ai donc délaissé mon destin de prophète pendant quelque temps.”. In the panel that follows, the three children are pictured marching together in a circle, with fists in the air, together shouting “à bas le roi!”, while the caption above reads: “on manifestait dans le jardin de la maison”. This scene demonstrates the ways in which the public and the private, the violence and the innocence, overlapped to create a new normal. The children play together as they would, yet their games have evolved from the typical soccer game in the alley (the most common play for Iranian children) to pretending to be guerilla soldiers. Curiously, readers cannot quite discern whether these costumes, consisting of guns and bullets strapped around them, are really worn by the children, or if they simply imagine dressing in such an official way, which keeps readers not far removed from the fantasy world of

a child. Satrapi effectively demonstrates in this scene that Iranian children are/were no different than French children in that they still played like normal children, not even remotely understanding the implications of their "game". At the same time, this violence seeped into their daily lives, causing rifts between reality and trauma.

This juxtaposition between child life and political violence is essential to Satrapi's message to French readers, that Iranians are and were *ordinary* people experiencing the *extraordinary* conditions of a revolution, and that at the same time, amidst the violence, life carried on, because it had to—it simply evolved. Satrapi's concern "is not merely about exposing and challenging the virulent machinations of 'official histories' but is more specifically about examining and bearing witness to the intertwining of the everyday and the historical."[47] *Persepolis* allows readers into the private world of an upper-class leftist family whose lives are turned upside down by the shift in regime. It presents an alternate perspective of the public violence that French audiences saw in the news in 1979, which primarily consisted of gunshots and women in long black chadors,[48] and which is still the general Western perception of Iran (and other Muslim countries). In an exclusive interview with Movie Web[49], Satrapi says that her inspiration to make *Persepolis* was first and foremost a reaction to Western media not accurately portraying Iran. After leaving Iran in 1984 and again in 1994, Satrapi says that she heard numerous absurd claims about Iran, to which she responds in saying: "you know, that is a true reality [what] you see on the TV channel, [and] I don't say it doesn't exist, it does. But [there are] many other realities that we never see, so it was really to say, 'I will give you at least

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[47] Hillary L Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (Columbia University Press, 2010),156.

[48] Material (usually black) that covers the entire body except for the face.

[49] *Persepolis - Exclusive: Marjane Satrapi*. *YouTube*, 2010.

another point of view'". Readers can therefore view *Persepolis* as an undoing of a Western or French idea of Iran as produced by the media during the 1970s. Satrapi shows readers "at least another point of view", the child's/coming of age perspective, in hopes of encouraging them to reconsider what they had thought about Iranian people (and specifically Iranian women), and to reread what they had seen on their televisions or in their newspapers, now from the personal and private perspective of a young girl witnessing it all. This point of view surely was never shown as part of the revolution, yet it is essential to understanding the lives of now Iranian adults who were children and teenagers during this shift. In showing her take on the revolution, and her experience as a small child, Satrapi not only humanizes but validates the Iranian people who became so "alien" to the rest of the world.

The Child's Gaze in Négar Djavadi's *Désorientale* (2016)

Following Satrapi's success with *Persepolis,* several other Iranian woman authors came forward to share their own experiences with the Iranian Revolution, writing themselves into this diasporic historical retelling of Iran in the 1970s and 1980s, and thus restructuring the history to reflect less of a Western impression. Sixteen years after the publication of *Persepolis*, the Iranian filmmaker Négar Djavadi joined this movement with the publication of her first novel titled *Désorientale* (2016), which like *Persepolis*, is a semiautobiographical fiction about a young girl finding her way through the politics of the Iranian Revolution while coming of age. The novel follows young Kimia Sadr who grows up in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution to a family of upper-class intellectuals and whose parents, like Marji's in *Persepolis*, are political activists. There are several notable echoes between *Persepolis* and *Désorientale*, especially since both authors were young girls in upper-class families who grew up through the same political turmoil

and violence of the revolution. Like *Persepolis*, *Désorientale* focuses on trauma and exile, and on the effects of violence and displacement on children's identities. In Djavadi's text, Kimia must learn from a very early age what it means to be the child of a political activist and the consequences that ensue. For example, she writes about how her father Darius "était caché quelque part dans les entrailles de Téhéran" (37) because he was wanted by the Shah's secret police for dissidence. She explains that while Darius remained in hiding, the police often came after her mother, threatening her life and targeting their home with bombs and bullets. In one traumatic scene for Kimia, a military general comes to their home to kill her father. She recalls that one day there was a knock on the door, and when she looked in the peephole it was covered from the outside. She explains, "J'ai ouvert la porte. Général Rahmani était devant moi, un pistolet à la main. Derrière lui un soldat tenait un garçon par les cheveux. J'ai commencé tout de suite à pleurer. Rahmani s'est mis à genoux devant moi et il m'a dit : 'Ne pleure pas, je ne vais pas te faire de mal, c'est ton connard de père que je vais tuer'" (45). This is just one event among many that disrupts Kimia's childhood as the daughter of a wanted activist, and it demonstrates to what extent she must grow up quickly as a survival tactic. In such an environment, there is little to no room for children's games and "normal" friendships. Instead, her life is ruled by violence and, soon after, exile. The guard coming to kill her father still speaks to her like a child ("ne pleure pas"; he gets down on his knee), yet he does not protect her from the sheer violence and is brutally explicit: "c'est ton connard de père que je vais tuer".

The juxtaposition between childhood and violence in both *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* demonstrates that Satrapi and Djavadi were normal children trying to learn about the world during a traumatizing decade over which they had no control. Furthermore, it blurs the boundaries between public and private histories (a topic to which I will return in chapter four)

and creates space for a more human approach to the Revolution and to Iranian women's experiences. In *Persepolis*, Marji is overly vocal about her desire to be involved in her parents' activism. She chants with her neighborhood friends in the street, begs her parents to take her with them to protest, and even gets in trouble for sneaking out to protest with her houseworker. She is outspoken, well-read, and wants nothing more than to be a part of this national event. Unlike Marji, Kimia does not have as much of an opportunity to simply be a child, primarily because she faces more direct violence more often. While Marji's parents are political activists just like Kimia's parents, because Kimia's father is a journalist and speaks and writes directly about the Shah and later about Khomeini, he has a search warrant out for his arrest. This is important because it shows that authorities fear and detest journalists writing the truth. In either case, regardless of the different types of childhoods Marji and Kimia experience and the different levels of violence they face, both girls end up with the same conclusion: they are no longer welcome in their country. In *Women Write Iran* (2016), Nima Naghibi writes that most of the narratives written by Iranian women in the diaspora following Satrapi "are produced by a generation who were children at the time of the revolution, old enough to understand what was happening but too young to participate in the protests or to act as political agents. This is the generation *to whom the revolution happened* rather than the generation who brought about revolution."[50] This generation is often referred to as the "Burnt Generation", precisely because of the violence that they witnessed as children and the way in which they were affected by a revolution that they did not cause.

For diasporic Iranian adults like Satrapi and Djavadi, for members of the Burnt Generation, to revisit the events of the revolution is to grieve all that they lost in having to leave

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[50] Nima Naghibi, *Women Write Iran : Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p.4.

their homes: family members, friends, economic and social status, entire lives, all left behind—"this is a population whose direct ties to Iran were disrupted after the 1979 revolution."[51] Unfortunately, because of the politics of the revolution and the imagery portrayed in Western media, Iranians in the Diaspora did not have the chance to grieve together. Instead, they had to focus on surviving and overcoming violent, racist threats while adjusting to a new life, oftentimes without a solid support system in the diaspora, especially if they were in political exile. This is evident in both *Persepolis* and *Désorientale*, where Marji feels alone in Vienna when none of her friends understand her suffering and she is made to feel as if she must lie about being French instead of Iranian, and Kimia's experience with her mother and sisters feeling like complete outsiders by French government officials, although they speak French and understand French culture. Understanding the lives of now Iranian adults who grew up during this shift matters because it opens space for diasporic Iranians, for whom "the wounds of revolution remain relatively fresh" (Naghibi 154), to grieve a traumatic rupture in their childhood that they could not understand as young people. In writing their stories, diasporic Iranian women revisit the pain and trauma that haunts them from a safe distance which allows for them to analyze and understand what really happened to them as children. The (semi)autobiographical stories that come out of this Burnt Generation are all quite similar in their representation of nostalgia and grief, in their retelling of the revolution through their child and now-adult perspectives, and in the stress placed on remembering the events of the past. In her essay "Voices of Silence", Gabrielle Schwab warns that if left unconfronted, "the collective and communal silencing of violent histories leads to the transgenerational transmission of trauma and the phantomatic return

[51] Naghibi, 4.

of the past."[52] Collectively approaching this grief, then, is imperative for Iranian women in the diaspora to move past their trauma so as to not be haunted by the memories and also to not pass them down to the next generation. Furthermore, the more women from this generation write their stories, the more they communicate to other women in the same group that what they experienced was *collective*, even if they felt alone at the time. Through writing, they can breathe a sigh of relief in releasing the silence on their trauma and instead embracing the collective grief that only other Iranian women in the Burnt Generation can understand.

At the same time, understanding diasporic Iranian women's lives also opens space for a discussion on human rights, to invite Western readers to reconsider their own privilege, which is indeed complicated because one risks misreading Iranian women's oppression as something that ought to be *mended* by the West. Naghibi writes in *Rethinking Global Sisterhood* that "responding with empathy (which recognizes difference—unlike sympathy, which assumes sameness) to stories of pain and trauma allows us to bring the process of reading our privilege and other's suffering by attending to an understanding of compassion as an emotion that impels action, and by redirecting the expression of compassion to one of internal redress" (47). It is important that Western readers engage with these stories so that they can act alongside (not to be confused with *on behalf of*) minorities such as Iranian women who are given a narrative instead of a voice. In *Persepolis* and *Désorientale*, both authors employ multiple tactics to humanize an otherwise villainized culture in Iran. They draw on childhood violence to show readers what the disruption looked and felt like which the Burnt generation experienced amidst the revolution, which gives Iranians the opportunity to reclaim their identities after so long being spoken for as

[52] Monica J. Casper and Eric Wertheimer. *Critical Trauma Studies : Understanding Violence, Conflict, and Memory in Everyday Life.* Edited by Monica J. Casper and Eric Wertheimer, New York University Press, 2016. p.120.

they dealt with trauma and the loss of their homes. Another way in which these writers reflect their complex identities is in their usage of distinct visual and oral narrative voices. In the following section, I analyze how Satrapi and Djavadi employ these voices and how these modes of narration reflect both trauma and healing in members of the Burnt Generation.

III. Creative, Counter-Narrative Strategies

Among stories published by diasporic Iranian writers, genres vary between graphic novels, autobiographies, novels, and nonfiction. But one relatively consistent aspect is the duality or multiplicity of narrative voices, often due to the rift in identities brought by displacement. In both *Persepolis* and *Désorientale*, the authors employ both a child-self narrative as well as an adult-self narrative which work together to demonstrate to readers what the child experienced in terms of trauma that they could not understand, as well as how the now-adult women can look back on these events from a safe distance to analyze, contextualize, and make sense of the trauma. In a previously mentioned interview with Satrapi in 2010[53], Satrapi said about writing *Persepolis*: "I needed to have distance with the story, I didn't have to be angry anymore, I didn't have to have any violence in me anymore, because, you know, you cannot answer stupidity by stupidity, you cannot answer to the violence by violence, so it is extremely important to take a step back". In this interview, Satrapi emphasizes the necessity of distance from the site of trauma in order to be able to think clearly and critically about one's experiences without (or with less) anger and fear in doing so. In *Persepolis*, there are two distinct voices in Satrapi's storytelling: Marji (her child self) and Marjane (her adult self). Satrapi makes a clear distinction between her child-self who experiences the trauma of the revolution, with all that she says and does (often out

[53] *Persepolis - Exclusive: Marjane Satrapi*. *Youtube*, 2010.

of naiveté), and her adult-self who returns (in this case imaginarily) to the site of trauma, to make sense both for herself and for readers of all that she thought and perceived of during the events of her childhood. The dual narration hints at the power and necessity of both voices: young Marji, who does not understand what is really going on as she experiences it, and adult Marjane, who processes the story as she recalls it, contextualizing and explaining to readers, and herself, along the way what she thought and felt. One example is on the first page of the first chapter, "le Foulard", in which Satrapi draws young Marji and her friends in the schoolyard, playing games with their newly required headscarves, while narrator Marjane explains: "nous n'aimions pas beaucoup porter le foulard, surtout qu'on ne savait pas pourquoi".

Figure 2

This scene is not necessarily highly traumatic in itself—Marji and her friends play in the schoolyard and appear to be enjoying themselves while they wait to go to class. Surely, however, it was puzzling to be forced to cover oneself as a child without being given an explanation, and this is precisely what adult narrator Marjane clarifies for herself and for readers in looking back: this panel "also demonstrates that the veil was as foreign to [Marji] and her classmates as it would be to her non-Muslim readers, and the irreverent uses of what they tend to read as a

symbol of fundamentalist oppression."[54] With the imagery of little girls playing and chatting in the schoolyard, in addition to Marjane's narration critiquing the lack of explanation to children, this scene is an example of how the dual narration in *Persepolis* enables writing oneself into the collective story: Satrapi does not just draw Marji, but other little girls, now adults, who shared the experience with Marji. Between child Marji and adult Marjane, readers can approach the idea of the headscarf with more empathy. Adult Marjane explains that like all Iranian women, young girls were suddenly required to wear the headscarf without any explanation of its "pourquoi." For a deeper understanding of what she went through, Satrapi looks back on the memory and analyzes from a safe distance. Not having had the words as a child to ask "pourquoi," she draws instead the veil as a cloth to have fun with and an accessory to play. As Constantino writes in "Marji Popular Commix Heroine", "the mature narrator reflects on the actions of the girls on that day and concludes that an explanation should have accompanied the imposition of the veil. This comment emphasizes the importance of understanding that comes from later knowledge and points to the fact that these little girls were inquisitive, curious, and open to education." [55] With the dual narrative voice in *Persepolis*, Satrapi highlights the necessity of returning to the site of the trauma in order to reach a more complete understanding, and that only then can one reach a state of healing.

In *Désorientale*, Djavadi employs a similar double narrative voice between child Kimia and adult Kimia. Like Marji, in reflecting on her childhood, adult narrator Kimia provides context for what she experienced. One example is how Kimia reflects on her understanding of her gender and sexual orientation, which is quite complex, especially for a child to understand.

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[54] Manuela Costantino, "Marji: Popular Commix Heroine Breathing Life into the Writing of History." *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2008, p.435.

[55] Costantino, 435.

She does not realize, until her sister murmurs something privately to her, that she is a lesbian. In the following scene, the adult narrator explains how child Kimia reacted when her sister called her a lesbian.

> Les heures qui suivirent, je les ai passées seule au premier étage, dans la chambre sans meubles où nous dormions. D'un coup, ce que je ressentais ne pouvait plus être exprimé par des mots simples. Si j'avais pu ouvrir la bouche au lieu de déguerpir dans l'escalier pour m'isoler, j'aurais crié : « ce n'est pas vrai Leïli, tu mens ! » Mais, en même temps, à l'autre bout de cette confusion légitime, il y avait la violence soudaine de la vérité. C'est peut-être elle que j'ai fuie en m'excluant moi-même de leur assemblée. (214)

In this scene, Kimia's sister has just told her that she is acting like a lesbian[56] while at their family's vacation home. In turn, Kimia immediately retreats to a spare room to escape embarrassment, as she assumes now that all family members felt about Kimia what her sister suggested. In the above excerpt, adult narrator Kimia gives words to the feelings that young Kimia could not express ("ce que je ressentais ne pouvait plus être exprimé par des mots simples"). She explains that her feelings were too big to understand, that she did not feel as though she could speak in that moment, but that if she could, she would tell her sister off. Narrator Kimia also remarks that as much as she wanted to tell her sister that she was a liar, that she suddenly felt the truth, and that perhaps it was her sister that she was hiding from, and not the whole family. Young Kimia ran and hid from her family when her sister suggested that she acts like a lesbian. As a child, she did not understand the implications of what was happening, that her sister had awoken a truth inside of her. As an adult, she looks back on this moment and can explain to both readers and to herself precisely how she was feeling: she was not angry that her sister suggested this, she was angry because it was the truth. Like in *Persepolis*, having both the child's reaction and the adult narrator point of view gives readers a full scope of the event

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[56] "*on dirait une lesbienne*" p.214.

and how the narrator now understands and processes the confusion. In bringing the child-self in dialogue with the adult-self, or in having the adult-self reflect on what the child-self could not articulate, Satrapi and Djavadi signify the multifaceted identities of now-adult Iranians. In bringing the child-self in dialogue with both their adult selves and their readers, the authors highlight feelings of confusion and pain ignored in the Western media's vilification of their nationality.

How Visual and Oral Approaches Foster a Different Facet of Diasporic Self-Expression

The duality of these narratives exists not only in the adult-child narrative perspective, but in how these authors evoke the senses to add another dimension to the story. In addition to the narrative duality, these writers implement sensorial modes of narration which offer another angle for readers to approach stories of heartache and violence. *Persepolis* is a graphic novel, a bold choice because there was really no tradition of graphic novels in Iran aside from comic strips in the newspapers.[57] Both Djavadi and Satrapi grew up reading *Les Aventures de Tintin* and *Astérix*, which were popular in Iran in the 1970s before they were banned by the Islamic guard. Not having grown up with exposure to other comics, Satrapi's inspiration to write *Persepolis* came in 1995 after reading Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980), a groundbreaking novel which anthropomorphizes people as mice while interviewing the author's father about his experience being a Jewish man during the Holocaust. In one interview (2012), Satrapi said that growing up, "the idea [she] had was that comics were for adolescents. But then you read *Maus* and realize comics are just a medium for expressing yourself and it was a revelation. ... You see it's possible

[57] A few comic books have since arisen, but still, there is not a fully formed tradition in Iran.

to make that."[58] Spiegelman's work, in essence, opened a world of new possibilities for Satrapi (and other readers and authors alike) in which the visual expresses ideas, feelings, and events that words alone cannot achieve in the same way. Yet of course there is far more to the graphic novel than its hybrid representation between words and visuals. Hillary Chute writes in *Disaster Drawn* (2016) that "comics texts give shape to lost histories and bodies. Through the practice and aesthetics of materializing history in the mark, with their hand-drawn words, images, frames, gutters, tiers, balloons, and boxes, they offer a 'new seeing'."[59] Graphic novels are unique in their hybrid approach; they also represent history like no other genre because of the possibility to communicate universal emotions wordlessly through a specific graphic language. The language or grammar of graphic novels is unique, requiring work on the part of the reader to contribute to the story.

In *Comics and Narration* (1999), Thierry Groensteen asks, "can an isolated image narrate? Can it, on its own, tell a story?" (21), to which he goes on to answer by explaining the language of panels and their order, and how together, they form a narrative. It is not one image that can tell a story, but it is the progression of visuals brought together by the grammar of graphics that allows Satrapi and other authors alike to tell their stories. Chute also writes in *Disaster Drawn* that "comics grammar exhibits the legibility of double narration—and stages disjuncts between presence and absence and between word and image—in order to pressure linearity, causality, and sequence: to express the simultaneity of traumatic temporality, and the doubled view of the witness as inhabiting the present and the past" (206). Satrapi's story relies on comics grammar to show readers the nuances of young Marji's experiences. For example, in

[58] Michael Cavna, "The Comic Riffs Interview". *Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 2012.

[59] Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn : Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, 38.

the chapter “le Shabbat”, Marji walks past her neighbors’ house which has been completely destroyed after being blown up, and she notices that in the rubble is her neighbor friend’s turquoise bracelet “encore attaché à…je ne sais pas…”.

Figure 3

The scene itself is silent, aside from the narrative captions. In the first panel, Satrapi draws Marji and her mother walking past the pile of rubble, and Marji looking back, as the narrative caption reads: “quand nous sommes passées devant la maison détruite des Baba-Lévy, je sentais qu’elle me trainait discrètement derrière elle. Quelque chose me disait que les Baba-Levy étaient là. Quelque chose a attiré mon attention.” In the next panel, Satrapi draws a close-up of Marji and her mother as Marji walks closer to the rubble that has caught her attention; the narrative caption reads: “J’ai vu alors un bracelet en turquoise, celui de Néda. C’était sa tante qui le lui avait offert pour ses quatorze ans.” Satrapi draws Marji looking worried as she comes closer to the rubble, but she is still not yet certain of what has transpired. The next panel is a close-up of Marji tearing up, as she covers her hand with her mouth in utter shock and the narrative caption reads: “Le bracelet était encore attaché à… Je ne sais pas…” Following this panel and its narrative ellipsis

is another close-up of Marji, this time with no narrative caption, as Marji covers her eyes with her hands, evidently in shock. The last panel of the page is all blackened: either the black created by Marji who covers her eyes, or the blocking of the traumatic memory by adult Marjane who adds a sober narrative caption: "aucun cri au monde n'aurait suffi à soulager ma souffrance et ma colère." In this scene, the grammar of graphic novels proves itself to be crucial as we consider exactly how Satrapi chooses to portray such a dark memory, the turquoise bracelet as the synecdoche of her friend dead under a pile of rubble. With each panel's progression, the illustrations close in on the darkness, both literal and metaphorical. The scene begins with Marji's saddened curiosity, and with each panel Marji's expression becomes more and more saddened, ultimately ending in a black panel. The first panel shows readers a bigger scope of the event: we see a widened panel showing the large pile of rubble and on the other side, Marji walking hand in hand with her mother. The panels progressively zoom in on Marji's inner pain and, ultimately, we can no longer see her and we only see a (metaphoric) darkness.

The artist seeks to represent the violence and pain experienced by Iranians during and following the revolution. The horror of a young girl slowly connecting a beloved piece of jewelry to her friend, deducting her death from the political violence is conveyed soberly and powerfully. Satrapi highlights, in showing Marji cover her face and then darkness, the child's inability to process the knowledge of the violence. Looking back, adult narrator Marjane also cannot see this moment in her memory other than pitch darkness. Satrapi relies on the gutter (the all-important spatial and temporal interval between two frames), where readers are asked to participate in the story. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud writes about *closure*, "this phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (63), in which the gutter plays an

essential role.[60] When illustrators decide to leave the violence out of the frames and suggest it in the gutter, they decide in effect to bring readers along as an accomplice, to involve them in the horror, to force them to participate. In the example of Marji uncovering her friend, the illustrator carefully chooses not to include speech, but to communicate solely with the visual and in the gutter. We cannot hear what Marji is thinking—we do not know if she is visualizing how her friend died or if she might perhaps be thinking of others who have died in the same way. In leaving this part of the scene black, readers are asked to imagine for themselves what this young, afraid girl might be experiencing. Satrapi's choice to tell this story through a visual lens is a way for her to involve readers in the story, to ask readers to reevaluate their preconceived notions of Iranians, and to consider the humanity and innocence of young Marji. Leigh Gilmore writes in her chapter "Witnessing *Persepolis*" that "Satrapi navigates trauma within the space of visual autobiography by drawing what can and cannot be seen. She draws both the unrepresentable violence and the challenge of witnessing."[61] In showing us both what can be seen (the friend's hand found in the rubble) and what cannot be seen (the bomb that killed her friend, all the violence surrounding her death), Satrapi shows readers an Iran that they could not have otherwise imagined, thus making space for a reimagination of her country and her people: "[she] is particularly concerned with […] showing Iran as *she* experienced it, to an audience whose only

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60 In his chapter "Blood in the Gutter", McCloud draws two frames as an example: in the first, readers see two men, one looking frightened and screaming "no! no!", while the other holds up an axe, presumably about to murder the former, as he shouts, "now you die!". In the second frame, readers see an outline of a city skyline, and in the sky the exclamation "eeyaa!!". Between these two frames, readers do not see the murder, but they can infer that it happened, through *closure*. McCloud argues for the important role the reader plays in deciding what happens in the gutter: "I may have drawn an axe being raised in this example, but I'm not the one who let it drop or decided how hard the blow, or who screamed, or why. That, dear reader, was your special crime, each of you committing it in your own style. All of you *participated* in the murder. All of you held the axe and chose your spot" (*Understanding Comics*, 68, emphasis added).

61 Michael A. Chaney, *Graphic Subjects Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels.* University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. p.160.

previous images of Iran may have been limited to ayatollahs, clenched fists, veils, and hostage-takers."[62] Satrapi's decision to tell her story from a visual perspective is key to the unique nature and success of *Persepolis*, because this visual aspect brings readers into the atmosphere in which young and confused Marji must bear witness to violence that she is too young to understand. Showing readers Marji's experiences thus encourages a re-seeing of Iranians by readers who had only ever thought of Iran as a sponsor of terrorism.

Oralities in *Désorientale*

In *Désorientale*, Djavadi also invites her readers into an embodied, sensorial experience, not with images as Satrapi, but with voices. Her text is more traditional in its genre: it is a novel of three hundred and forty-seven pages, narrated by twenty-five-year-old Kimia, who sits in a hospital waiting room in Paris as she prepares for artificial insemination, and who recalls her family's history over four generations. Despite the seemingly traditional format, Djavadi transforms her written pages so that they read as an oral history, making several allusions to the (now dated) technology of the cassette tape. In the beginning of the novel, for example, Kimia sits in the waiting room of the fertility clinic. As she waits, she notices that she is the only single woman sitting in the waiting room of the fertility clinic compared to the room full of heterosexual couples (a lesbian, she pretends to be in a heterosexual relationship with her gay male friend in order to be granted artificial insemination, but he is not there with her on this day). She considers how she might be judged by all the other couples waiting in this room with her simply because she sits there alone. Kimia then begins reflecting on her past and her family's history before her birth, yet quickly stops herself with the realization that readers have no context

[62] Amy Malek, "Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis Series." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2006, p.377.

for what she is talking about. She writes, “Pour que vous compreniez ce que je raconte, il faut que je rembobine et reparte du début; vous faire entendre, comme je l’entends moi-même en ce moment […] la voix de mon oncle Saddeq Sadr, surnommé Oncle Numéro 2. Une voix en mode mineur, aussi suave qu’une clarinette…” (19). In this transition from present to past, Kimia/Djavadi refers both to oral storytelling and to a wind instrument with her word choice such as “vous faire entendre” and “une voix en mode mineur aussi suave qu’une clarinette.” Telling readers that she quite literally wishes for them to *hear* her story, in a specifically pleasant voice, is a clue to the orality of the story ahead. Most importantly, however, is her use of the verb “rembobiner,” to rewind, which refers to a cassette player. Accordingly, the novel is structured into two sections: “Face A” and “Face B”, which allude to a cassette tape which must be turned over halfway through to keep on listening. As such, just as Satrapi invites readers to participate in the visual, Djavadi reminds readers that they are actively engaged with the story, and that with “Face B,” they can make a choice to continue or pause, or “rembobine”, just as one could do with a cassette, choosing whether or not to *listen* to the story. The metaphor also suggests that there is more than one side to any story.

Désorientale blurs the barrier between reader and narrator, between past and present, between different spaces and contexts, bringing to life the history that she is about to tell with sound and movement. Narrator Kimia recounts the story as if she were speaking in person to her readers, pausing and recounting other stories as tangents before returning to her initial thought, just as in the example above in which she stops the flow of her speaking to provide the reader with context. In this regard, the novel mirrors an authentic conversation—something, again, that can be heard. Not only does Kimia pause and redirect her speech in other directions, she also sometimes pulls readers back to the present of the hospital waiting room before throwing them

back into the past. For example, after continuing with the history of her family, Kimia again stops suddenly when she realizes she cannot remember a detail: "Retour à la salle d'attente. Bien que contrariée, je décide de sauter par-dessus le fragment manquant. Il faut se rendre à l'évidence : cette partie de l'histoire a été grignotée, puis balayée par le temps. Cela n'a pas d'importance, me dis-je, pourvu que tout le reste soit intact. Reprenons…" (23). This way of jolting readers from past to present and from one story to another defies readers' expectations and creates a sense of disorder or chaos, as they cannot count on reading a linear story, and must pay close attention to the time and place where the narrator takes them. Not only does Djavadi allude to the cassette tape in the structure of her book, but the orality of the book also comes from the Iranian tradition of telling oral stories. In this same scene, narrator Kimia notices the quiet of the waiting room: each person keeps to themself, and the room is still. If this waiting room were in Iran, Kimia tells us, it would be far noisier, with each person knowing the private business of the person next to them. She tells readers:

> L'Iranien n'aime ni la solitude ni le silence—tout autre bruit que la voix humaine, même le vacarme d'un embouteillage, étant considéré comme silence. […] Cette tendance à bavarder sans fin, à lancer des phrases comme des lassos dans l'air à la rencontre de l'autre, à raconter des histoires qui telles des matriochkas ouvrent sur d'autres histoires, est sans doute une façon de s'accommoder d'un destin qui n'a connu qu'invasions et totalitarisme. (53)

In her explanation of Iranians' tendency to need noise in a room, narrator Kimia highlights her own inclination to bring orality to the story. Iranians, Kimia tells us, do not do well with silence nor solitude—they seek the comfort of community, whether it familial or with strangers in a waiting room, and they find a way to make noise. She refers to the way in which Iranians speak as "throwing sentences in the air like lassos," always searching for the next sentence, as a way of accommodating a destiny full of invasions and totalitarianism. Kimia references here the political violence in Iran during the revolution and beyond, and points to the ways in which her

people have found coping mechanisms, one of which being to make noise, to never have silence. If we turn, then, to *Désorientale* and narrator Kimia's references to instruments and orality, readers can make the connection that Kimia, too, does not wish to relive her darkest moments, that she favors recounting stories that her readers then listen to and follow along with. She tells stories of her family's dynamics far before her own birth, going back and forth between past and present. And if we imagine her telling the entirety of the novel's story as an oral history, we can imagine her never taking a breath, quickly switching from topic to topic, only sometimes stopping to explain herself, such as when she tells us that she must "rembobiner" so that she can keep us up to date.

Djavadi's evocation of orality in *Désorientale* is nuanced and multilayered: she references the cassette tape which was a common technology in the 1970s during the revolution and during Kimia's upbringing. The cassette tape in many ways represents the Western imperialism that the Islamic republic wished to dismantle, with bootleg tapes being sold secretly on most street corners, allowing individuals to disregard the censorship that accompanied the revolution. The cassette tape also works as a metaphor for readers making an active decision to continue "listening," to engage with this story instead of passively consuming. Narrator Kimia also evokes orality in the way that she tells readers her story—she leans on the Iranian inclination to keep away the silence and to tell stories, perhaps due to the censorship of post-revolutionary Iran as a way to keep them alive. This tradition of telling stories *à l'oral* is a part of Iranian culture—especially for many women who were not literate until the 20th century, oral storytelling was necessary to keep their stories alive. In her article "The Ghosts of Our Mothers: From Oral Tradition to Written Words—A History and Critique of Jewish Women Writers of Iranian Heritage," for example, Farideh Goldin writes that the tradition of women gathering and

sharing their oral histories "also created a reservoir of stories that circulated among women before they were cognizant of the power of written words. Generations later, Iranian Jewish women would reach back to this collection of oral history to record their mothers' stories, to go beyond talking themselves free to writing themselves free."[63] Kimia's nod to oral storytelling is also her way of connecting with her Iranian foremothers and keeping this tradition alive within the diaspora. In sharing her story as an orality, she contributes to a tradition that has held Iranian women together in the face of adversity for a multitude of generations.

IV. "C'était la mort ou l'exil"[64]: Exile in *Désorientale* and *Persepolis*

The two narrative methods (a novel with graphics and a novel with voices) are important because they contribute to how these authors decide to tell the difficult stories of their exiled experiences and how they choose to connect both with the greater Iranian diaspora and their French readers. Exile is, for these authors, also largely related to their gender as Iranian women: as women writers, Djavadi's and Satrapi's gender is important in the context of a largely masculine literary tradition in Iran. Their narratives combat the notion of women's testimonies being less valuable than those of men. In *Désorientale*, Djavadi also raises questions of queerness and its forced invisibility in Iranian culture. Her coming of age involves coming to realize that she is a lesbian, and this adds to her feelings of unbelonging. Kimia says that she understood that being a gay woman had no place in Iran, that "de toute façon, c'était la mort ou l'exil, avec ou sans la Révolution. Ou bien une vie gâchée à faire semblant. […] Devenir épouse

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[63] Farideh Dayanim Goldin, "The Ghosts of Our Mothers: From Oral Tradition to Written Words—A History and Critique of Jewish Women Writers of Iranian Heritage." *Nashim : a Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, vol. 18, no. 18, 2009, p.93.

[64] Djavadi, 222.

et mère pour avoir la paix, se dissoudre dans la masse, échapper aux souffles dévastateurs des rumeurs" (222). The dilemma "la mort ou l'exil" is at the very foundation of why many Iranians left Iran during the revolution. In her article "The Iranian Diaspora: Its Formation and Transformation" (2011), Elhum Haghighat writes that "The Iranian revolution of 1978-1979 encouraged and often forced thousands of Iranian students, professionals, intellectuals, political activists, business entrepreneurs, religious minorities, and others to leave Iran for new destinations."[65] Reasons for leaving vary greatly: it might be the threat of real death, for those who were politically vocal against the regime, or for those like Kimia who are queer. It might also be a metaphorical death : the fear of losing one's country to a theocratic dictatorship and watching freedoms quickly disappear. For Kimia and Marji, the idea of death or exile is imminent : even aside from Kimia's queerness, her parents (one of whom remains in hiding) are wanted targets by the government, and Marji herself continues to cause trouble by vocally rejecting the regime. These young girls represent a generation of young people who had to learn early on that they were not welcome in their home country following the Iranian revolution. In this section, I analyze this alternative to either death or passing, which is to say leaving one's country, presumably for the rest of one's life. I examine the ways in which each writer expresses the physical experience/act of exile and the feelings of not belonging in their own country, and I consider how this treatment plays into the context of the greater generation of Iranian diasporic writing.

In *Women Write Iran* (2016), Nima Naghibi explains that life narratives like *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* "emphasize the importance of memory, and of a careful remembering (in the sense of piecing together) of personal stories of families and friends that have remained half told,

[65] Elhum Haghighat, "The Iranian Diaspora: Its Formation and Transformation." *Diaspora* (New York, N.Y.), vol. 20, no. 3, 2011, p.375.

lost in the frenzied shuffle between nations, between an Iran of their past and a (North) America, or Europe, of their present and future" (127). At the time of the revolution in 1979 (and in the years following), many Iranians chose to flee their home country either out of fear for their lives (leftist sympathizers, like Marji and Kimia's parents, were targeted by the revolutionary guard, and had to quickly escape to save themselves and their families) or out of disgust with a new oppressive regime. It is difficult to find exact numbers on how many families fled Iran—much of it was done in secret, and the rest not entirely documented: "no one knows exactly how many Iranians live in the diaspora today. Informal estimates have ranged from 'over one million' in the United States to 'four million or so' worldwide. Lack of comprehensive and reliable statistical research on the Iranian diaspora has been a perpetual problem in the study of this population."[66] Exiled from their home countries, Iranians dispersed mainly to the United States and to Europe where strong diasporic communities have since settled. A great majority of the people who left Iran in a frenzy have not since seen their home country over forty years later. For those who publicly reject(ed) the Islamic Republic, this is still out of fear for their lives, or fear of being let into Iran but never again being let out. For others, it is out of fear of seeing what has become of their home that no longer exists as it was. Settling in new countries, they left behind entire lives: family members, friends, photos, homes, sometimes entire identities. Regardless of the specific circumstances of each departure and return, this exile is now a shared trauma among many in the Iranian diaspora. A great number of authors in this generation, like Djavadi and Satrapi, were children or adolescents at the time of exile, which adds another layer of trauma and confusion to the shared wound of the revolution because they could not fully understand. For this generation, who was old enough to remember their pre-revolutionary lives but not old enough to participate

[66] Amy Malek, "Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis Series." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2006, p.357.

in the politics or make choices for themselves, the importance in writing these autobiographies is not only to work through the trauma or even to reconstruct the national discourse, but it is also a matter of reclaiming a sense of agency. Naghibi writes that authors in this generation, unlike the adults who protested in the streets, "see the revolution as something that happened *to them*, and as a result, [they battle] with a sense of frustration over their lack of agency during a historical moment that had such a definitive and devastating impact on their lives" (129). It is as such that the publications that come out of this generation tend to share the notion of longing for another time, as well as "the shared experience and articulation of the revolution as a traumatic event, as an inflicted wound during a key period in the authors' personal development" (129). Writing through the trauma both allows for group healing and retrospection at an older age and insists on the validity of this trauma as a part of Iranian historiography. In this case, the trauma of which I speak is that of being forced to abandon all familiarity to find safety. Below, I analyze how each author brings readers into their experience of exile as a young girl and how they, themselves, revisit these feelings of confusion, disorientation, and loneliness. In sharing and reliving their personal stories of exile, which vary so greatly between all members of the diaspora, these authors humanize the little girls who did not understand why they had to leave home, both for themselves and for readers, and in so doing they reformulate the possibilities that a reader might consider when now thinking about Iranians in the diaspora, in what they may have had to endure.

Varying Journeys into Exile for Kimia and Marji: How Exile Affects the Entire Family

Edward Said writes that "[exile] is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home."[67] For both Kimia and Marji, exile is

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[67] Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 2002. p.173.

something that tears them and their families away from both each other and from their homes. In *Persepolis*, Marji experiences this rift multiple times. When she is fourteen years old, her parents send her to study in Austria, where she lives for four years before returning to Iran after becoming homeless. Upon her return, she remains in Iran for several years, during which time she is married and then divorced, and finally realizes that she simply cannot sustain a life in Iran. In 1994, at the age of twenty-four, Marji leaves Iran again, this time for Paris with the idea that she will never again return. Marji faces a double exile, first going to Vienna and then going to Paris, both times tearing herself away from the familiar, both times causing a rift in her identity. In *Désorientale*, Kimia travels with her mother and sisters to meet her father in France as he hides from Iranian authorities. The mother and daughters are forced to travel through the desert on foot and by camel into Turkey where they are to retrieve plane tickets to France at the French embassy. They experience intense racism and ultimately arrive in France after a great deal of humiliation and othering by French officials. Being torn from everything they know, this family also endures humiliation and denial. In both cases, the authors highlight the feeling of being torn away from all familiarity to ultimately feel confused and alone, and to have their family feel the same way.

In *Persepolis*, Marji goes through multiple exiles—yet her initial exile to Austria is a key moment in her coming of age. She is initially exiled to Vienna because, at fourteen years old, she struggles to carry herself with the submission that the government demands. Satrapi draws Marji defying moral conduct codes: wearing jean jackets, jewelry, nail polish, all of which are cause for arrest because of their association with Western practices. She talks back to teachers at school, complaining that they are hypocrites and that they do not understand the way the world works, which forces her parents to repeatedly return to school to speak with the principal on her

behalf. Marji is a normal teenager. Satrapi draws her sporting her jean jacket with the signature Michael Jackson patch atop her school uniform along with her Nike shoes, for both of which she gets in trouble in school. Satrapi's depiction of Marji's Western clothing is important because it contributes to Satrapi's highlighting of the nuance of young Iranians' identities, which clashes with the new Islamic regime. Emily Edwards writes that the mixture of Marji's modest clothing and hair covering, along with her Western paraphernalia, "show Satrapi's emotional multiplicity that challenges the concept of cultural purity and state-imposed regulations. […] Satrapi's cultural preferences are influenced by a mixture of British and American artists; she has already become hybridized before any experience of physical exile from Iran."[68] The fact that young Marji wears a mixture of Western and Islamic clothing showcases to readers the ways in which, even before physically being exiled, Marji already feels a sense of unbelonging, or that she is not welcome in her own home country, perhaps even that she is *not* there. She seeks comfort in self-expression that unfortunately only makes her issues with the regime worse. In the page below, Marji is scolded by revolutionary guards about her Western attire and is ultimately asked to get into the infamous van which will take her to the police station. In this scene, Satrapi draws young Marji in such a way that shows readers both the violence that young women faced in even slightly expressing themselves outside of the accepted norm, as well as the State's obsession with anti-imperialism. The way in which she draws Marji highly contrasts with the female guards who wear long black chadors. She draws the guards in heavy black clothing from head to toe, and she draws Marji with a similar garb: a black headscarf and black school uniform. Marji's clothing, however, is contrasted with the white of her jacket and shoes, which indicates to readers that Marji is, at once, the same as these women (also belonging in Iran) and yet very

[68] Emily Edwards, "Searching for a Room of One's Own: Rethinking the Iranian Diaspora in 'Persepolis', 'Shahs of Sunset' and 'A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night.'" *Glocalism*, vol. 2017, no. 3, 2018. p.11.

different in her desires to personalize her wardrobe and express herself as a young person. Satrapi draws the domineering guards in such a way that they almost float in their black chadors, with mean faces, scrutinizing suspicious attire, physically harassing and verbally insulting young Marji. As the guard demands “Baisse ton fichu, petite pute,” she pulls the veil over Marji’s face, creating a disturbing image of a black hooding.

Figure 4

Satrapi’s careful depiction of Marji getting in trouble shows readers that Marji cannot stay in Iran for her own safety, that she wants to rebel from any authority figure who forbids her from personal sartorial choices, which put her at risk of arrest or worse. Living under a new Islamic dictatorship, her parents understand all too well that if they do not intervene, their daughter will end up in prison and/or ultimately assassinated, like many of their friends and family who spoke out against the government. It is with all of this in mind that one day, Marji’s parents tell their fourteen-year-old daughter that they are sending her to Austria alone to complete her studies. Marji’s mother tells her, “on préfère t’avoir loin de nous et heureuse, plutôt que proche mais

malheureuse et vu la situation, tu te porteras mieux ailleurs". This line is reminiscent of Kimia's "la mort ou l'exil:" in both cases, there is an understanding that the alternative to exile is suffering or even death. Marji's mother favors her daughter's happiness over her own desire to keep her close to the family. The sacrifice of Marji's mother encapsulates the feelings of exiled individuals like Marji and showcases the degree to which loved ones had to "choose" exile and/or separation as a form of safety, even if (and in this case, *when*) it meant that a mother had to part with her fourteen-year-old daughter.

The most powerful scene surrounding Marji's exile is on the very last page of volume two. The moment is symbolic because it ends for Marji the life that she knew, all that was familiar to her, as well as her childhood: going to a new country forces her to mature quickly to learn how to care for herself. In this scene, Marji is at the airport with her parents who come to watch her leave as she departs Iran for Austria. Like a typical teenager, she wants her parents to simply leave her at the airport and go—but she secretly deals with intense emotional regret in having to leave them. In this initial journey into exile for Marji, Satrapi highlights the ripple effect that a daughter's departure has on her family. Readers see Marji's mother crying hysterically as she leaves her daughter behind; knowing that it is the right thing to do does not make it easy. This becomes not only Marji's trauma to bear, but something with which her parents, friends, extended family all must also come to terms. Satrapi's depiction of Marji's departure into exile shows readers the extent to which exile affects the entire family as an intergenerational trauma not solely hurtful to Marji. As young Marji experiences the heartbreaking difficulty of leaving her family behind, adult narrator Satrapi reflects on this moment that changed her life, and she comes to realize to what extent this was not just a casual trip to study abroad but a pivotal moment in her development. As narrator Satrapi reflects, she is

also able to return to the moment of the trauma with enough distance to realize that writing/drawing this event is an indication of her own perseverance. Rocio Davis writes in "A Graphic Self" (2005) that "Because leaving Iran and her parents was "a little like dying" (153), the text serves as Marji's way of surviving, by revisiting and reenacting those memories of simultaneous violence and family togetherness, and her parents' love that made them understand that only by sending her away would she be safe." [69]

Figure 5

Satrapi's depiction of this pivotal moment in her childhood reflects her innocence as a child and her adult realization of how destructive this moment was for her and her family. In the first panel, Marji's parents smile and wave to her from behind an airport glass partition, as she signals to them, almost with an embarrassed look on her face, to leave. "Partez, partez," she says to them, as an airport attendant looks through her luggage and tells her, "referme ta valise. Tu peux

[69] Rocío G. Davis, "A Graphic Self: Comics as Autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*." *Prose Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2005, p.275.

partir." Satrapi explains in the caption the difficulty that she had with leaving and saying goodbye: "Je ne supportais pas de les voir là, derrière les vitres. Il n'y a rien de plus pénible que les adieux. C'est un peu comme la mort.". Saying goodbye is as intense to Marji as someone dying. Said explains that exile, "like death but without death's ultimate mercy, [has] torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography."[70] For Marji, whether her parents die or are pulled away from her, the effect is the same: she is *torn* from the safety of their arms and watches them suffer without being able to help. In alternative circumstances, she would perhaps be more certain that she would see her parents again. Here, however, there is no guarantee that the government will not arrest her own parents like they did her uncles.

In the second panel, Marji is drawn pushing her luggage on a cart, with a somber look. The scene is silent, with a caption split in half between the top and bottom of the panel to suggest her change of mind, which reads: "et puis non… je me suis retournée pour les voir une dernière fois…" The third panel draws heartbreak: Marji's mother has fainted while her husband carries her away, eyes looking down in sadness. In the background, Marji pushes her face and hands to the airport window, with large, sad eyes and her mouth agape. She is speechless. The caption reads: "…j'aurais mieux fait de m'en aller." Together, these three panels reconstruct the moment when Marji is forced to face the reality of her situation, when she sees her parents in their misery, realizing that she has no choice or autonomy in the situation, and that she is now suddenly alone and headed to a foreign country where she does not speak the language. Like Said's definition of exile, Marji experiences a rift—between her and her parents, her home, and all things familiar. She is now left with just one suitcase's worth of belongings to forge on and

[70] Said, *Reflections on Exile,* 174.

begin a new life in Vienna. Most studies on *Persepolis* gloss over this moment in the text and favor Marji's arrival—which is of course also important. However, I choose this scene to analyze because it is a moment in which adult Marjane must return to the site of the trauma—she is forced to re-witness her parents' devastation and her own naiveté. As readers, we witness this heartbreak as well. We witness Marji's initial adolescent urge to send her parents off and her sudden realization that they are walking away from her. This depiction of the precise moment of Marji going into exile is crucial to bring a humanizing approach to the Iranian diaspora. Showing readers this heartbreak captures what the media never could have depicted. In turn, readers gain access to hardship ignored, unspoken or unreported: the heartbreak of families torn apart, and young adults left to learn about the world on their own.

In *Désorientale*, Kimia's exile is not as cut and dry as Marji's. For Cameron Bushnell, "in one aspect, Kimia, like the rest of her family, is physically displaced, fleeing Iran when the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini endangers her dissident family. In a second aspect, Kimia's exile is more personal, a loss of sense of self and belonging to the family as she realizes her homosexuality—aberrant, indeed impossible, in Iran."[71] Like Marji, Kimia begins learning early on how she is not welcome in her own country. For Marji, this means wanting to freely express herself as a teenager. For Kimia, this means coming to terms with her sexuality when being queer is illegal in Iran.[72] As a child, narrator Kimia explains that her father treated her like the son he never had, that she always had more boyish qualities and did not necessarily fit in with the rest of the girls. As I previously explained, when one day her sister tells her to mind her

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[71] Cameron Fae Bushnell, "Orientalism Otherwise: A Poetics of Adjacency in Négar Djavadi's *Disoriental*." Interventions (London, England), vol. ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print, 2022, p.2.

[72] *Iran LGBT Laws - Pride Legal*. https://pridelegal.com/iran-lgbt-laws/.

behavior lest someone think she is a lesbian, it suddenly clicks in young Kimia's mind that she resonates with this word—she is afraid, however, to admit it, due to the social consequences. Unlike other girls her age, Kimia is not entirely sure about her gender identity—in part because her father openly treats her like the son he never had, and in part because she looks at boys and men with jealousy because of their freedom. Adult narrator Kimia tells readers that she always imagined herself as an adult, smoking on her terrace with no shirt on, because she saw her male neighbor doing so casually: "Je me disais qu'un jour, je ferais comme lui. J'aurais moi aussi le droit d'enlever mon T-shirt et de profiter du soleil sur ma peau dans l'indifférence générale" (213). Between her gender dysphoria and her confusion about her sexual orientation, young Kimia is certain of one thing: that she cannot talk about this confusion. Being a lesbian, especially, means that Kimia is essentially invisible (or exiled, yet not physically). In reflecting on her identity, she observes of Iranian culture that:

> De génération en génération, des codes ont été mis en place. Des codes pour élever les garçons et d'autres pour élever les filles. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de vêtements et de jouets, de "garçon qui ne pleur jamais" et de "fille qui aide maman". Il s'agit d'avenir. Devenir époux et père, gagner de l'argent et le faire savoir. Devenir épouse et mère, élever des enfants polis et performants et exceller dans l'art de tenir une maison. Personne ne sait comment élever l'entre-deux, se dépatouiller avec l'à-peu-près. Les Occidentaux s'étonnent que le changement de sexe soit autorisé dans la République islamique d'Iran. […] Parce qu'ils ignorent que dans cette culture, l'important c'est d'être *quelque chose* ; s'inscrire dans une catégorie et en suivre les règles. La transsexualité existe parce qu'il y a pire qu'être transsexuel : être homosexuel. Ce n'est même pas une honte. La honte, c'est perdre sa virginité avant le mariage, avorter, rester vieille fille et vivre chez ses parents jusqu'à la fin de ses jours. La honte c'est être drogué, volage, élever des enfants qui vous tournent le dos. Non, ce n'est pas une honte. C'est une impossibilité d'être. Une non-réalité. (219)

In this excerpt, Kimia explains the accepted binary roles within the family: one can either be a husband and a father who makes money for the family, or a wife and a mother who cares for the children. There is no third option, nothing outside of the binary—"that is, lesbianism had no place in Iran" (Bushnell 11). This realization for Kimia does not take up much space in her

greater story in *Désorientale*. Yet it is a crucial and pivotal moment for her because not only does she realize that she may very well be a lesbian, but she also realizes what comes with that identity: the somber understanding that she would never be recognized in her own home country. This is Kimia's first encounter with exile for herself: she is psychologically distanced from her culture and country: "her realization is sudden, a moment of disorienting exile from self and family that precedes and prepares a more literal national exile that removes her from Iran" (Bushnell 2). This scene then represents a moment in which Kimia feels confused, lost, and unwelcome in her own country. And this psychological exile follows her even after moving to Paris. For Kimia, this initial exilic experience affirms for her that she is not able to ultimately remain in a country that does not acknowledge her personhood.

The physical journey into exile later on is her second and more intense encounter with exile in which she must physically leave the country. The beginning of the Sadr family's journey into exile begins on the first page of the book's "Face B", in the chapter titled "Désorientale". Here, Djavadi introduces the voice of Kimia's mother, Sara, who suffers deeply amid the political chaos surrounding her husband. This first chapter begins from Sara's point of view and at a certain point tapers off where Kimia picks it back up, at which point she tells us that her sister Leili "a trouvé ce texte inachevé, écrit à la main en français sur des feuilles quadrillés, dans les affaires de Sara" (243) as a translation of one section of the book Sara had written about their experiences. Kimia tells readers, "pour être honnête, à ce stade de l'histoire, je vois mal comment poursuivre le récit de Sara, ou plutôt comment rapprocher ma vision déformée d'enfant du réalisme de la sienne, et continuer à l'endroit exact où elle vous a laissés" (246). Looking back, adult Kimia knows that her childlike perception of what was happening does not give an accurate idea of the series of events leading to their exile. Knowing this, and reading her

mother's account, allows for Kimia to reconsider the events of her exile and to, alongside readers, empathize with her mother and her younger self. This technique of binding stories, of having Kimia pick up where Sara left off, reinforces the idea that these stories and traumas are shared by a collective group of women or exiled people. In this case, the journey from Iran into exile is not solely Kimia's experience, nor is it solely that of her sisters, or that of her mother. Together with their guides, they create a woven story of exile, each with their own point of view, all of which are valid and necessary pieces of the greater story. On a larger scale, the same is true for Djavadi's text in the greater context of Iranian diasporic writers in her generation: her story is one facet of what makes up the larger, more inclusive story of Iranian women and families during the revolution. The narrative choice that Djavadi makes with this alternate point of view reminds readers that Kimia's point of view in telling the story is that of a child's and one that may not remember everything exactly as it was ("*ma vision déformée d'enfant*" p.246). She acknowledges and brings to the forefront the point of view of Kimia's mother, a strong woman who brought her three young daughters across multiple borders, against all odds.

The Sadr family's journey into exile itself is arduous—Sara feels immense guilt for taking her family away from their home. She also fears for her life and the lives of her daughters. In reflecting before leaving, she considers what life in the apartment complex will look like once they are gone and asks the difficult question of whether or not she will even be alive as it happens:

> les voisins d'aujourd'hui vieilliront, partiront, et ceux qui ne sont pas encore nés prendront leur place. Le courant ordinaire de la vie et de la mort continuera à traverser ce lieu […]. Où serons-nous quand le jasmin perdra ses fleurs ? Serons-nous encore vivantes dans une semaine, dans dix jours ? J'ai quarante-trois ans et une vie entière à laisser derrière moi. (237)

Sara's pain as a mother never escapes her throughout the voyage and showcases the extent to which the exile is not only difficult for Kimia but for every person in the family who risk their lives as a unit to traverse borders into safety. The trip into exile is long: the family takes car rides and then travels by camel and by foot, with the goal of ultimately reaching the French embassy in Turkey. Sara writes: "À trois heures et demie du matin, le mercredi 25 mars 1981, quelque part dans cette immensité blanche et froide, nous avons franchi une ligne imaginaire. 'Ça y est…Nous sommes en Turquie', m'a dit Omid qui marchait à côté de moi. Nous nous sommes arrêtés quelques mètres plus loin" (243). Though it is a great success to have crossed over the border into Turkey, this entry is rather anticlimactic. There is no need to show identification papers or passports, they simply walk through clandestinely. Sara writes that they have crossed "une ligne imaginaire" which references the fact that there is no physical border between Iran and Turkey, but it also highlights the arbitrary nature of borders and nationalism that are at the center of political violence. This imaginary line determines whether one is granted certain rights, whether they are safe, whether they are human. To cross this line is anticlimactic in the story, too, because Sara (and readers) might expect a more official entrance into another country. In reality, the borders that decide her fate are not only arbitrary, but they do not physically exist. This, in turn, adds to the *disorienting* nature (a nod to the title) of leaving one's home: to not even know where one is in the in-between is to lose one's bearings, to be vulnerable and confused.

Unexpected Racism and Humiliation in the 'Promised Land'

Unlike Marji's simple plane ride, Kimia's family's trip into exile is not so easy, even upon arriving to Turkey, which is only the first checkpoint of the long voyage. Sara and her daughters count on arriving to the promised land (the French embassy) and being helped to find a

plane to France. Unfortunately, their dreams are quickly crushed by racist French officers. As they enter the building, Kimia describes her excitement to finally be on French soil, that "depuis l'enfance, notre confiance en ce pays était telle qu'en pénétrant dans le bureau minuscule et impersonnel où nous conduisit la femme, nous n'avions aucun doute sur l'accueil qui nous serait réservé, à nous, francophiles apatrides/apatrides francophiles" (251). Why this immense sense of certainty that a country where the girls have never lived should welcome them with open arms? Earlier on in the book, Kimia explains how obsessed with France her mother was, that before the revolution, "Sara nous emmenait dans un supermarché français ouvert dans une des rues huppées du nord de la ville" (35) and that despite exorbitant costs, the mother insisted on enrolling her daughters in the very posh French *lycée Razi* in Tehran, "de même que certaines mères, rêvant d'être reine de beauté, inscrivent leurs filles à des concours de Miss" (40). Up until the 1980s, France was considered the land of opportunity and culture, and much of Iranian culture was influenced by France. Having studied for one year in France, Sara was confident she understood French culture, and sought to transmit her understanding and trust to her daughters, aspiring to Frenchness the way other mothers aspire for their daughters to win in a beauty pageant. Yet, as I will discuss in the following section on biculturalism, what they did not understand is that Frenchness is not something that they would be able to attain as immigrants. Their experience reveals that Frenchness seems reserved for white, French citizens "de souche," regardless of whether one speaks the language and understands the culture.

At the embassy's front desk, Sara and her daughters are met with racist agents who refuse to help them. One of the agents tells the woman guiding Sara and the girls, "Laisse tomber, ils n'ont pas de *pognon*" (251). Kimia insists that "il utilisa exprès l'argot, certain que Sara ne le comprendrait pas" (251). The small family leaves feeling embarrassed and confused, shocked by

their treatment by representatives of France. Regardless of how "French" they *felt*, to the agents in the embassy, they were just another family of immigrants with no money and no papers. One week later, thanks to the help of Darius, Sara returns to the embassy and successfully retrieves the passes. Kimia does not explain what happens exactly, but this is because she does not know—Sara leaves the girls and enters the building alone, which leaves readers to imagine what happened for her to be able to retrieve the stateless passes. Did she retrieve the papers with sexual favors? Did she bribe them with an exorbitant amount of money? Did she do something even more humiliating that one could not even think of? Whatever the case may be, this moment proves Sara's commitment to keep her family together, to survive at all costs. Even if she must carry out humiliating acts to retrieve the plane tickets, she does so for her family's reunification. This is also a side of the immigration process that is often overlooked: many families within the diaspora may have similar stories of surviving at all costs—unfortunately, however, they are met with even more discrimination upon entering the host country (a point to which I will return in the next section on biculturalism). At the airport, Sara is questioned by a customs worker asking how she got to Turkey to begin with, which leads to a thirty-six-hour investigation of Sara with the Turkish police coercing her into signing a contract agreeing to never again set foot in Turkey—another instance of the police belittling and dehumanizing immigrants, punishing them for wishing for a better life. As the airplane begins to take off, Kimia considers what this departure means for her, of all that she leaves behind: "Tandis que tout en bas l'Orient rétrécit, devient anecdotique puis disparait, assise près du hublot, Kimiâ Sadr, telle que vous l'avez connue, subit le même sort. Bientôt, je vais naître pour la seconde fois. […] Bientôt, je serai une 'désorientale'" (257). This line finds parallels with Marji's scene at the airport, which signifies an end to Marji as an innocent girl and to Marji's childhood. Kimia here states more directly that

this is indeed a moment of rebirth, that the Kimia that we knew will disappear just as the Turkish land beneath the airplane. Kimia says here that she will become a "désorientale," which signifies both that she will be someone who is *disoriented*, who is lost, and also someone who is no longer "orientale." These scenes showcase to what extent the journey into exile is, itself, *disorienting*, with imaginary borders and arbitrary rules at embassies. Further, Kimia points to the fact that her identity will soon be "désorientale," confused, *in-between*. These scenes of exile point to this in-betweenness that comes with being forced to leave one's country and the protagonists quickly find that they are not able to enter their host countries' societies as easily as they would have imagined.

V. The Consequences of Exile : Biculturalism and Entry into the Diaspora

Both Marji and Kimia's journeys into exile are complicated. Marji is torn from her family to get on a plane and go into the unknown, while Kimia watches her family be belittled by French guards and ultimately arrives in a new country in a state of shock. Both young girls arrive in a Western country and are immediately expected to assimilate (a loaded word in French culture to which I will return). They do not have the chance to prepare themselves for a new culture, or rather, they do not understand how different the host culture will be from their expectations. Both girls grow up in a time during which the French language and French culture are highly influential in Iran. Both girls come from upper middle class, intellectual, leftist families who encourage them to explore Western culture by sending them to study in the French schools of Tehran and encouraging them to read the works of Western philosophers and leftists. With this upbringing, Marji and Kimia might consider themselves somewhat bicultural in Iran, if we consider biculturalism as the notion of feeling comfortable with both one's own culture and an additional culture. Yet once they leave their homes, both girls are shocked to discover that

they are foreign in a country that does not acknowledge their suffering as an immigrant. In *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora* (2010), Zohreh Sullivan refers to exile and diaspora as "ways in which identity is played out, as an entry into notions of self-identification and loss of self-representation, and as a particular case of how we define ourselves against others, of how any group consolidates homogenous selfhood and structures of feelings as defense against the anxieties of division and against lost attachment."[73] For these young protagonists, being placed in a completely new environment in which they are not familiar with the culture (and in Marji's case, the language) means renegotiating their own identity based on a new backdrop of the host-culture.

The Loneliness of Exile in a New Country

In both Vienna and Paris, respectively, Marji and Kimia feel extremely alone. Kimia tells readers, for example, that in the promised land, the family had reached an impasse, that she had to come to terms with finding her own path, that "le déracinement avait fait de nous non seulement des étrangers chez les autres, mais des étrangers les uns pour les autres. On croit communément que les grandes douleurs resserrent les liens. Ce n'est pas vrai de l'exil. La survie est une affaire personnelle" (273). Similarly, in Vienna, Marji also feels extreme loneliness even when staying with her mother's close friend, or even with her own new friends in social settings. In both contexts, Marji and Kimia learn that their situation is not understood by outsiders and that they must learn independence. In *Persepolis*, Marji comes to realize upon her arrival the complicated nature of her identity: she wants to fit in in the West and is genuinely excited to be able to express this side of her upbringing, but she also quickly learns that her worldview is

[73] Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Exiled Memories Stories of Iranian Diaspora*. Temple University Press, 2010. p.8.

extremely different than Western kids, or even Iranian kids living in the diaspora. The first example we see of this is in the first chapter of the second book, "la soupe," when Marji is picked up at the airport by her mother's best friend Zozo and her daughter Chirine. As Marji and Chirine chat in the back of the taxi, a series of four panels shows Marji's growing frustration with her new Western friend.

Figure 6

In the first panel, Marji tells Chirine with a smile on her face, "Ça va être cool d'aller à l'école sans voile, de ne pas se taper tous les jours pour les martyrs de la guerre…", while Chirine has a puzzled look on her face and her speech bubble consists of a single question mark. Of course, Chirine has no idea what it means to live through the Iranian revolution or the Iran-Iraq war, and this is in fact all Marji knows in this moment. Chirine tries to relate to Marji through material items. She shows Marji her earmuffs, and says to Marji, "Tu as vu? Ça c'est super à la mode. C'est pour protéger les oreilles du froid. Tu veux l'essayer ?" With a somewhat confused look on her face, Marji responds with a polite "non merci!" Chirine continues, however, seemingly forgetting that Marji is even next to her. She looks through her purse and says, while not even

looking at Marji, “ça, c’est mon stylo parfum framboise mais j’en ai à la fraise et à la mûre.” Again, Marji looks confused, which makes sense since these material items are superficial and irrelevant to her recent experience of unfreedom at school. Marji wants to experience freedom from the Islamic regime but she is immediately met with the materialism of the West. By the fourth and last panel of the scene, Marji is visibly frustrated. Again, Chirine is absorbed by her belongings. Putting on lipstick while looking in a small mirror, she asks Marji, “tu veux mettre du rouge à lèvres? J’adore ce rose nacré. C’est trop in !!!”. Marji looks angrily out the window, letting out an audible exasperation (“pfff….”). The caption reveals Marji’s frustration: “quelle traitresse! Alors que les gens mouraient dans notre pays, elle me parlait de choses futiles”. The loneliness and frustration experienced in that car ride mirrors the loneliness that she will feel throughout her entire stay in Vienna.

In *Désorientale*, Kimia has her entire immediate family to lean on: unlike Marji, she did not have to leave behind her immediate loved ones. However, she still feels alone to learn how to be resilient: “La survie est une affaire personnelle” (273). While each family member is busy trying to find their own sense of self in this new country, and several of them falling into deep depression, it causes tension in the household but leads Kimia to find her own way. As she grows older, she distances herself more and more from her family, especially as her mother grows increasingly depressed. She discovers punk music and falls in love with its chaotic anti-establishment energy (similar to Marji). She skips classes at school and instead goes to buy records. She is kicked out of the house by her mother who worries so much about her coming home in the early hours of the morning that she lashes out and calls her daughter a prostitute. Overall, Kimia’s experience at that time in her life is in fact quite like that of Marji’s in her loneliness and her affinity for punk music, though Marji is a few years older than Kimia upon

arrival in Vienna. Like Marji, Kimia also moves around quite a bit, from Paris to Brussels to Berlin. She spends time with different people and distances herself further from her family. Ultimately, she comes to realize that her family kept her in the past, and that in order to move forward, to develop her own identity, distance was necessary.

> Malgré ma peur, pas un seul instant que je n'ai pensé revenir. Le bien-être acquis en m'éloignant de ma famille retenait fermement au-delà des frontières. Élevée dans une culture où la communauté prime sur l'individu, jamais auparavant je n'avais ressenti de façon aussi tangible que j'existais. J'avais enfin la sensation de tenir ma vie entre mes mains. Je pouvais prendre des décisions sans aucun rapport avec le passé ni avec la façon dont une immigrée doit se comporter pour acquérir une légitimité dans le pays d'accueil. […] Je me reconstituais, me requinquais, m'apprivoisais, comme après une longue maladie. (311)

Though she was sometimes afraid living so far from family, Kimia never once wished to return home, because her wellbeing was more important to her. She brings up that Iranian culture favors the community over the individual, yet that she needed desperately to have the space to focus on and develop her individuality. It is difficult for the reader to discern whether Kimia lives a successfully bicultural life, but it recalls the way in which Marji must leave her family behind at the end of *Persepolis*—leaving behind a chapter of one's life makes it easier to move on. Living in exile makes Kimia feel trapped in that she is so entangled in family troubles that she essentially exists in a stagnant state in which she cannot grow. In fact, she refers to this period as a "longue maladie" from which she needed to recover. She also writes that never before had she considered her own individual existence until now, both of which indicate a state of being stifled. In leaving her family and moving away, Kimia allows herself to begin to heal from her trauma. Because trauma is passed on down generations, her bicultural experience involves distancing and separation. She cannot simply begin anew until she is able to be on her own. As per Emily Edwards, "for diasporic communities, "home" has always transcended physical boundaries: home becomes an abstraction, a blend of past memories and future

imagination."[74] Thus, for Kimia, it is not imperative that she remain in the house with her parents and siblings. This is not home, and never has been—home for Kimia is an abstraction. Perhaps it is her home back in Tehran, or perhaps because of the violence at her home in Tehran, 'home' does not exist for her. Whatever the case may be, this abstraction contributes to Kimia's quest to find herself away from the family household. Being independent is the only way for her to even attempt to assimilate into French society.

Racism Towards Alleged "Terrorist" Iranians

The loneliness that Marji and Kimia feel is largely due to their "inability to assimilate," all of which I place in quotations because it is not an inability to assimilate so much as it is a rejection, by Europeans, of their integration. As young girls, both protagonists want nothing more than any other adolescent would: to make friends and to blend into society. However, and especially during the 1980s following the Iranian Revolution, Western countries were not interested in integrating Iranians into society. Haghighat writes that "the formation of the Iranian diaspora […] coincided with the growing paranoia, negative sentiments, and destructive political and religious imaginaries in the Western world concerning Islam, Muslims, and Iranians as religiously zealous and terrorist"(375). Because of this, she argues, "the distorted and negative imaginaries of Iranians as members of a terrorist state have affected their negotiations in their new homelands and their social identity as an ethnic immigrant group"(375). These "distorted and negative imaginaries of Iranians as members of a terrorist state" continue to pose a huge threat to Iranians simply wishing for a different life abroad. Yet in the 1980s, the situation was far worse: both *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* dwell on how their female protagonists come to a

[74] Edwards, 1.

difficult realization that not only are they not welcome in their own country, but they are also unwelcome in a country that was supposed to grant them asylum.

In *Persepolis*, Marji has several encounters that indicate the level to which she is unwelcome in Vienna. She is screamed at by her landlord who swears Marji has stolen from her, she is told by a nun at her hostel that all Iranians are uneducated, and she is mocked by fellow teenagers after a party. In Vienna, Marji suffers a great deal with her identity—she struggles to fit in with Viennese teenagers and feels guilty for being in safety yet unhappy while her entire country suffers. She tries smoking marijuana, changing her hair cut, and wearing makeup to fit in and better integrate with Viennese teenagers. Ultimately, however, she is haunted by her own identity reminding her that she is not being true to herself. In her search for assimilation, Marji's guilt grows to a point of wanting to completely forget her nationality. In one panel, she watches the television with a sad look on her face. The television shows images of buildings being blown up, and the words "Iran-Iraq Krieg."[75] She holds the remote in her hand, with a caption that reads, "je me sentais si coupable que dès qu'il y avait des informations sur l'Iran, je changeais de chaîne." What becomes painfully obvious to Marji is that in order to survive in this country, in order to pass as Austrian, even one year after having arrived, she must forget her past and ignore its present strife, as it causes too much confusion and guilt to be able to hold both cultures in her mind. She has haunting dreams of her family members and evidently her conscience is not clear. At a high school party, she tells everyone that she is French, not once mentioning Iran. One caption of this party reads, "il faut dire qu'à l'époque, l'Iran c'était le mal et être iranienne était lourd à porter. Il était plus facile de mentir que de l'assumer." For Marji, being Iranian and integrating into Austrian society did not feel like an option—to be Iranian at this time meant to

[75] *Krieg*: German word meaning 'war.'

carry on one's back all of the "evil" political violence amidst the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. Yet Marji was a teenager—she was not responsible for this violence. It felt easier, then, for her to simply lie. Ultimately, however, Marji's desire to integrate is not accepted by racist teenagers.

A few days following this party, Marjane's experience in Vienna takes a drastic shift as she can no longer pretend to be something that she is not. In a series of panels leading up to an angry explosion, Marji eavesdrops at a café near school as kids from the party talk poorly about her, not realizing that she is sitting directly behind them.

Figure 7

The first panel shows one girl leaning forward to her two friends as if to gossip, saying "elle a raconté à mon frère qu'elle était française," to which a boy responds by asking, "et ton frère l'a crue?" Marji looks puzzled, perhaps unsure if it is about her that they are talking. This kind of gossip continues as the kids make more and more fun of Marji—the first girl exclaims, for example, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Je me suiciderais si mon frère sortait avec un thon pareil !" Marji is visibly embarrassed by this remark, but it is the two panels that follow which cause her to

explode in anger. In a close-up of the three teenagers' faces as they lean forward to gossip, one girl says to the group, "je ne sais pas si vous avez remarqué mais elle ne parle jamais ni de son pays, ni de ses parents," to which her friend responds, "mais bien sûr! Elle ment quand elle dit qu'elle a connu la guerre. Tout ça pour faire son intéressante". In the next panel, the close-up is now on Marji who is so angry that vapor puffs out of her nose as she hears one of the girls say, "de toute façon, ses parents doivent s'en foutre d'elle, sinon ils ne l'auraient pas envoyée seule!" This is the last straw for Marji—she does not yet say anything, but the caption reads, "là, c'était trop, mon sang n'a fait qu'un tour." Marji screams at the gossiping teens, "Vous allez vous taire ou c'est moi qui vais vous la fermer ! JE SUIS IRANIENNE ET FIÈRE DE L'ÊTRE !" This moment highlights all the complexities of Marji's attempted integration into Austrian society. All that Marji wanted was to forget the political violence in her country, all that she had witnessed, to feel like a normal teenager and to not think about missing her family. The way that she knows how to do this is to pretend to be French. When the world assumes so much of one simply because of their culture, it is easier to lie to avoid the assumptions, stereotypes, and biases. What Marji realizes in this moment as the Austrian teenagers make fun of her desires to block out the political violence is that she accepts her own identity. When teenagers accuse her of not being Iranian, it sparks an internal anger in Marji—an anger after all that she has been through, and at herself for all she has tried to forget and to hide. This moment mirrors Kimia's internal monologue on the plane going to France in which she calls her travel a rebirth. For Marji, this is also a moment of rebirth: she is no longer ashamed of being Iranian and realizes that she must reclaim her identity, even though she feels shame for being in safety while her family is not. Regardless of whether or not she will be a *désorientale*, Marji will not force herself to pretend to be French, she will not run from who she is.

"L'escalator, c'est pour *eux*"[76]

In *Désorientale,* ten-year-old Kimia arrives in France where her father has already been living in hiding for several months. Because he has already been living in France, he has learned the cultural codes that he then passes onto her upon her arrival. For example, on the very first page, Kimia explains that her father never took the escalator, because it was not meant for immigrants:

> À Paris, mon père, Darius Sadr, ne prenait jamais d'escalator. La première fois que je suis descendue avec lui dans le métro, le 21 avril 1981, je lui en ai demandé la raison et il m'a répondu : 'L'escalator, c'est pour eux'. Par *eux*, il entendait vous, évidemment. Vous qui alliez au travail en ce mardi matin d'avril. Vous, citoyens de ce pays, dont les impôts, les prélèvements obligatoires, les taxes d'habitation, mais aussi l'éducation, l'intransigeance, le sens critique, l'esprit de solidarité, la fierté, la culture, le patriotisme, l'attachement à la République et à la démocratie, avaient concouru durant des siècles à aboutir à ces escaliers mécaniques installés à des mètres sous terre. (9)

This passage opens the text and Kimia addresses readers directly with the apostrophe "vous, citoyens de ce pays," which, while not necessarily aggressive, is certainly confrontational. This opening brings attention to the fact that from her first time on the metro with her father as a young girl, she is made aware that she is allegedly different than "eux." Even her politically active father has internalized this difference though he could have easily used the escalator. Kimia/Djavadi's word choice in this excerpt is heavily loaded. First, her usage of *vous* when addressing the readers is nuanced—she could use *toi*, singular, to address her reader. After all, it is only one person reading at a time. She uses *vous* to address her French readers collectively. She pokes at the insinuation in French culture that the immigrant is of a lower social class. What follows is a long list of identity markers that she uses for French people, building them up to be

[76] Djavadi, 9.

hard workers and loyal citizens, yet she contradicts this, or perhaps pokes fun at it, when she adds at the end that all that French people are and have done for the past centuries has been for nothing other than the right to use escalators. Of course, the narrator is not seriously suggesting that escalator usage is the end goal of a French person, that this is what they care so much about. What the narrator showcases in this excerpt is her father's inability to assimilate into French culture, to find space for himself among French people because, simply put, he would never be French. The narrator satirically highlights all the privileges and entitlements of a French person as there to protect the escalator. Her satire points to the reality lived by her father: regardless of whether or not it was true, Darius believed that the escalator was *only* for French citizens.

The idea of assimilation is overtly present throughout Kimia's story, and especially in this moment with her father and the escalator. Her father's inability to assimilate into French society is what makes him an outcast. Though he speaks the language and understands the culture to an extent, he will never be allowed to be seen as French, again due to his "inability" to assimilate. In its French usage, *l'assimilation* is strongly linked to the country's colonial past. In "Trajectoires postcoloniales de l'assimilation" (2016), Stéphanie Guyon explains:

> Dans le contexte des vieilles colonies françaises post-esclavagistes (Antilles, Réunion, Guyane), la notion d'assimilation est conçue comme synonyme d'égalité entre Blancs et esclaves affranchis en ce qu'elle désigne la manière dont les gens de couleur adoptent des manières d'être et de s'habiller réservées aux Blancs. Dans le contexte colonial du XIXe siècle, l'assimilation qui constituait un objectif pour la République se transforme en étalon de mesure de la distance des colonisés à la civilisation française.[77]

Guyon points to the idea that a person of color can be assimilated into French culture only so long as they carry themselves in the way that is "réservé aux Blancs," but that there is no room for other cultures to present themselves as a part of the larger society. This is, as she points out,

[77] Stéphanie Guyon, "Trajectoires post-coloniales de l'assimilation/Post-Colonial Trajectories of Assimilation." *Politix*, vol. 4, no. 116, 2016, p.9.

largely linked to the colonial context of the nineteenth century which further enforced this idea that the French were more civilized than their colonized counterparts (we can think to the colonial *mission civilatrice*, the French idea to "civilize" colonized individuals, as an example). Frenchness is ideologically constructed: theoretically, individuals from France's previous colonies *could* achieve French citizenship: "in 1830, a decree confirmed that free natives of Senegal had all the rights accorded to 'citoyens français'; in 1833, a law extended this status to all the inhabitants of France's old regime colonies—including India, the Caribbean, and Réunion […]. With the final abolition of slavery in 1848, France affirmed the full citizenship of all inhabitants of its old colonies."[78] Yet though they theoretically *could* achieve citizenship, because of differences in religion or appearance or cultural values, individuals who arrived in France from former colonies struggled to be accepted as French. Guyon highlights that the initial idea of *l'assimilation* was a law in favor of the universalizing *République,* yet it ultimately became the process that created a Frenchness unattainable for those outside the metropole while it demanded an erasure of one's identity to fit in.

The issue with *l'assimilation* is the French desire for a homogenous society and "République indivisible" based in a separation of Church and State (*laïcité*), which is at the very foundation of the Fifth Republic of France and dates to 1905 when the law was first established. The critique of "communautarisme" drives the notion of *laïcité*: to be different, to wear visible symbols that differentiate people into distinct communities runs the risk of creating a division, of dividing the Republic, and being contrary to its constitutional principles. In the case of Kimia's family not being accepted into French culture, we must also consider the fact that they came from a Muslim country and that Islam is at the center of French debates on *laïcité*. For French

[78] Jessica Marglin, "Citizenship and Nationality in the French Colonial Maghrib." *Routledge Handbook of Citizenship in the Middle East and North Africa* (2021).

lawmakers, colonized individuals who identified as Muslim (or those who were seen as 'Arab' or '*indigène'*) were not granted the option to achieve citizenship—"[no] law […] made French citizens of the vast majority of Algerians—those called 'Arabs', 'Berbers', 'Muslims', or *indigènes*—despite the fact that they had French nationality and lived on the territory of the French Republic."[79] A history of French colonial laws is beyond the scope of my project, yet what is crucial is the idea that individuals from a Muslim country, or individuals who might "look Muslim," tend to be viewed as non-French. Kimia's father arrives in France only a few months before her, yet he already understands that he is unwelcome. Darius's rejection in French society is a combination between the laws of *laïcité* and the vilification of Islam at the time of the Iranian Revolution. Though Kimia's family spoke French and could come to understand French culture and daily habits, they would never be able to assimilate into French culture unless they stripped away their difference. There was no option for her family to remain Iranian *and* be accepted into French society. This is also evident in Marji's case, when she chooses to pretend to be French instead of Iranian.

Kimia tells readers, "À dix ans, je n'avais pas conscience de toutes ces notions, mais le regard désarmé de mon père—attrapé durant les mois passés seul dans cette ville et que je ne lui connaissais pas—m'ébranla au point qu'aujourd'hui encore, chaque fois que je me trouve face à un escalator, je pense à lui. J'entends le bruit de ses pas qui grimpent les marches dures de l'escaliers" (9). The fact that at twenty-five years old, Kimia admits that she still thinks of her father when seeing escalators affirms the pain of unbelonging: her father's deference to French "notions" is engrained into her experience, regardless of whether she has grown to have different views on French culture and identity. She also says that at this age, she had not ever considered

[79] Todd Shepard, "Algerian Nationalism, Zionism, and French Laïcité: A History of Ethnoreligious Nationalisms and Decolonization." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2013, p.451.

these notions, but that the real reason for which the conversation about escalators has stuck with her is not the shock of hearing it, but the memory of "le regard désarmé" of her father. Her father, her political leftist hero, the journalist, as he lived in Paris alone for months without his family, by the time his daughter arrives, has concluded that he does not belong, that this society which him and his wife held on to so dearly as a welcoming place for intellectuals was a dystopia. This opening to *Désorientale* shows readers to what extent arriving in France for Kimia meant coming to understand the need for complete detachment from her culture, and the complete rejection from a country that she believed to be a haven. Her father telling her that they could not use the escalator showed her that there was no option at the time to achieve freedom: in Iran, the police were hunting her father, and in France, she could not even use an escalator. This experience stays with her for so many years because she sees her hero disarmed and destroyed.

VI. Conclusion

In *Désorientale* and *Persepolis*, two young girls live through the Iranian Revolution and are exposed to violence and unbelonging at a young age. Marji and Kimia grow up with privileged parents who encourage them to practice French and immerse themselves in Western culture. The girls are raised to believe the West to be a promised land of acceptance and safety, but this is not the case. In Vienna, Marji is mocked by Austrian teenagers, while in Paris Kimia learns from her father not to use the escalator which he believes is reserved for French only. Both protagonists learn that they do not belong in their home country, nor do they belong in their host country. They learn that they must rely on themselves and that home is an abstract concept: Marji becomes homeless, while Kimia leaves home to distance herself from her family and her culture. In following their struggles, readers are brought close to individuals in the Iranian

diaspora thanks to the authors' humanization of their protagonists: Kimia might be judged, sitting alone in that doctor's waiting room in Paris. But in hearing her story, in following her witness the attempted assassinations of her father and his ultimate death, as well as learning as a girl that she is a lesbian in a country in which queerness is illegal, a certain image of the "Iranian immigrant" is shed and replaced by a young girl who, against all odds, *survived*. Similarly, Marji might be judged for sleeping on the streets in Vienna, but when she finds her friend's blown-up body in the street or visits her uncle before his execution, readers simply see a girl trying to grow up amidst danger and violence.

These stories are part of a much larger wave of Iranian women speaking up about their experiences with the revolution and in the diaspora, many of whom were inspired by Satrapi's *Persepolis*. In writing their stories, however fictionalized they may be, women writers like Satrapi and Djavadi insist on the trauma and harm that they experienced in being forced out of their homes as children. They insist on the validity and existence of these experiences, which are considered untrue or exaggerated under the current Islamic government in Iran. The fact that *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* are forbidden in Iran only proves the danger these testimonials pose for the State. And even though their stories cannot be read in Iran, these women authors spread a message that Iranian women do not need to be saved, that they are resilient. The publications of *Désorientale* and *Persepolis*, among others, allow for a different interpretation of Iranian feminism by Westerners: one that asks not for *saving*, but for understanding and educating. Since the revolution and Khomeini taking power, women in Iran have been spoken *for* and *about*, but seldom *with*. They have been told, not asked, what their traditional values are. In the diaspora, they have been deemed outcasts of society due to their ties with a "terrorist" country. Western feminism tends to focus on the veil, yet the bigger issue is the silencing of the resilience and

strength of Iranian women which goes unnoticed, even by modern Iranian women. The more stories such as these can be circulated, the more Iranian women can also understand that they have power in themselves to make change in their country. These stories are now more important than ever, given the protests in Iran in 2022 after the execution of Mahsa Amini. In sharing their (somewhat fictionalized) autobiographies, these women authors threaten the Iranian State which censors any voice that is not in favor of the current regime, which killed masses of Iranian people following the revolution and during the Iran-Iraq war. At the same time, these stories shed light on stereotypes and biases surrounding Iranians in the diaspora. They humanize Iranians who for so long have been part of an "axis of evil." *Persepolis* and *Désorientale* represent so much more than stories about "foreign" girls and their hardships. These stories mark a moment in which diasporic Iranian women reject being spoken for and insist on taking back their identities.

III. TESTIMONIAL WRITING AND VIOLENT SILENCING IN SWANN MERALLI'S *ALGÉRIENNES* (2018) AND DELPHINE MINOUI'S *JE VOUS ÉCRIS DE TÉHÉRAN* (2016)

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the diasporic struggles of women and girls who fled Iran during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. I examined the ways in which Iranian women turn to writing to explore their experiences of displacement as children and how these experiences deeply affected their sense of self into adulthood. I focused heavily on displacement and the diasporic experience, and I now turn to the actual violence of the revolution and its aftermath. In this chapter, I examine two texts: Swann Meralli's graphic novel *Algériennes* (2018) and Délphine Minoui's *Je vous écris de Téhéran* (2015), a semi-autobiographical novel in the form of a posthumous letter to her deceased grandfather. Together, these two texts highlight the institutional violence engrained in the aftermath of revolution and the treatment (or lack thereof) of women as fundamental in movements of resistance. In *Algériennes*, readers follow a French reporter, Beatrice, who travels to Algeria in search of answers regarding her father's past as a soldier fighting in the Algerian war. Instead, she uncovers stories of women who fought in the Algerian revolution and the violence that ensued from the French military. Similarly, in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, Franco-Iranian Delphine works as a reporter for *le Figaro* (which is true of the author in real life) and returns to Iran in 1998 to report on the political status of the country following a presidential election[80]. Her interest in Iran is sparked by her grandfather's death, which leaves her with unanswered questions about her home country. Like Beatrice in *Algériennes,* Delphine discovers the lives of women who rebel against the State and who face institutional violence and torture as a result. In both stories, two women are connected to the national histories of Iran and Algeria, respectively, with which they are not familiar—yet

[80] Mohammad Khatami became President of Iran in August 1997.

ultimately, it is their work as women journalists that bridges the gap between past and present, both for themselves and for their readers. Most importantly, it is their work as journalists which sheds light on the fact that so many women were involved in Iranian and Algerian revolutions and yet information on their participation is either withheld or manipulated by the State to feed nationalist ideologies. I interpret the characters of Beatrice and Delphine as mediators for a Western audience to understand an aspect of the Algerian and Iranian revolutions less discussed, or often erased altogether: the experiences and roles of women in revolution. My analysis of these two texts focuses on three representational issues: the violence and torture of the revolution itself; the private and secret lives of women in a paternalistic society; and women protagonists seeking answers about their own family histories. Authorial choices (genre, narration, style) build up for readers a portrait of the audacity and strength of women who risk their lives and freedom to object to the religious, paternalistic outcome of the revolution in their respective countries, to keep fighting for the rights and values that they believe in, and to resist the abusive silencing that shuts them off from the rest of the world. Furthermore, both authors bring into question the role of women in a post-revolutionary society where, though they equally participated alongside men in the revolutionary fight for justice against their oppressive governments, they still face religious and misogynistic oppression that insists on their silence.

Guided by the intersections of these two texts, this chapter considers women's experiences in the Iranian and Algerian revolutions and the oppression and erasure that ensued despite their tenacity. In both *Algériennes* and *Je vous écris,* the authors challenge the double standards of patriarchal governments that glorify the work of men and refuse to acknowledge women as key components and pillars of society. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to highlight the significance of the erasure of women from their own national histories in which they

courageously took part. The first section of the chapter examines the context of the Iranian and Algerian revolutions and how they intersect. Situating both revolutions clarifies the role of women in their respective societies before, during, and after national revolutions that drastically changed their daily lives. Following this contextualization, I then examine the patriarchal silencing of women and their erasure from national histories. In the two texts, both protagonists represent a younger generation of women (both roughly in their thirties) being seen and heard, finding answers to their questions, after immense silence on the part of men (both men in their private lives and public male authorities). In the second section, I consider how Algerian and Iranian women are portrayed by Western media during and after their respective revolutions. For example, from the Algerian revolution came the image of the young revolutionary woman holding a gun, which was highly fetishized in Western media and yet only represented a miniscule percentage of the women involved in the war. On the other hand, during the Iranian revolution, Westerners saw images of Iranian women wearing long black chadors, which soon became a Western symbol of backward oppression. In both cases, these images were only representative of a small part of the greater context of these revolutions, yet they became clichés. While there *were* young Algerian women fighting as soldiers, there were also countless other women participating in the war in other ways. While there surely was and is oppression against women in Iran following the revolution, the black chador does not necessarily represent their lack of agency, though there are some women whose husbands/fathers/brothers might insist that they cover themselves in the name of religion and modesty. Examining the misrepresentations of Algerian and Iranian women sheds light on how they have been reduced to fetishized clichés, both in the West and in their respective countries, even though they were prominent agents in the success of both revolutions. The third section approaches the torture and violence that women

experienced both during and after their respective revolutions. Because of their gender, women were often victims of torture by means of sexual assault and rape, often perpetrated by soldiers. For a long time, this information was not released. When they spoke out against injustice, when they tried to fight back against Iranian and Algerian governments, women were often met with severe torture as a threat to keep them quiet.

I. Contextual Intersections Between the Iranian and Algerian Revolutions

In the previous chapter, I laid out the circumstances surrounding the Iranian Revolution: a king overthrown by his people for his alleged decadent Western ideals, a religious figure promising to return the country to traditional values, and the subsequent political and economic downfall of Iran. At the time of the revolution, many Iranians had grown tired of a dominant Western influence in their country causing socioeconomic struggles for much of the population. This helps explain why they were attracted to the idea of returning to traditional Iranian customs and values, as well as the idea of moving away from a monarchy into a democracy. They followed the lead of Ayatollah Khomeini, who promised to bring the country away from the pseudo-colonial control of the West, and to bring democracy and power to the voices of Iranians. At the heart of this revolution was not the notion of an Islamic republic as seen today in Iran, but more so of democracy: Khomeini originally spoke of establishing a National Front, claiming to base Iran's future constitution on that of the French Fifth Republic[81], a claim that failed to come to fruition once he came to power. Ultimately, the Iranian public was left blindsided and confused: they had fought and overthrown their king only to be ruled under a theocratic dictatorship which, instead of celebrating Iranian culture and traditions, gradually focused on

[81] Radio Farda, "Khomeini's Return to Iran: Broken Promises and Breaking Alliances."

radicalized religious practices, and created a significant divide between Iranian men and women, ultimately closing Iran off from the West.

In the case of the Algerian Revolution, conflict began similarly in the sense that French colonial control over Algeria triggered tensions, and a quest for autonomy and sovereignty. Like Iranians, Algerians wanted their voices heard and represented in democracy. Algeria was long under French influence before its revolution—"France first occupied Algeria in 1830 and considered it to be an integral component of the French metropolitan state. More than one million French, Italian, and Spanish nationals were settled there by 1959 and comprised 10 percent of the general population."[82] These settlers, more commonly referred to as *pieds noirs*, caused conflict in Algerian society because of their elevated status compared to Muslim Algerians:

> Muslims day-to-day were denied effective access to French citizenship and grossly underrepresented in the French Parliament. European settler (or *pied noir*) interests dominated Algerian influence on the metropole, and for decades *pied noir* protests had stifled all attempts at social political reform. Perhaps not insultingly, Muslims were disenfranchised locally by the *communes mixtes* system, which denied democratic governance specifically to Muslim majority communities. [83]

Algerians became foreign in their own land. Furthermore, the overemphasis of Algerians being Muslim only added to their othering: "designated as 'French Muslims', the native people of Algeria were reduced to a collective identity framed by religion. Islam became therefore an almost intrinsic native quality."[84] Imbalance, inequality, and discrimination multiplied conflict between Algerians and *pieds noirs*, both in political settings and daily interactions. Both lived in

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[82] World Peace Foundation, *Algeria: War of Independence | Mass Atrocity Endings*.

[83] John LeJeune. "Revolutionary Terror and Nation-Building: Frantz Fanon and the Algerian Revolution." Journal for the Study of Radicalism, vol. 13, no. 2, 2019, p.12.

[84] Raphaëlle Branche. "The French Army and the Geneva Conventions during the Algerian War of Independence and After." Do the Geneva Conventions Matter?, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017. p.2.

French Algeria, yet only one community was acknowledged with full French rights. In his article "Unlawful Acts or Strategies of Resistance?", Samuel Kalman writes about an example of this tension and violence between the two groups, in which a French guard was assaulted by an Algerian man:

> On January 18, 1939, in the *commune mixte* of Rirha, the residents of a tent enclave (*mechta*) threatened a European guard on his daily rounds. Gustave Taillentou arrived to serve papers concerning a minor legal matter to a local resident on behalf of the French authorities. When he arrived at the dwelling of the leader (ouakaf), Messaoud Mehenni, to ask for directions, he was brusquely told to return *chez toi* and threatened with violence if he did not comply. Attempting to explain the reason for his presence only worsened the situation; Mehenni began to yell menacingly while a crowd quickly gathered and projectiles were thrown, with one irate denizen brandishing a firearm. Realizing the consequences, Taillentou beat a hasty retreat yet lashed out at the aggressors with physical violence[…]. [85]

The violence in this example demonstrates to what extent the tension between Algerians and French settlers and colonizers could explode at any moment and kept increasing up until the explosions (both literal and metaphorical) of the revolution. As Kalman points out in his article, "anticolonial groups did not appear in a vacuum. Decades before the fight for Algerian independence, Arabs and Kabyles regularly demonstrated their displeasure with Gallic aspirations to hegemony without recourse to any formal party structure or organized militancy" (86). The tension and violence between Muslim Algerians, French colonizers, and *pieds noirs* grew more intense. Six years later, in May 1945, during the Sétif massacre, masses of Muslim Algerians were murdered——"Banned since 1939, Algeria's foremost nationalist movement, the Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA) orchestrated protests […] to disrupt French celebrations of the end of war in Europe. […] White settlers, targeted in the initial violence, turned to vigilantism.

[85] Samuel Kalman. "Unlawful Acts or Strategies of Resistance?" French Historical Studies, vol. 43, no. 1, 2020, p.85.

They joined French gendarmerie and army units in suppressing this regional rebellion." [86] Muslim Algerians' dissatisfaction with the unfair power imbalance between settlers and Algerians triggered the protests and their violent repression. Significantly, the massacre inspired anti-colonial uprisings in other French colonies as well: "three months later, in French Indochina, the Vietnamese Communist party seized power in Hanoi. […] In April 1947 the leaders of Madagascar's self-proclaimed 'national movement' also rebelled against French colonial rule" (Thomas 228). Despite inspiring other French colonies to move toward independence, Algeria's own independence was not proclaimed until 1962, fought by the Algerian National Front (FLN), after a buildup of tensions and confrontations. Compared to the Iranian revolution, the Algerian revolution was far more visibly violent: Iran's relationship with France and the United States was more distant compared to the status of Algeria as one of France's colonies. The violence of the Algerian revolution received more coverage compared to the secret violence and disappearances in the Iranian Revolution: "En Algérie, le conflit a causé des centaines de milliers de morts, occasionné le déplacement de millions de paysans, déstructuré l'économie. […] La guerre d'indépendance algérienne fut donc, avec celle d'Indochine (1946-1954), la plus dure guerre de décolonisation française du siècle."[87] Algeria's fight for independence began with a series of explosions on the first of November 1954: "Du Constantinois à l'Oranie, incendies, attaques de commandos révèlent l'existence d'un mouvement concerté, coordonné. À Alger, Boufarik, Bouira, Batna, Khenchela…, trente attentats presque simultanés contre des objectifs militaires ou de police, sont perpétrés" (Stora 9). The FLN continued to pursue strategic, violent attacks to undermine French military and civil

[86] Martin Thomas, "From Sétif to Moramanga." War in History, vol. 25, no. 2, 2018, p.228.

[87] Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie: 1954-1962.* Éditions La Découverte, 2012. p.3.

presence. On September 30, 1956, shortly after those initial explosions, the Battle of Algiers was set off by three bombs planted by women in public venues.[88] The war was long and protracted: it took almost a decade after war began for Algeria to gain its independence led by the FLN in 1962. Its victory was crucial, setting the foundation for an Algeria independent from French colonial structures. In her introduction to *Women Fight, Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War* (2018), Mildred Mortimer reminds readers that regardless of this victory in 1962, the aftermath and transition to a homogenous national identity was quite difficult. By the end of the revolution, "a million Algerian lives had been lost, more than three million rural Algerians had been displaced from their homes, hundreds of villages had been razed, and fields, pastures, and forests destroyed. […] Moreover, as a newly independent nation, Algeria was faced with millions of impoverished, uprooted peasants poorly equipped to enter a new phase of their political existence" (2). Similarly, in Iran, the aftermath of the revolution resulted in masses[89] of Iranians assassinated or exiled if suspected of collusion with the West (which ranged from sympathies to a secular state, or activism to dismantle the new government). To achieve independence from the West, both revolutions suffered enormous losses and chose the reconstruction of now-Islamic societies based in religion and tradition. A pre-revolutionary, colonial heritage remains, in particular the French language, an official language in Algerian society. In Iran, French loan words still make up a portion of daily lexicon: words such as "cadeau," "gens d'armes," "ananas," for example, are commonly used among Farsi speakers.

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[88] Christopher Hitchens, "A Chronology of the Algerian War of Independence." *The Atlantic*, 1 Nov. 2006.

[89] "Between 1980 and 2000, the Iranian immigrant population more than doubled from 122,000 to 283,000. This population growth continued into the 21st century, albeit at a slower pace, with 385,000 Iranian immigrants living in the United States in 2019. That year, Iranians made up less than 1 percent of the more than 44.9 million immigrants in the United States" https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iranian-immigrants-united-states-2021.

Both the Iranian and Algerian revolutions confronted Western influence and sought to define what it meant to be Iranian/Algerian, not only for their national citizens, but also vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Both revolutions shifted how the West related to and represented them. Iran's new government was vilified to stoke fear, resulting in Westerners' misperceptions. In her essay "Death of the Mannequin," [90] Mehrangiz Kar explains how journalists moved quickly to represent this new Iran at the time of the revolution, and especially its new idea of women:

> Foreign observers flocked to Iran with journalist visas, exploring the religious centers of political power and the depressed atmosphere of the cities. They were the reporters of the darkness and sorrow that weighed on the transformation of Iranian society. They introduced Iranian women to the world as masses of Islamic-looking shadows represented by the color black. Journalists from all over the world were reporting the Islamic government's aggressive methods and its projects for the separation of the sexes in careers and educations. And for the fear of the regime, people never let these reporters into their private gatherings. Thus, for many years, the world remained unaware of the conflicting public and private mores in Iran. They believed that Iranians had detached themselves from music, dance, singing, happiness, and their individual identities. They had no idea what was going on behind closed doors. The lifeless mannequins and sad pedestrians became the customary targets of cameras. A fictitious image of Iranian women was introduced to foreign eyes. (35)

Kar reminds us that during and following the revolution, Western journalists stereotyped Iranian life as a universe strictly of "dark oppression" that they witnessed in Iran, albeit at the surface. This superficial reporting never accurately represented the lived experience of Iranians, due to a lack of trust in Western journalism and a fear of further misrepresentation. Negative and dramatic media coverage shaped a Western worldview of Iran based in vilification not only of the Islamic regime, but of Iranians themselves, thus triggering what is now common and clichéd Western discourse surrounding Iranians as oppressed and resentful.

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[90] Lila Azam Zanganeh, *My Sister Guard Your Veil; My Brother Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices*. Beacon Press, 2008. pp 30-37.

Algeria faced a different kind of challenge following its revolution because of its colonial past with France. France worked hard to repress the traumatic memories of the war and to erase exactions. In *The Algerian War, the Algerian Revolution* (2020)[91], Natalya Vince writes that "for nearly four decades after the end of the war, the official term in France was 'operations in North Africa', which was used alongside other euphemistic expressions such as 'events', 'operations to maintain order' and 'pacification'" (2). More recently, adds Vince, "the term 'French-Algerian War' has emerged, which is also unsatisfactory, as it suggests a symmetrical conflict between two similar powers, when in fact the war pitched one of the largest and best equipped armies in the world against rural and urban guerrillas operating within a civilian population" (2). It was not until 1999 that "a law was passed to rename 'operations in North Africa' the 'Algerian War' […]. Yet this is not a neutral term either: instead, it reflects a French national perspective, in the same way that Americans talk about the 'Vietnam War' whilst the Vietnamese talk about the 'Resistance War against America'" (Vince 2). In *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, Benjamin Stora insists on the deliberate French amnesia that perpetuates a state of shock each time that it "uncovers" the horrors of the revolution: "En France, surtout, pendant trente années, une mise en scène de l'amnésie s'organise. L'Algérie semble être une redécouverte perpétuelle. Chaque sortie de film, ou de livre, s'accompagne de la mention 'pour la première fois…'" (98). Stora argues that the revolutionary experience of Algerians against a dominant French colonial presence has been, until very recently, pushed under a metaphorical French nationalist rug to maintain a specific image of French grandeur, not defeat, and not violations of human rights. Stora insists on the deliberate, premeditated state of this cyclical amnesia: "Et l'on découvre que l'oubli de la guerre d'Algérie n'est pas absence de mémoire. Mais cette sensation d'oubli tient

[91] Natalya Vince, *The Algerian War, the Algerian Revolution*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

dans l'existence de mémoires tronquées, partielles et partiales, légendes et stéréotypes élaborés dans la crainte d'une parole vraie" (99). This "truncated memory" Stora writes about is essential to an understanding of the coverage of the Algerian revolution: it highlights fear of the truth, strategies of selective memories, and unwillingness to take responsibility. It calls attention to negligence at best, manipulation at worst, in how France represented Algeria's liberation and its resulting society. As in the case of the Iranian people, negative stereotypes of the Algerian people propagated in/by the media misrepresent a history and culture in a Manichean, neo-colonial perspective, still "them vs. us".

The Western approach to both revolutions was one of manipulation (only showing certain surface-level aspects of the violence) and ambivalence. While both countries were fighting against Western influence in their respective societies, another sort of violence was State-sponsored: each revolution deployed similar tactics of censorship and mass violence. In both countries, histories and events were made to be disappeared by the State to maintain narratives in sync with national ideologies. For example, in Iran, people who spoke up against the Shah and later against Ayatollah Khomeini were made to be disappeared by these rulers' secret agents, using forceful intimidation tactics such as imprisonment and torture. Outside of what news footage was publicly shown to the rest of the world, which mainly consisted of protests or women in black chadors, the violence of the revolution was kept secret, as countless leftists disappeared, and others were tortured in prison. In *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, for example, one of the Iranian women that Delphine befriends, Niloufar, is arrested and tortured because of her resistance to the regime: "Sans avocat ni témoin. Au bout de cinq minutes d'audience, le juge la condamna à cinq ans de prison, dont deux fermes et trois avec sursis. Motifs d'accusation : avoir pris des photos pendant les manifestations, avoir insulté le Guide suprême, avoir offensé les

versets du Coran" (163). Any resistance to the regime, such as independently taking photos that would objectively document public demonstrations, would result in immediate punishment—prison— and censorship. Similarly, the protagonist Delphine herself is threatened multiple times by secret agents of the Islamic government who insist that she chooses between ceasing to write and imprisonment.

In both Algeria and Iran, censorship is still a prominent practice. Vince writes that it is extremely challenging to write about the intricacies of Algerian society following the revolution for several reasons, but in part because "many of the historical actors of the past fifty years are not only still alive but still in positions of power" (13). "For Algerian historians in Algeria", adds Vince, "this is a difficult history to write if you want to hold on to your job. For historians working outside Algeria, [it] is an uncertain enterprise, with only a sketchy idea of what sources you will have available or whether eyewitnesses will be willing to talk to you" (13). In Iran, it is illegal to voice resistance to the State—much of the writing about the sociopolitical stance in Iran is done in the Iranian Diaspora (primarily in the United States and France). Even there, writers often fear for their lives or the lives of their families. Writing or speaking out is very dangerous, as figures in power will retaliate in some fashion. Though difficult, the choice to write and speak out is crucial. As Mortimer writes, "silence, sometimes a form of protection, at other times a form of resistance, and far too often a result of intimidation, contributes, of course, to obscuring history. Yet when Algerian women break their silence, they not only revise perspectives on their nation's history but also destroy the stereotype of the mute and passive 'Oriental woman'" (3).

In the vast scholarship on the complexities of the Algerian and Iranian revolutions, I chose to highlight a set of convergences and divergences that help clarify what is at stake when

Meralli and Minoui pick up the challenge to express themselves and the imperative to publish their work. In both Iran and Algeria, the history of these revolutions is still being written, because it is still being uncovered. In contributing to the reconstruction of national discourses, these writers take enormous risks to bring justice to history. It is not common for these two revolutions to be examined alongside one another, but as I have shown above, there are undeniable similarities and parallels between the two that can shed further light on patterns in revolutions and in the societal aftermath. In the following section, I examine another common thread: the paternalistic silence that seeks to erase from history what does not serve the nationalist agenda. Meralli and Minoui highlight the ways in which this insufficient silence in fact mobilizes younger generations to find answers, rather than its initial intent of silencing future generations as well.

II. Searching for Answers: How Paternal Silence Leads Women to Find Answers

In both *Je vous écris de Téhéran* and *Algériennes*, the plot is set into action because of the silence of men for different reasons while a younger generation of women is finding answers that were kept from them by the patriarchy. In *Algériennes*, the story begins with Beatrice reading an article that inspires her to ask her father about his time as a French soldier in the Algerian War. To her dismay, however, her father is unwilling to give any detail on his time as a soldier in the war and the conversation ends almost as quickly as it begins, leaving Beatrice with several unanswered questions about her father's past and about Algeria. In the opening scene, Beatrice and her parents sit at the dinner table in a silence that is only interrupted by Beatrice mentioning, "Au fait…J'ai lu un article vachement intéressant sur l'Algérie et la guerre" (7).

Figure 8

Over a series of six frames, Beatrice tries to gain information from her father about his time spent fighting in the Algerian war, but she is met with an unexpected hostility. She raises the question of silence with curiosity: "c'est drôle, vous m'avez déjà raconté votre rencontre, votre enfance, votre mariage…mais jamais la guerre. Tu as bien fait l'Algérie, papa ?", to which he responds with an indifferent "oui." In this frame, Beatrice and her mother are drawn facing readers, both sitting next to each other with inquisitive looks. In contrast, Beatrice's father is drawn with his back to readers, but it is notable that he does not look up to meet his family's gaze. The father carries on eating dinner, dismissing the curiosity of his wife and daughter about the war. This silence mirrors the silence of the French state, who controlled information so as not to be held accountable. It also points to a pattern of silence that trickles down: as a soldier, he was not given much information by the army, but was sent to fight a war without asking questions. Readers can interpret his refusal to share any information as a refusal to relive and share that trauma—both the trauma of never receiving answers of his own, and the trauma of

blindly carrying out violent acts. In a subsequent scene, Beatrice's mother tells her, "à l'époque, personne ne voulait d'une nouvelle guerre. Quand on demandait des explications, on nous disait : 'c'est pas la guerre', alors on s'arrêtait là…On n'était pas très au courant, mais ça nous allait bien" (8). Her mother's comment points to the French erasure or dismissal of the Algerian revolution. As I explained in the previous section, the French State did not acknowledge the truth about the Algerian revolution until decades after the fact. As a result, indicates Beatrice's mother, soldiers carrying out these violent acts were misinformed that it was "not a war" (which changes the rules of engagement). France did not acknowledge that a war was occurring, largely because they considered this an *internal* affair: Algeria was under French rule and Algerians were French, so France refused to name it a war, in avoidance of the Geneva convention: "the specific situation of Algeria made it easier for the French authorities not to recognize a state of war. They acknowledged only an internal affair and wanted other countries to stay out of it. The armed forces were just 'maintaining order' in a French territory. Although France signed the [Geneva] treaties and ratified them in 1951, it was very reluctant to consider that they were relevant" (Branche 3). Because France saw no need to address these "internal affairs" as justifiably a war setting, they insisted to soldiers and citizens, as Beatrice's mother mentions, that "[c'était] pas la guerre". France's refusal to admit to the true nature of the conflict trickled down to everyone involved on the French side, which meant that conscripts like Beatrice's father could not understand their role and the long-term objectives until after the fact.

Following her initial attempt to engage with her father, Beatrice tries several more times to press him, asking him in the following frame, "ça te plairait de lire l'article?" Her father looks up from his food with a visibly irritated expression: it is evident that her persistence frustrates him when he simply wants to forget the war. This time, his response is more animated : "oh, tous

ces trucs, c'est n'importe quoi ! Tous les journalistes disent la même chose !" The father distrusts public information which does not capture the muddled experience of soldiers in a war where the rules of engagement and the Geneva convention were infamously and repeatedly broken. It becomes more and more evident with each frame that his growing frustration is linked not only to a desire to move on from the war, but also by the fact that his trauma is not entirely validated or legitimized. In the last frame of the page, he explodes in anger after Beatrice suggests: "tu pourrais leur écrire pour leur donner ton avis". The more Beatrice asks about the war, the more visibly agitated her father becomes until he shouts "Ça suffit, Béatrice! Tu vas pas t'y mettre aussi ! J'étais gamin, et j'ai fait mon service militaire, et c'est tout ! Voilà comment ça s'est passé !" This frame represents all three family members facing readers. Beatrice is physically taken aback, while her mother shows an expression of frustration towards her husband's exploding anger. The father's body language switches from one of passive dismissal (hunched over his food, not looking up) to one of rage signaled by food spitting out of his mouth as he loses his self-control and is drawn with an exclamatory speech bubble.

In the following scene, the father retires to the living room to watch television alone, evidently not wanting to be bothered, while the women wash dishes in the kitchen. Beatrice turns to her mother and asks, "pourquoi il en parle jamais? Je sais que ça a été dur…Mais quand même, je suis sa fille. C'est à peine si je sais le poste qu'il a occupé" (8). Beatrice comes to find that her father suffered greatly from the war, both during and after—when he returned only to face his own parents' reproaches. Her mother explains that "à son retour, papi et mamie lui ont reproché de les avoir abandonnées, le travail à la ferme et eux…Il y avait un décalage immense, surtout à la campagne". This information is revealed as a first instance in the graphic novel of women turning to other women because of the silence of men. Beatrice feels the need to

understand how her father lived through the Algerian revolution to understand his (as well as her own) identity.

Figure 9

Even though she turns to her mother, Beatrice is the character who represents a new generation of individuals seeking the truth. Her mother, on the other hand, represents the same generation as her father, which is to say a generation that had to forget so that they could survive and move on. Beatrice asks her mother why she never pried, and if she ever asked her husband any questions, to which she responds: "Oui, un peu. Mais j'ai fini par laisser tomber…tu sais, c'était dur" (8). Her mother's response demonstrates to what extent the French State encouraged silence about the Algerian war: soldiers were not briefed on what they would be involved in, and following the war, they were traumatized and therefore did not want to speak about anything that they witnessed. Family members like Beatrice's mother also learned not to ask questions because they found that they would not receive a response. This is a form of indirect censorship that was also

prominent during the Iranian Revolution, during which time much of the State sponsored violence against Iranians, themselves, was kept from the public. At the same time, those who escaped the violence of the revolution often did not want to think or speak about what they witnessed because of the trauma that they faced, and because of a desire to blend into their new homes in exile. In the following section, I analyze a similar experience for Delphine as Beatrice, in that she is denied any information on her connection to Iran by her father and thus by her entire family.

"Chez nous, à Paris, l'Iran devint un non-dit"[92]

In *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, Delphine's desire to immerse herself in Iranian culture and learn about her heritage comes from her relationship with her Iranian grandfather, who is the only person in her family who wishes to give her information on Iran. Like Beatrice's father, Delphine's father also struggles to talk about Iran, in great part because of his resentment toward the (Iranian) State, and because of the racism that he faces abroad given his country's negative image post-revolution. In the first pages of the novel, the narrator Delphine explains : "chez nous, à Paris, l'Iran devint un non-dit. […] Dans les journaux français, sa description se résumait désormais à trois mots : islam, tchador et terrorisme" (14). Like many other Iranians living abroad at the time of the revolution, her father tried to forget his Iranian culture so that he could assimilate in France, which meant leaning toward his French wife's cultural identity. When her father is one day stopped by the French police and treated "de bougnoule," [93] he quickly changes his first name into a French one: "à partir de ce jour, il se fit appeler 'Henri'. […] Faute de

[92] Minoui, 14.

[93] Pejorative, used to describe people of North African descent.

pouvoir changer son pays, il s'était changé lui-même" (15). For narrator Delphine, this event solidifies the idea that she is not Iranian : "J'en conclus que j'étais française. À 100%. Rien, chez nous, ne donnait à penser autrement. Nous parlions français. Nous mangions français. Nous rêvions en français. Lorsque, à chaque rentrée des classes, l'institutrice m'interrogeait sur le pays de mes origines, je répondais : 'la France !' sans hésiter" (15). The silence in Delphine's household is thus more nuanced than in Beatrice's experience, yet it mirrors the experience of Beatrice's father, who is scarred by the violence that he witnessed and who refuses to talk about his past as a soldier in the unpopular Algerian war. For Delphine's father, talking about Iran is both remembering a homeland where he cannot return because he is in exile, and it is also a way of highlighting his difference in a French society that rewards assimilation. As a result, writes Delphine, "Personne, à la maison, ne s'était jamais soucié de m'enseigner mes origines" (12).

Delphine's grandfather is the only family member who encourages her to pursue a knowledge of her heritage, alongside the encouragements of her professors : "À l'école de journalisme, que j'avais intégrée sur concours en 1995, mes professeurs m'encouragèrent à dépasser les clichés. Une des règles d'or de notre métier. Voir, sentir, aller au plus près, avant de juger. Deux ans plus tard, je fis de la "presse iranienne" le sujet de mon mémoire de fin d'études. Un prétexte idéal pour revenir dans ton pays" (16). Why the possessive adjective "ton" instead of "mon", given that the narrative is in first person? Delphine concludes early on that she is thoroughly French. Regardless of her Iranian genealogy, she understands that she has never experienced what it means to be Iranian. Throughout the novel, which is in the form of a letter to her deceased grandfather, she consistently refers to Iran as "ton pays," which is to say her grandfather's country, and never her own. It is her father's silence, as a way of finding safety and acceptance in a different culture, that shaped Delphine's upbringing: he did not raise her with an

awareness of their Iranian roots—it was a "non-dit." As such, her bicultural identity becomes an abstraction. She is repeatedly told by other Iranians that she will never understand certain things because she does not understand what it means to be Iranian – a point to which I will return in a later section. Yet regardless of this inability to fully connect to her Iranian heritage, Delphine's bigger concern is to understand her grandfather, and therefore to understand *his* country. The distance between Iran and France, both geographical and metaphorical, does not allow her to form a solid relationship with him until the month before he dies of heart failure. For Delphine, this death is devastating and leads her to Iran, supported by her professors who tell her to defy stereotypes: "Un matin d'éclaircie, après quelques mois d'hésitation, j'ai sauté dans le métro, direction Opéra. Au comptoir d'une agence de voyages, j'ai demandé un billet pour Téhéran. 'Pour combien de temps ?' s'est enquis le vendeur. 'Une semaine', ai-je répondu. Au final, j'y resterais dix ans" (17). Paradoxically, the death of her grandfather, which brings ultimate silence and distance from her Iranian culture, is precisely what takes her to the country of origin to uncover the lives of women whom she never would have known, and at the same time to learn more about her identity as a bicultural writer.

III. Missing in Representation : The Secret Lives of Iranian and Algerian Women

In both *Algériennes* and *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, the protagonists arrive in post-revolutionary Algeria and Iran, respectively, in search of answers to their genealogical questions. While they do uncover some information about their respective families, their more prominent discoveries are in the lived experiences of women that have otherwise been made private or lost—both during and after the revolutions. I wrote previously that much of the information available to the rest of the world about the Iranian and Algerian revolutions was, and still is,

limited to two types of information: that which is deemed acceptable to share by the State, and superficial depictions of violence and war shared by Western journalists. What is missing from these depictions of life in Algeria and Iran is any representation of the lived violence and strength of the people, especially in the case of women, who in both countries played key roles in their respective revolutions, yet who were subsequently denied their own agency and rights. Beyond the global politics of their respective revolutions, Iranian and Algerian women faced (and continue to face) further invisibility in relation to their gender and rights, despite having laid the foundation for the very society that oppresses them. The Algerian historian Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, who also took part in the revolution on behalf of the FLN, writes: "qu'il s'agisse d'œuvres de fiction, de témoignages ou de recherches universitaires, les écrits sur la guerre d'Algérie sont de plus en plus nombreux et divers mais tous ont en commun d'ignorer le militantisme des femmes." [94] When women are represented in the Algerian revolution, they are either shown as women with guns or women as homemakers—yet as Mortimer highlights extensively in *Women Fight, Women Write* (2018), there existed several different kinds of work that women carried out in the name of resistance, much of which is still not properly recognized nearly fifty years later:

> If in the rural areas *moudjahidate* (female FLN militants) tended to the wounded, fed the troops, and instructed the rural population in health, sanitation, and politics, urban militants performed various duties as well. In the cities, *moussebilate*, or noncombatants, gave refuge to rebels, collected money and medicine, transported messages, and took food to prisoners. At first, *fidayate*, female urban guerillas, worked primarily in liaisons, transporting weapons and bombs. However, during the Battle of Algiers (January-September 1957), as the French paratroopers carried out repressive measures in the capital, blocking the indigenous parts of the city with checkpoints, Algerian women, particularly attractive young girls, became crucial FLN operatives; passing as Europeans, they were able to move more easily through the city than Algerian men. (32)

[94] Mortimer, 2.

Much of women's involvement in the Algerian revolution was unseen and therefore either misrepresented or not at all acknowledged. When considering the role of women in the Algerian revolution and in postrevolutionary Algerian society, it is also crucial to consider how women perceived of themselves, especially for those who took part in the resistance in these perhaps less romanticized or less acknowledged ways. Because of the sensationalizing of young women holding guns by the media, many women who remained at home or who shared messages with neighbors, for example, did not feel that they were active participants in the resistance. Mortimer adds that pictures in newspapers and magazines of young girls holding guns, who did not even know how to use such weaponry, "fostered the mystique of the woman militant as either a young urban or rural guerrilla" (27), when in reality, statistics indicate that fifty-nine percent of the 10,949 women taking part in the resistance were over the age of thirty (28)—"a less romantic statistic shows that mature Algerian women, with family obligations far greater than those of teenagers, formed the larger ranks of militants" (28). And not only does this statistic lessen the sensationalized image of young girls holding shotguns, but it highlights the notion of women's work going unnoticed: "88 percent [of the women militants] were *moussebilate*, civil militants engaged in noncombative activities, providing vital support in the form of supplies and/or refuge for the combatants" (28). With this in mind, we might ask: why the sensationalizing of the young girl holding a gun as the image of a militant? In his celebrated 1966 film the *Battle of Algiers*, Gillo Pontecorvo was applauded for representing women as militants, such as Algerian women disguising themselves as Frenchwomen and planting bombs in the city. This is accurate, yet in a film that lasts two hours long, it is the only scene, roughly fifteen minutes long, that highlights the work of women in the resistance. Throughout the film, women are mainly silent. Female characters are not seen fighting alongside their male

counterparts or providing support. Why not give them more speaking roles and properly represent their full participation in the war besides setting off the bombs? Frantz Fanon wrote extensively on the Algerian revolution yet missed key information when approaching the subject of Algerian women. For example, in his essay “l’Algérie se dévoile” (1959), Fanon reduces Algerian women’s efforts to a last resort, writing that they were only included *by men* when the war became too intense: “Progressively, the urgency of a total war made itself felt. […] The leaders hesitated to involve women, being perfectly aware of the ferocity of the colonizer. […] No one of them failed to realize that any Algerian women arrested would be tortured to death” (48). Torture and rape were valid concerns, but Fanon’s language treats women as a delicate subcategory whose participation in the revolutionary war was both a last resort and a dangerous decision, neither of which are accurate. Fanon downplaying the role of women in the revolution showcases the greater issue of the FLN not recognizing women’s crucial role. Women fought for their nation’s independence, but they also had to prove their value. Over fifty years later, new information keeps emerging on how fundamental women were to achieve Algeria’s independence.

“Les vraies résistantes, elles ont été oubliées” [95]

In *Algériennes*, Beatrice learns the stories of several women who were involved in the war, stories that were not otherwise included in the national history of the revolution. Even after traveling to Algeria and visiting a museum dedicated to the revolution, she realizes that this information is vastly missing. In one scene, for example, Beatrice is drawn inside of the

[95] Meralli, 34.

Mémorial du Martyr[96] in Alger. As she makes her way around the museum, taking photos on her mobile phone of different photos and artifacts from the revolution, she is caught by surprise by a woman's voice behind her saying: "les vraies moudjahidates, vous ne les trouverez pas ici" (34).

Figure 10

It is the voice of Djamila, one of the four older women that Beatrice meets who recount their experiences as members of the Resistance. Djamila's physical placement in this scene is quite powerful: she remains seated, cane in hand, against the back wall of the museum, silently observing visitors who tour the exhibition**.** The illustrator, Deloupy Prud'homme, draws the museum to be quiet until Djamila's voice breaks the silence to correct misinformation about women in the war. It is her voice, the voice of a woman who lived the experience of the war, that creates a rift in the male-dominated discourse. Djamila's interruption forces a different

[96] The *Mémorial du Martyr* is a monument in Algiers commemorating the Algerian War. It was opened in 1982, on the 20th anniversary of Algeria's independence.

perspective, both on Beatrice and on readers alike—she does not allow for glorified false or incomplete information to be shared without intervention. It is because of Djamila that Beatrice comes to understand the facade put on by the memorial, that "les vraies résistantes, elles ont été oubliées. Ici, c'est juste un temple à la gloire du FLN" (35). Djamila's placement in the museum thus highlights the fact that a history cannot be told only from the point of view of a male dominated organization. It must be told by multiple voices, especially by the women who are since forgotten.

Mortimer writes that "on the one hand, we need hard data, facts and figures, to support the truth about a given historical moment. On the other hand, it is necessary to put a human face on the events" (213). Djamila is an excellent example of resistant women in the revolution, and it is through her testimony that Beatrice and readers alike learn of the unraveling of the revolution, while we are also able to put a face to the events through seeing her story visually. In the pages that follow, readers learn that Djamila's father became a member of the FLN and was ultimately captured by French soldiers; he was held in prison and beaten to near-death. Djamila took it upon herself to visit him in prison, and it was in seeing her father in such a critical state that she realized the necessity to join the fight for liberation. Three subsequent panels show Djamila in her home, in silence, making the decision to join the Resistance. In the first panel, Djamila is drawn in her bedroom, sitting on her bed with her back to readers. There are no sounds or activity, but readers can discern that she sits in silence, processing what she has just witnessed in the violence done to her father. The next panel is a simple close-up of Djamila's upper body. Holding scissors, she cuts her hair and cries silently. The emotion in this mute frame is powerful—her father in prison and her brothers out fighting, she realizes that she must join the fight, for her father and for her family, to bring them back together. Cutting her hair symbolizes

shedding her femininity and focusing on fighting, as any soldier might do. In the last frame, readers see only the floor: Djamila's feet are drawn with one atop the other, an action generally perceived as a signifier of discomfort, with hair clippings covering the floor and her feet. The caption reads: "C'est ce jour-là que j'ai décidé de rejoindre la résistance".

Figure 11

The significance of this scene is in the image of the floor, and not of her face. The focus is now on her feet on the ground, as she prepares to go fight—her hair covers her feet and reminds readers that she wants her gender to be irrelevant. This sequence in which Djamila reflects in silence, deciding to join the FLN, also mirrors the quiet work of women in the Algerian resistance in the sense that much of what women did and sacrificed for the revolution went unseen. Vince writes about the *Monument du Martyr* in which Beatrice finds herself, pointing out that "at the base of the monument, three statues are said to represent the different facets of *al-thawra*—'the revolution', as the War of Independence is called in Algeria. They are all figures of

armed men" (2). Djamila's experience as a soldier gives her a clearer perspective of her significance as a soldier. Yet the only way this information is shared, in the case of her story in *Algériennes*, is by her physically sitting and waiting in the museum to correct information. As I previously mentioned, even members of the FLN such as Fanon did not fully understand the scope of the conflict, even as they were participating in it, as it applied to women. How, then, might this information possibly be shared if not by the women themselves? In this scene the author, Swann Meralli, creates an intergenerational dialogue which negates the male dominated narrative surrounding the history of the revolution. Readers not only witness Djamila's difficult decision to join the Resistance after seeing her father abused, but they also see her taking it upon herself, as an older woman well after the revolution, to correct this narrative by physically intervening in the memorial space. In the following subsection, Beatrice meets Saïda, another woman who also intervenes in this male-dominated narrative to share the story of her escape from the war.

Mirroring Gendered Experiences: Women's Secret Sacrifices in the War

Another example of revolutionary women gone unnoticed or misrepresented is Saïda, the first of the four women whom Beatrice meets, whose example also highlights the ways in which graphic novels use formatting as a secondary grammar to communicate with readers. Saïda narrates the story of how she swiftly left her home in Algeria in just one night's notice, leaving behind her childhood home and her beloved grandmother. Her story spans over thirteen pages, all of which are painted monochromatically in beige, or in deep blue when depicting the night. In contrast to the vibrantly painted present-day conversation that Beatrice has with Saïda as she tells her story, monochrome beige and blue immediately signal to readers that they are in the past

without having to use verbal clues: the colors clearly indicate a dream or recollection state. Monochrome may also indicate a lack of clarity as Saïda, now an elderly woman, recalls her traumatic past. Whereas the present-day panels are clear and colorful, with crisp and solid borders on each panel, the characters and borders in her past are more blurry, not as crisp, and colors are bland and uniform. These color cues work as visual codes to bring both readers and Beatrice into a state of remembrance. Over the course of Saïda's story, Beatrice learns along with readers that Saïda's father and brothers were soldiers in the Algerian resistance, that her father became a spy for France, and that her family was brought to "safety"[97] from the war to France, where they were forced to live in encampments with other Algerians who had also fled the violence of the war. One scene in particular highlights the stories or parts of the revolution that were left untold, and how the media left out the sacrifices and sadness of the majority of women who were not eulogized like the minority of young female revolutionaries who planted bombs and held rifles.

Over two pages and twelve frames, readers witness Saïda's father's experience as a soldier, which is mirrored on the opposite page with a depiction of the women in her family quickly preparing to leave in the night to escape to supposed safety in France. These mirrored scenes highlight the different gendered experiences of the war, notably in how they were presented (or not) to the public. On the left side, readers see the experience of male soldiers traveling in the night. On the right side, women tend to the home and family in the confines of the dwelling.

[97] Quotations used here because Saïda explains that she lived in very poor conditions in France, in an Algerian camp where she was treated as less than human.

Figure 12

Hillary Chute writes in *Disaster Drawn* (2016) that in "articulating presence and facing spectacle in time and space while underlining gaps and frictions, comics texts give shape to lost histories and bodies. Through the practice and aesthetics of materializing history in the mark, with their hand-drawn words, images, frames, gutters, tiers, balloons, and boxes, they offer a 'new seeing.'"[98] In the case of *Algériennes*, the artist mirrors these two scenes to give shape to a part of the war that was not recognized in the same way as men's fighting, thus demonstrating to readers the nuances of participation in the revolution and offering a "new seeing" of the war's participants. These mirrored scenes demonstrate that men's experiences in the war were more obvious and predictable: they were portrayed as fighters who carried guns, witnessed dead and severed bodies, and participated in warfare. For example, one frame in this sequence depicts two soldiers surrendering to three other soldiers facing them. This frame, like all the others on this

[98] Chute, *Disaster Drawn,* 38.

page, is monochromatic and reminiscent of old photographs that might have been shared by the media during the war or that are perhaps now hung in the memorial where Beatrice meets Djamila. The monochromatic nature of the panel has another effect: readers cannot easily differentiate between French and Algerian soldiers, and this may suggest that the lines were blurred between the two sides during the war: the caption reads that Saïda's father had joined the French side and that "il aidait à surveiller des fermes ou à traquer des résistants" (18), yet readers cannot easily tell which man is her father or on which side he stands. As Vince writes, "distinguishing between collaborator and resister during the war was not easy, and switching sides happened in both directions. […] The French army sought to pressurize captured FLN soldiers into enlisting, and the FLN deliberately targeted the wives of Muslims enrolled in the French army to get them to persuade their husbands to desert."[99] The monochromatic storytelling triggers and signals remembrance, but it also highlights the ambiguity of the war itself, where enemies could not be told apart. While this left side of the sequence depicts the difficulties that male soldiers lived through, the mirroring page on the right captures a reality of the war that was never broadcasted: the intimate space of Algerian women behind closed doors and all that they sacrificed in the name of the war.

Some women like Djamila were involved in the battlefield—yet this was not most women, and even these women were not accurately represented in the media, as Djamila points out. For most women, being involved in the revolution meant tasks as different as spreading information to other men and women, cooking and caring for soldiers in need, and providing shelter for them. Vince writes that "rural women willingly hid, fed and carried out other tasks for the *mujahidin*, but had no illusions about their fate if they stopped doing this. In the words of

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[99] Vince, 63.

Fatima Berci: 'If you left, it was like you were betraying your country. We were beyond scared'[100]" (Vince 61). The external pressure on women to both continue caring for families in their traditional roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters *and* be involved in the revolution, was enormous. As Vince references, women were afraid of betraying the cause of independence if they refused to get involved, even with the added pressure of caretaking. Preceding this scene, readers witness Saïda and her female family members providing a safe place for a woman soldier to sleep in the night, hiding her in a shed in their yard so that she will not be caught (17). While they work as part of the Resistance, the women still care for the children. In the main sequence Saïda and her female family members prepare to leave their home briskly in the middle of the night, as a result of Saïda's father having connections and being able to send them secretly to France ("mon père a longtemps supplié l'armée pour qu'elle vienne nous chercher. On avait reçu un ordre dans la journée"). In this scene, the departure is what is most powerful[101]—Saïda and the other women are forced to drop everything and to quickly put family affairs in order so they can leave their home indefinitely. Women wake sleeping children and comfort them, while gathering their own belongings, thus simultaneously tending to soldiers and children. In the last two frames, Saïda's grandmother hands her a small tin box, telling her "tiens, garde ça avec toi, s'il te plait. Ce sont tous mes trésors". The subtle act of giving Saïda this box evokes intense emotion, especially as Saïda indicates on the following page that this was the last time she saw her grandmother. The act of giving her granddaughter her most prized possessions is a way of ensuring that her belongings will not end up in the hands of the French army, and that her home no longer felt like a safe space for memories and mementos. This small interaction is one

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[100] Interview with Fatima Bercy (16 June 2005) (*Vince's note in Our Fighting Sisters, p.61*).

[101] The departure itself is not seen until the page that follows, yet here readers gain an understanding of its consequences.

example of the sacrifices made, both on the part of the grandmother, and by Saïda—the grandmother stays behind, for reasons that are unexplained but most likely health and age related, or out of a desire to remain in her homeland in her later years, regardless of the war. She must part with her entire family, and send them off with her possessions, with no certainty that they will ever see one another again. On the other hand, Saïda and the other women are tasked with quickly leaving the country, caring for children and each other, to go to France, where they will not only be faced with the guilt of leaving Algeria in a time of need, but also where they will be discriminated against and abused.

This mirrored sequence exemplifies the intricacies of the war—its public vs private faces—which were not represented for the public, especially in the private domestic sphere of women. Chute writes that "driven by the urgencies of re-seeing the war in acts of witness, comics proposes an ethics of looking and reading intent on defamiliarizing standard or received images of history while yet aiming to communicate and circulate" (31). This sequence in *Algériennes* allows readers to re-see the war in acts of witness, both in men witnessing dead siblings as well as women being forced to part with each other. While many are aware, when discussing the Algerian revolution, that masses of Algerians did flee to France, the graphic novel performs a deeper archiving when drawing exile, grief, disorientation, pain, and separation that many women experienced. The two-page sequence enables a better understanding of not only the experience of women outside of the fetishized image of the young woman holding a weapon; they also implicitly convey the inadequate mediatic representation of the war. This two-page sequence highlights the male dominated discourse surrounding the Algerian Revolution, signaling that "comics, indeed, becomes itself the form of counteraction to inscription by the framing looks of dominant culture" (Chute 83). This counteraction to the dominant narrative is

common in revolutionary testimony because of the ways in which information is presented to the public: most of the real lived experiences of people (and especially women) during times of war and revolution are not what they seem to be as presented by the media. The same counteraction is present in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, where the author invites readers into the inner worlds of both the Iranian government and women's experiences, thus making space for an understanding of a different angle of the revolution and its aftermath, or as Chute puts it, giving readers a chance to *re-see* the revolution.

Reconsidering the Western Woman's Role in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*

Like the protagonist Beatrice, Delphine, in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, notes a similar paradox almost immediately upon her arrival in Tehran: the information on Iran shared by Western media does not match the lived experience of Iranians. She arrives in Iran in 1998, one year after the election of President Mohammad Khatami[102], whose presidency meant victory (in the eyes of the younger generation) against the preceding Islamic regime. As a reporter, Delphine attends student protests in favor of democracy, and witnesses the history of her father's country in the making as it develops before her. Through these protests she befriends several young women who show her a different side of Iranian youths fighting for liberation. As is the case in *Algériennes*, resistance looks different for each of these women: for some it means wearing makeup in public (a practice not allowed under the Islamic Regime), for others it translates into remaining silent when tortured by the police. Minoui learns through watching her new friends just how powerful Iranian women are in their fight for liberation. She also comes to understand how she fits in as a bicultural individual. As a Franco-Iranian woman with hardly any cultural

[102] President of Iran from 1997-2005.

upbringing on her Iranian side, Delphine approaches Iran from a French perspective. She knows as much as the French media has shown her, alongside a small amount of information shared by her late grandfather. She is reminded several times by other women that she could never penetrate what Iranian women endure because she was not born or raised in Iran, another reminder of how much life inside Iran is inaccessible, and therefore misunderstood. Minoui comes to learn, and agree, that she can never fully understand what it is to be a woman born and raised in Iran who lived through the revolution. This exchange between Delphine and her new Iranian friends is reminiscent of the 1979 Iranian revolution, during which Western feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett involved themselves in women's struggles to help their Iranian 'sisters', in the name of global sisterhood or global feminism. In 1979, shortly after Khomeini's rise to power and his infliction of oppressive "traditional" laws, Simone de Beauvoir sent a delegation of eighteen women from Paris to Tehran to show Western support for Iranian women—"the delegation was made up of French, Egyptian, Swiss, and Belgian feminists, journalists, and photographers, who were described by the French *Libération* journalist Claire Brière as 'a group of largely upper class and aristocratic women, disinterested in the everyday life of ordinary Iranians."[103] This group of women caused a problem for Iranian feminism: being upper class, privileged women, they were already removed from the daily struggles of average women, let alone women from another country. The Western feminists that visited Iran participated in demonstrations and worked alongside the WOI (Women's Organization of Iran), yet they focused on media coverage and on "leading" Iranian women to victory over their oppressors, and less on actively listening to Iranian women to understand their perspective and experience. Unlike Delphine's understanding that she will never know the experience of an

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[103] Negar Mottahedeh, *Whisper Tapes: Kate Millett in Iran*. Stanford Briefs, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2019. p.132.

Iranian woman, Western feminists blamed the government for oppressing women without engaging with women about their struggles. Naghibi writes in *Rethinking Global Feminism* that "during the second wave of feminism, the discourse of international sisterhood stressed the notion of a shared and universal women's oppression. But the rhetoric of women's solidarity and collectivity was undermined by divisiveness among second-wave feminists from the movement's earlier days" (75). The American feminist Kate Millett also went to Iran during the revolution after being invited to speak at a women's march in March 1979. She, much like Delphine, did ultimately understand her place as a Western feminist and that "it is impossible to equate the experiences of Western sisters who demonstrate for several hours outside Rockefeller Center in New York with those of Iranian women who risk their lives when they march in the streets as feminists" (Naghibi 98). In attempting to lend their support to Iranian women's issues, Western feminists effectively caused more problems for them in the greater scope of the revolution and women's rights: "the presence of Kate Millett and European feminists in Iran at that particular historical juncture allowed the ruling elite to argue that feminism was a Western phenomenon and that all feminist activity in Iran would be perceived as 'counterrevolutionary' behavior" (Naghibi 101). Given that the basis of the Iranian revolution was a desire to separate from Western imperialism, the fact that the ruling elite could claim feminist activity to be a Western phenomenon meant that they could easily dismiss it as "evil" instead of addressing any women's issues as legitimate. Not only did the presence of Western feminism not help the women's liberation movement in Iran, it perpetuated the clichéd image of the veiled Iranian woman who could not gain her own independence from the government. Western feminists failed to gain an accurate, intimate understanding of Iranian women's lives.

In *Rethinking Global Feminism*, Naghibi critiques the concept of global sisterhood and the ways in which Western feminism tends to view women of color as backward and oppressed (i.e., as victims). She writes about the cliché image of the veiled woman as the defining image of oppressed Iranian women in the nineteenth century and especially during the 1979 Iranian revolution. She "examines what happens to this structure of representation when it is contested by post-revolutionary, indigenous Iranian feminists in their own narratives of self-representation" (Naghibi xvi). In many ways, Delphine's approach mirrors that of the Western feminists who engaged with the revolution before—as a French woman, she does not understand the lived experience of Iranian women. At the same time, it reflects a new generation of feminists interested in a genuine global sisterhood that is not based on "equal oppression". If we look to Delphine, she falls, like Beatrice, in the middle of this dichotomy between Western and Islamic feminisms. She is connected to Iran by her family yet has never lived the experience of an Iranian woman. At the same time, she acts as a mediator for Western readers learning about Iran and Iranian women alongside her. Through her friends, and her job as a female journalist, she comes to learn the limitations of being a woman in Iran, much of which surprises her. To be a woman with a voice in post-revolutionary Iran is to subject oneself to constant harassment and fear of imprisonment. She learns from her female friends, as they stand up for their beliefs despite getting threatened and arrested by the government, that a woman cannot give up in the face of patriarchal oppression if she ever wants her voice to be heard. The reality of a radically unafraid woman is far from the media's representation of submissive Iranian women, both in the West and in Iran. As she writes determined, militant women, Minoui brings to readers' attention the same kind of paradox which Beatrice highlights, which is the difference between the

public/mediatic vs. private/lived experience of Iranians (a point to which I return in the next chapter).

Niloufar: the XXIst Century Modern Iranian feminist

During her time in Iran, Delphine meets Niloufar, nicknamed the "godmother of the young people," [104] who holds parties and gathers likeminded young people in a safe space to express themselves. At forty years old, Niloufar does not tire of fighting against the State, and she is ultimately arrested for her political involvement. Because she photographed protests, she is put into prison for five years among criminals who have committed crimes such as manslaughter or burglary. The consequences of having a voice are grave, and women like Niloufar are acutely aware of this danger. For Western readers, Niloufar's experience may or may not be surprising, depending on their own political experience with state censorship and reprisal. Yet what is certain is that she does not reflect the woman in the black chador shown on television worldwide, who submits to her husband, is unobtrusive, and does not meddle in public affairs or politics. In the following excerpt, Minoui paints a portrait of Niloufar, which readers can use to identify a type of revolutionary woman in Iran that is far from the mediatic representations:

> De jour comme de nuit, [les jeunes] frappaient à sa porte, à l'affût d'une oreille attentive à laquelle confier leurs problèmes. Toujours disposée à aider, elle avait une solution à tout : le chirurgien haute-couture qui reficelle l'hymen des jeunes dépucelées, le consulat multi-visa pour immigration express, l'avocat féministe qui sépare aussi vite qu'il marie…Elle-même divorcée, Niloufar vivait seule. Depuis qu'elle avait déniché des banques de sperme espagnoles sur Internet, elle rêvait de faire un bébé toute seule. Ses voisins avaient beau s'offusquer de son mode de vie, elle se moquait du qu'en-dira-t-on. Pour elle, c'était une forme de rédemption. Ex-opposante au chah, elle portait la culpabilité d'une révolution qui avait mal tourné (35)

[104] "surnommé 'la marraine' des jeunes" p.34.

Minoui's language to describe Niloufar points to a great amount of independence on several levels: she reflects an audacious, courageous spirit who is not prepared to let the autocratic turn of political events in Iran make her give up on her fight for liberation. Not only is she divorced, a highly frowned upon status in post-revolutionary Islamic Iran, but she also wishes to have a baby on her own—another taboo. Instead of focusing on finding a husband with whom to have children, what family would hope for her to do to regain respect, she spends her time acting as a "godmother" to young Iranians, taking them in and mentoring them, with the hopes of fostering a brighter future for her country. Specifically mentioned here is the reconstruction of "deflowered young women's" hymens. It is implied that she does this so that they will not be punished by conservative parents, authority figures, or future husbands, who might find out they have been intimate before marriage. The passage also mentions the way in which her neighbors disapprove, yet Niloufar is unbothered. Minoui explains that for Niloufar, who was a great supporter of the revolution, her independent behavior is an act of redemption: though the Iran that she was promised from the revolution was taken from her (or rather, never granted to her to begin with), as were her rights as a woman, she holds on with such force to make way for a new generation of hopeful and radical individuals. Niloufar reflects the Iranian women who are unseen in the media, whose rights were taken from them when the dictatorship of Ayatollah Khomeini began, who immediately went to protest once he began setting oppressive laws. She carries on her shoulders the weight of a revolution that did not unfold in the way she had expected. There is a certain culpability for many Iranians who fought for change only to be met with a loss of public autonomy. The fact that she fights back and uses what independence she does have as redemption demonstrates the strength and activism that Minoui wishes for her readers to see in Iranian women. Niloufar represents courage in the face of oppression, violence, and

manipulation. Being divorced and deciding to have a child outside of marriage breaks the taboo of this behavior in a conservative Muslim country. The transgressive Niloufar opens a window into what female agency and feminism *à l'iranienne* might look like. Evidently, Niloufar, the Iranian woman of the twenty-first century, represents the prospect of change and perseverance. Choosing to write about her gives Minoui the chance to present to readers a more intimate side of Iranian women but also a very modern one, that cannot be seen from the outside. Though the Islamic government may hide stories of powerful women to maintain the patriarchal power of the dictatorship, Minoui's testimonial journalism brings them into the open to educate her readers, and she does so at her own risk. Though she is repeatedly threatened by the government to the point of needing to leave Iran eventually, she shares these stories because they interrupt the narrative of the dictatorship that has been in place since 1979, in hopes of reimagining the history, and future, of Iranian women.

IV. Violence Within Violence: Secret Tortures and Violations of Women in the War

I have shown that the representation of both the Algerian and Iranian revolutions did not consistently reflect the authentic voices of the people experiencing these events. In the previous section, I examined how women were not included in greater histories of these events, and if they were, their representations were missing nuance and detail, focusing more on fetishized images to feed revolutionary and national propaganda. Western feminism, while well-intentioned, also missed going beyond the surface and their support backfired. By contrast, Minoui and Meralli's characters embody the agency, voice, and sacrifices of "ordinary" women—though extraordinary in their struggles. This last section delves deeper into their suffering: it focuses specifically on the violence of the revolution, to question whether the torture

of women was acknowledged or even known. Violence reported by the media was generally the only one that was discussed; the torture of women or minorities was often left unacknowledged, perhaps because it did not hold the same weight for the public as torture against men. Furthermore, what *was* reported was highly regulated by political powers that wanted to control how the world understood the revolution. In private, men in positions of power exerted a great deal of violence especially unto women, homosexuals, and disabled persons, which was not reported or acknowledged until far after the revolutions, if at all. Stora explains how information on the torture of Algerians circulated among French officials:

> Dès le 15 janvier 1955, l'écrivain François Mauriac publie dans *L'Express* un article qui s'intitule déjà "la question". Dans le même temps, le journaliste Claude Bourdet dénonce lui aussi ce qu'il appelle "Votre Gestapo d'Algérie" dans *France-Observateur*. Le 2 mars 1955, un inspecteur général de l'administration, Roger Willaume, remet au gouverneur général de l'Algérie, Jacques Soustelle, un rapport d'où il ressort clairement que la torture était pratiquée couramment sur les "suspects". Le 13 décembre 1955, le président du Conseil, Edgar Faure, reçoit un rapport dû à Jean Mairey, directeur de la Sûreté nationale, qui parvenait aux mêmes constatations. Cette torture est employée par les DOP (détachement opérationnel de protection), unités spéciales de l'armée chargées des interrogatoires "poussés" (26)

Stora explains that torture was acknowledged by intellectuals and journalists. Complaints were made for the practice to cease immediately, even before the war ended. Against the backdrop of the brutality of the French army against Algerians during the revolution, I focus specifically on one absence : women's experiences and the torture of women. To clarify, some women's stories did circulate. Among the most infamous, the 'three Djamilas' (Bouhired, Bouazza, and Boupacha) (Vince 83) were convicted to the death penalty as members of the FLN, their stories of torture exposed to the public in the late 1950s and then in 1960. In his famous defense of his client Djamila Bouhired titled *Pour Djamila Bouhired*, Jacques Vergès (Bouhired's lawyer) "condemned the torture Bouhired had been subjected to at the hands of the French army,

including placing electrodes in her vagina and on her nipples, and questioned the legality of the military court in which she had been tried."[105] It was this text, "a text that related the itinerary of a young Algerian accused of participating in guerilla warfare, tortured in prison, and condemned to death,"[106] which brought the practice of torture to the public eye. Then in 1960, Simone de Beauvoir publicly defended Djamila Boupacha, who was tortured and raped with a bottle by the French army. Because Algerian society is primarily Muslim, it is presumed that Boupacha's rape also constituted a violation of her virginity since Muslim women are not to have intimate relations until after marriage. Beauvoir defended Djamila Boupacha after being raped, yet Judith Surkis questions Beauvoir's motivation given that virginity enters the discussion: "Judith Surkis underlines: 'If in *the Second Sex* [de] Beauvoir denounced the fetishization of virginity as the product of paternalistic ethics, here she nonetheless mobilized that figure for the sake of political argument.'" (85) Defending Boupacha after her virginity is (presumably) violated by a French soldier is not intrinsically problematic, but Mortimer highlights the problematic nature of focusing on a woman's body, stating that "whether for or against the nationalist movement, all of these descriptions place the bodies and sexuality of these women on display for public consumption." (85) Even if there was public awareness of the 'three Djamilas' stories, perhaps the focus is placed on the wrong aspect. In 1982, an event in Tizi Ouzou (north central Algeria) celebrating International Women's Day "honored 'the example of Tassadit,' the pregnant wife of a *maquisard* who was interrogated in her village by *harkis*. The article describes how even under torture she said nothing about her husband's whereabouts. The soldiers bet on the sex of the

[105] Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters*, 84.

[106] Mildred Mortimer, "Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls: Algeria's Women Combatants Depicted by Daniele Djamila Amrane-Minne, Louisette Ighilahriz, and Assia Djebar." Research in African Literatures, vol. 43, no. 1, 2012, p.107.

child, her stomach was ripped open, and the baby thrown to the commander's dog. Tassadit died."[107] Readers will never know whether this woman would want her story honored and memorialized. But documenting the gendered violence of the revolution lifts victims like Tassadit out of anonymity, it lifts brutality out of invisibility, and it exposes the French soldiers as perpetrators. Readers can think of Beatrice's father, who never wants to speak about the war, who says he was young and completed his service, and who is silent and agitated. Could he have raped women with a bottle or ripped open their stomachs? Could he have witnessed the soldier next to him do such things? The trauma of the war affected those who were tortured by the soldiers, but Beatrice's father reminds us that soldiers who tortured or who witnessed torture might also live with guilt and regret, having obeyed orders blindly. Beatrice's father cannot speak to her or his wife about the war that he fought in, perhaps because it is too difficult to live with the torture, rape, and massacre that he witnessed or was party to, if even indirectly.

I have shown that Algerian women were brutally tortured by the French army with impunity, and that testimonies from the women themselves are still missing. In her article, Mortimer writes about Henri Alleg, who one year after *Pour Djamila Bouhired* was published, wrote his own account of being tortured by the French army in Algeria, titled *La Question.* Mortimer writes that "with the passage of time, other testimonies have come to light as participants in the Algerian War have begun to unburden themselves of guarded secrets. […] However, *Louise Ighilariz* [108]is the first Algerian woman to bring the issue before the French and Algerian public in testimony that reveals her own traumatic experience of rape and torture at the hands of the French military." (107) It is important to speak the names of women who have come

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[107] Vince, 218.

[108] Emphasis added.

forward to denounce their torture, because so many women died in combat or shortly after and remained completely anonymous. Sharing their names is also keeping alive the memory of women who can no longer come forward themselves to speak of the violence that they endured. To return to *Algériennes*, the writer (Meralli) and illustrator (Deloupy) represent stories that they have collected through research, contributing to the greater reformation of the historiography of the war. Published nearly seventy years after the start of the revolution, *Algériennes* allows readers to learn about the violence that women endured and gain awareness of the missing pieces in the war's mediatic, official representation.

Malika's Silent Rape by French soldiers

The last woman whom Beatrice meets is Djamila's friend, Malika, who tells Beatrice in detail about the violence that she witnessed as a member of the FLN, having watched the French army murder her comrades right in front of her. Malika's story is the most disturbing in the graphic novel in relation to violence against women. Almost killed during FLN activity, Malika is transferred by the French to a hospital to be taken care of, before being sent away to a torture center—because as she says, "il fallait bien que je sois vivante pour être interrogée" (89). Immediately out of hospital care, she is brought to a secret location and tortured by French soldiers to make her reveal information about the FLN. The illustrator draws Malika's experience being tortured over two pages. Malika is held alone in a room, naked and tied to a bed, while soldiers come in and out of the room with different torture tactics to humiliate and hurt her, yet she refuses to speak. The first act of torture that she experiences upon being tied to the bed is rape.

Figure 13

From one page to the next, readers follow the sequence of Malika being brought into the room up until the point where her rapists leave her behind on the floor as they exit the room: the before and after her rape, but the exclusion of the moment itself. This torture sequence is especially haunting to readers because of its silence. Over the span of eight frames, Malika speaks only three times: twice she repeats “s’il vous plait…” followed by “non!” and once she simply lets out an “aie!” when being thrown onto the bed. Similarly, each soldier is drawn only speaking once: both instances are immediately before the actual act of rape from what readers can gather, given that the actual rape is not shown (a point to which I will return). In both instances, the soldiers speak to each other about Malika as if she is not there. In one frame, the first soldier says to the other: “tu vas voir, elle sont solides les petites fellagas,” a sarcasm referring to Malika’s status as an anti-colonial fighter. Two frames later, the soldiers stand over Malika and look down at her

immediately before raping her, while the second soldier says to the first: "S'ils envoient leurs femmes au combat, c'est que ça va bientôt finir!", again referring to Algerians in general and objectifying Malika as a war tactic and not a person. Each other frame in this sequence is silent, other than narrative text boxes which express Malika's thoughts in this situation, despite her outward silence. For example, the very first frame shows Malika being dragged by a soldier to her torture chamber in silence with a text box in the corner that simply reads: "j'espérais être prête". What adds to the buildup of the violence is the fact that these text boxes diminish after the first four frames, at which point she realizes that she is going to be tortured, and she seemingly ceases to be able to even make out thoughts in her mind. Keeping in mind that Malika is recounting this memory to Beatrice, the diminishing text boxes also demonstrate that as the rape scene progresses, her memories become less representational. This digression of thoughts and words in memory is also clear in the second page of the sequence, which switches from six square frames to two large rectangular frames. The shift in scale reflects Malika's helplessness: whereas in the beginning she speaks and thinks about her surroundings, by the end of the rape scene she is seen on the floor, in fetal position and in complete silence. This overall visual and verbal representation of the scene allows readers to understand the violence done to Malika not only in a physical sense, but also the way in which it leaves her silent and alone. Furthermore, it forces readers to "participate" and engage in the violence in that torture chamber. Here again I borrow the concept of readers' participation in the violence drawn in comics from Scott McCloud because it provides an apt, critical frame to approach readers' reception.

The silence in this scene is magnified by fundamental representational strategies. The act of rape itself is never shown. This communicates in part the way in which Malika has processed the memory of her rape: she has shielded it from her memory for her own protection and

survival, or her mind was blank and unable to process the trauma to begin with. At the same time, this is a very precise choice on the part of the illustrator to make readers work psychologically throughout the scene as active witnesses. Readers do not need to see the rape graphically to be able to deduct what has happened, and it is in fact more important that they do not see it here. There are two frames that represent the rape scene. In the first, two standing soldiers look down on Malika most likely on the bed or perhaps on the floor, and though Malika is not visible, her speech is still "heard" (read) when she yells "non!" and "s'il vous plait…". The second frame directly below the first represents the two soldiers walking out of the room and Malika on the floor in silence. These frames alone are difficult to process: seeing Malika on the floor in fetal position after shouting for the soldiers to stop is indeed heartbreaking. Yet the most important feature of these two frames is the space in between them, in the space and time of the "gutter" (the all-important spatial and temporal interval between two frames), where blood is spilled. The illustrator's decision to leave out the actual act of violence in any graphic novel is ultimately a decision to bring readers along as an accomplice, to involve them in the horror, to force them to participate. In the case of Malika's rape scene, readers never see her violation. They must imagine what happens in the gutter, which in turn, in a sense, makes readers accountable, which is unique to comics: "the comics creator asks us to join in a silent dance of the seen and the unseen. The visible and the invisible. This dance is unique to comics. No other artform gives so much to its audience while asking so much from them as well" (McCloud 92). Malika's rape scene is not only essential because it shows what was largely hidden from the public (the torture of women in the Algerian Revolution), but because it does not allow readers to passively absorb the story. This is especially prevalent when considering the ways in which the Algerian Revolution was not acknowledged by the West and especially France—in forcing

readers to engage with the blood in the gutter, the author and illustrator leave their readers to consider the violence in a closer, brutal light to approach the experience of victim *and* perpetrator.

In addition to closure, other representational and discursive strategies compound the force of the moment. Alternating points of view show closeups of different details such as Malika's hands being tied up, or the face of the soldier that she looks up at from the bed. Close frames and reversed perspectives allow readers to experience the story not only from Malika's point of view, but from multiple angles, like a cinematic viewpoint. Another key component in the illustrator's representation of Malika's story is her lack of presence: though she is physically present when French soldiers abuse her, she does not have a voice of her own with which to speak up. Her thoughts are heard in the first few panels, as are her exclamations, but she only speaks three times in the scene; she does not participate and is not fully present, perhaps choosing to disassociate to escape the trauma. The ways in which Malika recalls her torture are also very strategically placed. The borders of each frame are irregular, which is a technique used throughout the graphic novel to distinguish scenes from the past vs. scenes from the present. The wavy frames are suggestive of the way in which traumatic memory is often not perfectly clear. Another strategic aesthetic element is the drawing style itself: the faces, for instance, are far from realistic, which helps readers relate to the characters. McCloud writes that "when we abstract an image through cartooning, [we are] not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential "meaning", an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art [cannot]" (30). In other words, it is often easier to relate to characters' experiences when the drawing is less realistic. The drawing of both Malika and the soldiers avoids realism also because the hyper realism of torture and rape means there is no need

to draw faces realistically. Readers might even be distracted by faces that can take away from the horror of Malika's violation. Furthermore, the lack of realism also adds to readers' understanding of how Malika as a victim remembers her rape—the faces of abusers are often too much of a trigger for survivors of sexual violence. The ultimate effect of the scene, and of the graphic novel overall, thus guides readers in reconsidering mainstream stories and learning this alternate, traumatic history of the Algerian revolution. It also reveals the unspoken experience of the women who participated in the liberation movement. Witnessing Malika's rape by French soldiers is difficult and gut wrenching—yet it represents the masses of sexually assaulted women whose stories were never heard, who remained anonymous, many of whom died of torture, and the war crimes that went unpunished.

This is not unique to the Algerian Revolution; secret torture happened to women in the Iranian Revolution as well. In the following section, I examine similar phenomena within the scope of the Iranian revolution in the context of *Je vous écris de Téhéran*. In this novel, readers also learn of the violence and intimidation tactics used on women and activists to maintain control over the public perception of the government, but the experience for readers is different due to the genre. As I have stated, the graphic novel format, with its use of *closure* in the gutter, obligates readers to participate to a certain degree in the violence of the war and forces them to bear witness to the events recounted to Beatrice. *Je vous écris de Téhéran* is evidently not a graphic novel, but its ambiguous genre also lends itself to the act of bearing witness. At its foundation, the book is in the form of one long posthumous letter to Delphine's deceased grandfather. Delphine documents everything that she experiences during her time in Iran: her impressions of her newly widowed grandmother with whom she lives, her new radical friends, her work as a journalist in and outside of Iran, her marriage, and most important to this chapter,

the torture and violence conducted towards her and her female friends, to the point of one female friend not feeling safe to even *whisper* the truth without first leaving Iran. While the book could perhaps be summed up as a posthumous letter, I argue that its genre is far more complex: it is a fiction and a testimony, a form of autobiography and a documentary. It matches the readers' experience in reading *Algériennes* because readers are also called on to participate in recreating in their imagination the reality of torture while they are pulled away from their own preconceptions of Iranian woman and government.

Delphine's Habituation to Violence in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*

As I previously mentioned, Delphine arrives in Tehran in 1998, one year after the election of a new president, Mohammad Khatami. Iran in 1998 is far different than the country she remembers: the last time that she had been in Iran as a child was in 1977 at the very beginnings of the Iranian Revolution, at which time the atmosphere in Iran was tense due to the building hatred towards the Shah. Iran in 1977 was still a westernized county. Returning now, post-revolution, Delphine sees a completely different country ruled by a theocracy, and as an outsider, she does not yet understand its nuances. With the new presidency of Mohammad Khatami, Iran appears to be heading towards a more progressive state. Narrator Delphine describes the new president as a man of his people: "[Khatami] avait refusé de céder à la tentation du trône. On disait de lui qu'il avait fait campagne à travers le pays à bord d'un simple bus. Depuis sa victoire, il serrait les mains, osait les bains de foule. Une nouvelle façon d'être, un style bien à lui. 'L'Iran pour tour les Iraniens', disait l'un de ses slogans" (21). On the surface, Khatami appears to bring about significant change of atmosphere and perhaps more importantly, *hope*, to the people of Iran. However, Delphine quickly comes to find that it is only the surface

of the country that has changed after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, if at all, and that the shadier parts of the government which had made intellectuals disappear during the revolution were still very much present. As a reporter, Delphine experiences the violence and intimidation of the government firsthand when, one day, she receives an anonymous phone call ordering her for a meeting in a foreign affairs office. Upon her arrival, she is met with two interrogators, one of whom has a hand deformity who Delphine refers to as *Monsieur Finger*. As they question her, it becomes clear to Delphine that these men have been watching her, making sure she realizes they are familiar with every aspect of her life: "de mes sorties, de mes rencontres, de mes interviews. Il connaissait les moindres détails de ma vie. Il avait lu et écouté mes reportages, me savait accro au cinéma iranien. […] Sur une liste, qu'il déroula sur la table, il se mit à lire à haute voix les noms de mes nouvelles connaissances, de mes meilleures amies. Comment était-il si bien renseigné ?" (95). Délphine remains outwardly calm, and silent, and leaves when she is told to do so. This is the first of many interrogations that she experiences from *Monsieur Finger*, and she soon learns to go along with his interviews, almost as a formality. She writes: "la peur commençait à devenir une compagne comme une autre. Je savais que les murs avaient des oreilles, qu'il ne fallait jamais être trop bavard au téléphone. […] Monsieur Finger aussi, je commençais à m'y habituer. Ses interrogatoires à n'en plus finir. […] Je me disais que ça faisait partie du kit du reporter" (194). For Delphine, as evidenced in this passage, the interrogations that she is subjected to become part of her work as a reporter. One can also stress here the added irony of the investigator being investigated. The fear that she lives with each day becomes a part of daily life; following safety precautions becomes a given, and the knowledge that she is being watched remains at the foreground of her mind. The fact that Delphine's attitude quickly shifts to one of ambivalence is a strong indication of the nature of life in Iran as a journalist, and even

more so as a woman—this constant fear is inevitable, yet she refuses to cease reporting because of it. Freedom of speech does not exist under a theocratic dictatorship, whether or not there is a more progressive president in power. Recounting her interrogations with Monsieur Finger gives readers insight into intimidation tactics and pressure, into sacrifices she made as a reporter in Iran, and demonstrates her dedication to her journalistic work. Sharing her experiences reveals the psychological violence and fear of being used to reinforce censorship, casting into doubt the information the regime lets through.

"J'aurais pu mourir comme ça" [109]

Not only does Delphine, herself, experience intimidation tactics, showing readers how censorship is enforced, but she also mediates for and exposes Western readers to Niloufar's story, which is one of arrest and torture to near-death. Niloufar is arrested at a protest where she is taking photos, where she is accused of being a spy. It is only several years after this event that Delphine finally sees her and can fill in the blanks—up until then, she can only assume that Niloufar has been taken and killed, like so many others who were disappeared. Seeing Delphine after so long, Niloufar desperately wants to tell her about her arrest, yet she is filled with fear: "il faudra que je te raconte, a soufflé Niloufar. C'est une longue histoire, mais je préfère ne pas en parler tant que je suis en Iran. Les murs ont des oreilles…" (158). As Delphine noted, this understanding that "the walls have ears" or that someone is always listening becomes a part of daily life. Being a part of the resistance becomes then synonymous with speaking in code or keeping silent. After being in prison, Niloufar is understandably cautious to be sure not to get into trouble again, to the point of refusing to discuss her arrest while in Iran altogether. When

[109] Minoui, 163.

they finally meet in France, she explains to Delphine the circumstances of her arrest: “tout s’est déroulé très vite. J’étais en train de prendre des photos […] En voyant mon appareil photo, un policier en civil m’a hurlé dessus en me demandant si j’étais journaliste. Je n’ai pas eu le temps de luis répondre. J’ai senti des mains m’attraper violemment. J’ai essayé de me débattre. En vain. Autour de moi, des coups de bâton et de couteau s’abattaient sur les jeunes” (160). Niloufar’s description of her arrest provides readers with an intimate perspective and a near-sensory experience of what it was like to be a part of this crowd that was suddenly overtaken by officers. As readers, we can vividly imagine her sudden arrest, being grabbed by an officer, and trying to get away to no avail. We can almost hear the screams of other students being injured by knives and batons, and in turn there is a sense of empathy that comes out of this description precisely because it is so factual and unsentimental. Without reverting to pathos, her descriptive language brings readers into the space and time of the traumatic incident, which forcefully shifts the perspective from what was seen in the media to what was experienced by victims. Learning of Niloufar’s arrest alongside readers, Delphine acts as a mediator between the victim (Niloufar) and Western readers, cultivating a space in which exchange can take place and readers can join not only in empathy but in solidarity. Learning about Niloufar’s arrest, and later her experience being tortured, opens a space for readers to reevaluate what they thought they knew about the political atmosphere in post-revolutionary Islamic Iran.

Niloufar recounts her entire prison experience to Delphine, in all its gut-wrenching detail. She tells Delphine about the torture of her solitary confinement in prison : “Là-bas, on m’a jetée dans une minuscule cellule isolée de deux mètres sur un mètre et demi. Aucune fenêtre à laquelle se pencher. Des murs épais, le vide autour de moi. Une solitude à devenir folle. Avec un néon accroché au plafond, juste au-dessus de ma tête, toujours allumé, de jour comme de nuit…Sa

lumière était aveuglante, elle faisait mal aux yeux…" (161). This type of confinement is now recognized as torture and is widely condemned by mental health and human rights associations as a practice that is proven to break down one's mental health and ultimately scar them permanently. On their website, for example, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) explains that solitary confinement can be life altering for individuals with or without mental illness, that "isolating individuals, especially for long periods of time, can cause severe psychological distress" and that "extreme isolation can have a permanent impact and significantly increase the risk of suicide and self-injury."[110] Similarly, in June 2021, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was part of the publication of the first ever "Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement by the Federal Government,"[111] which calls on the government to end all forms of solitary confinement, among other demands to diminish torture as a form of "rehabilitation", which it is not. In their book *Solitary Confinement: Effects, Practices, and Pathways Towards reform* (2019), Peter Smith and Jules Lobel explain that the effects of solitary prison styles have been known for at least the past century: "Harmful effects of solitary confinement practices were discovered during the nineteenth century and a sizable and impressively sophisticated literature accumulated and documented significant damage to prisoners", also going on to mention the "reports of insanity, suicide, and the complete alienation of prisoners from social life [which] seriously discredited the new form of punishment." [112] Despite these reports and studies, solitary confinement is still used, especially in several Asian countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Korea, and certainly in the United States, with the full

[110] "Solitary Confinement." *NAMI*.

[111] "Criminal Justice Task Force Releases First-Ever Federal Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement." *American Civil Liberties Union*, 7 June 2021.

[112] Peter Scharff Smith and Jules Lobel. "Solitary Confinement: Effects, Practices, and Pathways Towards Reform". Oxford University Press, 2019.

knowledge of torture being placed on incarcerated individuals. Niloufar's description of her windowless cell size, less than two by two, puts it at the lower end of the low standards of solitary confinement cells. The blinding neon light in such a small space is intentional to harm the inmate and push her to lose control of her faculties. The more she explains, the more horrifying her experience in prison seems. This is in part because of our subconscious understanding that solitary confinement would drive us to insanity. Niloufar is tortured in several different ways, the first of which is being isolated. She goes on to carefully explain to Delphine another one of the tactics used which nearly killed her:

> Ils m'allongeaient sur un lit et me menottaient les mains et les chevilles. Puis ils me frappaient sous les pieds avec des câbles. Plus je hurlais, plus j'avais l'impression d'étouffer. Je transpirais sous mon tchador. Pour me faire suffoquer de plus belle, il leur arrivait de m'enrouler dans une couverture en laine. En plein été ! Tout en me débattant, j'essayais de tirer la couverture avec mes dents, pour respirer un peu. À plusieurs reprises, j'ai perdu à moitié connaissance. J'aurais pu mourir comme ça. (163)

Niloufar reveals to Delphine the extent to which she was tortured while in prison for several years, explaining in detail how she was repeatedly nearly suffocated by the guards, tied to a bed and whipped with a cable, covered with a wool blanket on top of her chador in the sweltering heat of the summer to induce her suffocation. Her realistic, matter-of-fact language translates the nightmare of torture. The use of the French imperfect is notable here to indicate the repetitive nature to this torture, most likely occurring at *least* once daily. As a result, notes Niloufar, she could have easily died from this treatment. The point of torture is to bring the prisoner to the brink of death, to gain information from them. Niloufar surviving her torture renders her both stronger and acutely aware of the political powers always watching and waiting.

With Delphine as a mediator for Western readers, what do readers gain from knowing this information other than feeling sympathy? Naghibi asks: "how can we, as privileged readers, bear witness to the traumatic experiences endured by political prisoners in a meaningful way, in

a way that goes beyond merely expressing sympathy in the face of another's suffering?" (45). In *Je vous écris de Téhéran*, there are many different representations of violence: police raids at protests and parties; Delphine's interrogations with Monsieur Finger; Niloufar's imprisonment; and the murder or disappearance of Niloufar's and Delphine's friends and acquaintances. As readers in the West, it is difficult to accept the amount of information that was held from the public, because the lack of information shaped a clichéd worldview of Iranians and Iranian women. How Delphine is interrogated ultimately leads to her leaving the country years later, and taking photographs leads to Niloufar being imprisoned, two experiences that testify to the practice of censorship: the State was never going to allow for certain information to be published. State-sponsored violence in post-revolutionary Iran keeps the "correct" information circulating. Even though Western media covered the violence of the Iranian revolution, much of the internal information was not accessible to most journalists. As in the Algerian Revolution, it was the obvious violence which was reported: protests and gunshots, yet not the hidden and illegal violence of torture in the name of censorship and nationalism. For this reason, Niloufar's testimony is crucial to readers' understanding of how torture and intimidation were used against those wanting to share the truth.

V. Conclusion

This chapter explored Swann Meralli's *Algériennes* and Delphine Minoui's J*e vous écris de Téhéran* in relation to the Algerian and Iranian revolutions, respectively. I examined how these texts raise the question of women's involvement both in the revolution and in the post-revolutionary society, and how women's stories are still being uncovered, several decades later. Accounts of rape and torture, being locked in solitary confinements, and being violently

intimidated by police, highlight the strength and perseverance of women who continue to work in resistance regardless of the State's attempts to silence them. When their fathers and grandfathers were silent, Beatrice and Delphine went to see for themselves. They went to Algeria and Iran to bear witness: there, they uncovered the State's attempts at erasing women's participation and treatment, they worked harder as mediators to inform both themselves and readers. These protagonists demonstrate both violence done unto women, but also, with the help of the women that they meet, the unwillingness of Algerian and Iranian women to give up, to be only victims. As time goes on, more and more testimonial literature is published by women who experienced the brutality of wars and autocratic regimes. While these testimonies allow us to learn more about what happened in these revolutions where so much was lost as well as gained, they also raise the question of what is at stake when historiography does not confront its erasure of women's histories.

IV. LIFTING THE VEIL: IRANIAN AND ALGERIAN WOMEN IN PRIVATE SPACES

Thus far in this project, I have examined the violence and grief connected to the experiences of Iranian and Algerian women during their countries' respective revolutions and wars. In chapter two, I examined how Satrapi and Djavadi represent the rift in identity when they both left Iran as young girls, forced to brave the rules of a different society while navigating racism they did not expect. Similarly, in chapter three I discussed the difficulties of exile as it relates to the Algerian Revolution in Meralli's graphic novel *Algériennes*, in which in one scene Algerian women must leave their homes abruptly in the middle of the night to escape to France. Chapter three also highlighted the invisibilization by the media of women's experiences in revolution, both in Iran and Algeria. In contrast with this invisibilization, I argued in chapter three that women also suffered in their respective revolutions and the aftermath due to the fetishization of war images of young women and girls holding guns. In this fourth and final chapter, I shift my attention to the intimate spaces behind closed doors, which are still generally forbidden from the public eye, and what is at stake for the women in these private spaces. While I addressed private spaces in chapter three in relation to women being erased from national histories and the violence they endured, in this final chapter I highlight the idea of Algerian and Iranian women holding onto community, holding space for one another as women both amidst state violence, and in spite of state approved stereotypes and oppression. The idea of interiority is essential in the two post-revolutionary works I examine: Assia Djebar's series of short stories, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and Marjane Satrapi's less commonly known graphic novel *Broderies* (2003)[113]. I consider how the public versus private dichotomy for

[113] This version of *Broderies* does not contain page numbers. Any further references to scenes within the book will not be referenced by page number.

Muslim women plays into their self-representations in my chosen texts, and how the private sphere of their lives becomes sacred in the face of state violence. Both Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and Satrapi's *Broderies* bring readers into women's private spaces, where women can be themselves, where readers have access to their hopes, dreams, and fears, and where women do not answer to patriarchal expectations. Djebar and Satrapi bring readers into a space where women are not fetishized or exoticized, but they instead show what readers were never allowed to know or understand: women existing in their own rights and with their own independence, women holding space for one another as a community of subaltern individuals[114], women existing outside of the stereotypes projected onto them in the public sphere. In my analysis of these two texts, I consider what it means to be a non-Muslim-woman reader entering these spaces: are we, as readers, *invited* or are we *intruding*? What does it mean to place oneself in the private sphere that for so long was (and still is) deemed off limits? Furthermore, I ask what authors seek to convey from observing women in their private spaces, in their intimate familiarity, as opposed to their performative roles in the public sphere. The women in both books demonstrate a tenacity that appears only to be able to surface in the private sphere. When their being and their performance in public demand "modesty" and are at the same time fetishized both by outsiders and by their compatriots, how can women be free to express their wants, needs, and fears? Djebar and Satrapi present us with two different worlds that are at the same time connected in this Janus-faced public versus private existence. In my analysis, I address how Djebar and Satrapi suggest that Algerian and Iranian women have indeed guarded this part of

[114] By *subaltern*, I refer to Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1935) and his original definition of 'subaltern' as any low-ranking person or group of people who suffer under hegemonic domination which denies them the basic right of participation in society.

themselves and thus maintained their sense of community and self-preservation over several generations, presenting more hope for generations to come.

This chapter is comprised of four parts. In the first part, "Tracing the European portrayal of the 'Orient'", I trace the ways in which French authors and artists portrayed Iranians and individuals from other Muslim countries as exotic others. Drawing upon Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* (1978), I turn to Pierre Loti's *Vers Ispahan* (1904) as an example of the ways in which Persians and other individuals from Muslim countries were portrayed before the twenty-first century, and especially women. This reveals the Western obsession with hijab, and it shines light on the ignorant disregard for women's lives behind the public eye. Here, I consider theoretical approaches such as Farzaneh Milani's *Veils and Words*: *The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (1992) and Joan Scott's *The Politics of the Veil* (2007) to unpack the fantasy of the Muslim woman and the damage that it causes to her identity. To consider Western representations of Easterners that lack self-examination and exclude authentic testimonies is important because it contextualizes the innovations and radicalness of texts such as *Femmes d'Alger* and *Broderies:* they bring readers *within*, into a space until then only accessed indirectly through a white, male, Western, patriarchal gaze, thus feeding an orientalization that stereotypified women and kept them unknown. In part two, "A Metaphorical Unveiling: How the structure of these texts *lifts the veil* between public and private discourse", I examine the structure of the two primary texts: though one is a graphic novel and the other is a collection of short stories, both authors make formal choices which foster a similar feeling of interiority and familiarity. In this part, I consider how each author highlights the interior space in ways that challenge the mainstream histories of these two countries. For example, the entirety of *Broderies* takes place within the confines of the matriarch's salon in Tehran. Part three, "Multiplicity : how

Djebar and Satrapi evoke a sense of multiplicity to convey the complex nature of Muslim women's identities", contrasts with the stereotypical one-dimensional identification of women in Islamic spaces that generally associates them with hijab and does not go further than this. In this part, I consider how Djebar sheds light on Delacroix's painting which, uncoincidentally, bears the same name as her novel, and how works such as this feed the binaries and dichotomies which do not allow for a woman in an Islamic space to be seen for her complete and complex self. Djebar uses this title to offer a new seeing of those women in the painting, where they are not frozen, but mobile. Similarly, *Broderies* points to the multiple voices of Iranian women, both in showing several different characters like Djebar, but also in demonstrating the multitude of experiences they have had, namely with abusive men, and how they carry on. These texts do not feature men as primary characters, precisely because the authors' goal (among others) is to counteract the one-dimensional caricaturization of a woman in an Islamic space being oppressed and needing a man. Rather, these women are complex and go through various experiences amongst other women, with this communal aspect also demonstrating a sense of multiplicity. In the last part, "Time in the post-revolution: a longing for imagined times", I focus on the representation of temporality in both texts. Djebar's text is divided into two parts: *Aujourd'hui* and *Hier*, whereas Satrapi draws women recalling stories from their childhoods and transporting readers through a dream state of recollection, all while remaining in the present. In this part, I consider the longing for a freer life and therefore the longing for a different outcome from their respective revolutions, given that women in both texts watch their worlds change following revolution. For example, in Iran women fought in the revolution for a more democratic republic—following Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power, however, they were suddenly told that they were to cover themselves in public spaces and that they were to pay closer attention to their

outward appearance to remain "modest". The women in *Broderies* long both for a life that could have been, with a different outcome of the revolution, and they also long for their lives before the revolution, when they were permitted a more secular public existence. This temporal focus is important because this is a daily struggle for those women living in the aftermath of revolution: while they must adhere to societal expectations for women, they internally long for and share this nostalgia for another possibility, in the past and/or imagined future. In both *Femmes d'Alger* and *Broderies*, time is an important factor for our understanding of the women protagonists' identities—they struggle to remain in the present so as to not let go of the past, because forgetting the past means accepting how they have been denied inclusion in the present.

In both texts, the authors showcase women who both maintain the traditional role of serving the family and who also exist independently, demonstrating personal wants and needs that exceed their traditional roles as caregivers. This dual or nuanced existence is key to this chapter because it demonstrates the fact that Iranian and Algerian women are not bound to only one role: their identities are multifaceted; they are complex individuals. Yet the public eye does not allow for women's complexities and their individual desires and rights beyond traditional roles. Rather, these facets of their identities are reserved for the private sphere—for different reasons that I address throughout the chapter. This chapter pieces together an archetype of the Algerian/Iranian woman who goes against the exoticizing and objectifying stereotypes of the "oppressed oriental woman". Instead, the texts present a woman who holds her country together with her hard work and audacity to keep forging ahead. The authors' representations of women "dans leur intérieur" remind us that women's existence in Islamic spaces is complicated and nuanced, far different than the one-dimensional Western representation of the Eastern woman in a black chador or burqa. Between the public and private sphere, this chapter showcases to what

extent women in Islamic spaces maintain their tenacity in the face of adversity by keeping private that which is most sacred to them: their complete and complex identities and communities. To trace the women in these stories is indeed to come to know a tenacity that has not been showcased in other representations: Djebar and Satrapi are two authors who led the way for Algerian and Iranian women to be featured at the forefront of literature, and as such, their texts take on a role of making known this part of Algerian and Iranian women's experiences that was not otherwise highlighted in literature.

I. Tracing the European Portrayal of the "Orient"

In chapter three, I explained that during the Iranian revolution, Iranian women were weary to let reporters into their private spaces because they had seen the effects of Iranian women being represented without their input in the media. They were afraid of what might come of allowing someone into this space because of the misunderstandings that could make their way into the media, thus resulting in inaccuracies, stereotypes, or incomplete portrayals of their daily lives. These inaccuracies are a result of a longstanding fetishization of not just Iranians, but of individuals from other Muslim countries such as Turkey and Egypt, as well as Algeria, who have been painted as exotic, and in the women's case, desirable. Tracing this fetishization gives context to the originality and urgency of works like Djebar's and Satrapi's. In *L'Histoire des relations entre l'Iran et la France: du Moyen Age à nos jours* (2018), Safoura Ladani explains how French interest in Eastern countries changed over the years but that it was during the Middle Ages, and specifically during the Crusades, that French interest was reborn—especially in relation to religion:

> L'Orient signifiait chez les Français du Moyen Age « les contrées situées là où se lève le soleil ». Les Français de cette époque manifestaient un manque d'intérêt pour cette région

> du monde. Pour eux, l'Orient se limitait au Levant et aux Terres saintes. Les croisades avaient éveillé leur intérêt pour l'Orient. Mais ils pensaient seulement à l'invasion des Occidentaux en Orient et pas à l'Orient lui-même. L'Orient se trouvait parfois dans les ouvrages littéraires de cette époque comme *La Chanson de Roland*. Néanmoins, les grands auteurs du XVIe siècle comme Rabelais et Montaigne ne l'évoquent que très vaguement dans leurs ouvrages. (15)

Ladani explains that the French during the Middle Ages viewed the Orient as a distant abstraction, as a marker of the direction in which the sun rose. She mentions the earliest surviving work of French literature, *La Chanson de Roland* (c.1115), the epic poem describing the Battle of Roncevaux Pass in 778, in which the writer describes the battle between Charlemagne's Frankish armies and the Muslim King Marsile in Spain. This battle takes place due to a fear that Al-Andalus will encroach upon Christian territory in France, and ultimately results in the Muslim army[115] fleeing the site of the war, thus representing Christian domination over the Muslim other. This long-lasting feeling of superiority over Muslim others translated into the literary caricaturization of Muslim or Eastern individuals as less educated and generally inferior, a simplification rooted in European ignorance. The French were focused on two factors: the religious threat of Muslims, and the superficial aspects of Eastern cultures. Ladani writes, for example, that Europeans, and French people in particular, viewed Muslims as a threat to Europe : "en fait, ils savaient peu de choses sur eux ; la mode des ablutions dans leurs pratiques religieuses, quelques informations sur leurs prières et la polygamie, tout en y ajoutant les informations sur le harem des femmes qui se trouvait dans la cour des rois de ces pays et des récits incroyables sur Mahomet, leur prophète" (30). This general ignorance was precisely what fueled the caricaturization and vilification of Eastern individuals: Western writers relied on rumors and observations of superficial aspects of the cultures instead of seeking out concrete information, which led to them highlighting cultural phenomena that they did not understand to

[115] In *La chanson de Roland*, Muslims and Christians are referred to as "Saracens" or "Paynims".

begin with and then fetishizing it. In his groundbreaking *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes that the European idea of the Orient "was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections" (7). This artificial mimicry of the Oriental other is evident in a great deal of French literature, such as Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), which depicts Turkish individuals as caricatures who cannot quite fit in with French society, as well as Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), an epistolary novel which recounts the story of two Persian noblemen (Usbek and Rica) as they travel from Ispahan, the then-capital of Persia, to France, and write letters to their wives back in their seraglio (among others). Art was also a prominent medium by which Western individuals projected Eastern fantasies, of which examples include Eugene Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1834) as well as several of Jean-Léon Gérôme's[116] paintings such as *Arab Girl with a Waterpipe* (1873), *Woman of Cairo* (1882), *Arab Girl in a Doorway* (1873), and *Pool in a Harem* (1876), all of which portray Eastern women often completely nude and often in private quarters. In such paintings, Western male artists could portray Eastern individuals, often women, in an eroticizing manner that painted them as objects of desire to fulfill fantasies of adventure and sexual desire: "to fabricate this exoticized and eroticized Orient, the male artist had the power to represent women in a style and dress of his own choice. These women were veiled and were not allowed to appear unveiled to men outside the family; this means that the male artists had the 'power to reveal the coverings and reveal

[116] Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) was a famous 19th century French painter who painted several orientalist paintings involving nude women in private spaces such as the harem.

what lies beneath.'"[117] In these literary and artistic examples, the most consistent component is the orientalizing male gaze, which has shaped and dominated the arts and literature for a long time.

In *Orientalism*, Said also points to this idea of Eastern women figuring as tokens for European men, using the example of Flaubert and his account of Kuchuk Hanem:

> There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was 'typically Oriental'.[118]

Said points to Flaubert's Orientalist accounts of Kuchuk Hanem, referring to the fact that Flaubert wrote *about* and *for* her, but that her own voice was not included. His example of Flaubert points to the tokenization of Eastern women by European travelers. They stood *for* something, not *as* something: "according to Said, Flaubert's relationship to Kuchuk Hanem 'fairly *stands for* the relative strength between East and West…'. Women do not stand for themselves. They 'stand for' something else; they 'stand in for', and 'stand as' fetishes."[119] This tokenization or symbolization of Eastern women became a recurring consequence or characteristic of French orientalist representation of Eastern women. The French male authors and travelers who wrote about their experiences in the so-called Orient based many of their assumptions on the countries they visited on the status and treatment of women in that society. In

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[117] Jelodar and Noraini Md. Yusof. "Black and White Memories: Re-Inscription of Visual Orientalism in Embroideries." 3L, *Language, Linguistics, Literature* 20.3 (2014), p.65.

[118] Said, 6.

[119] Ensieh Shabanirad, and Seyyed Mohammad Marandi. "Edward Said's Orientalism and the Representation of Oriental Women in George Orwell's Burmese Days." *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, vol. 60, 2015, p.22.

her chapter “Reza Shah Pahlavi and Women: A Re-evaluation,”[120] Shireen Mahdavi cites John Malcolm[121] as an example, “who went to Persia at the beginning of the nineteenth century [and who] stated that: ‘In Persia the lower classes deem females important in proportion as they are useful in domestic life: the higher consider them as born for their sensual gratification. Women have, in fact, no assigned place, but are what their husbands, or rather lords, may choose to make them’” (190). Citing another example, Mahdavi writes that the night before Reza Shah’s coronation (1926), “an American visitor reports: ‘the position of women is lower than in almost any other Mohammedan country; there is a tremendous gulf between the women of Cairo and Constantinople and the women of Tehran, even those of the very highest position. The queen, the mother of the crown prince, can neither read nor write; the other queen as an aristocrat by birth, is barely literate’”(192). Referencing several examples, Mahdavi highlights the fact that Iranian women were becoming the center of comparison and political contrast by male European travelers, especially. We do not read accounts of interviews or citations by women in these accounts—evidently, these male observers viewed Iranian women as an oppressed and lesser species who could not speak for themselves. While I do not argue against claims of illiteracy and oppressive conditions, I raise the problematics of narratives never including women’s lived experience and voices. I hypothesize that the scarcity of female travelers to the East meant that the accounts that came to dominate were male authored which failed to open the private sphere.

In 1904, French writer Pierre Loti published *Vers Ispahan* (1904), which leads readers on a voyage to Ispahan (at the time the capital of Persia and one of the largest cities in the world).

[120] Stephanie Cronin, *The Making of Modern Iran : State and Society Under Riza Shah 1921-1941*. RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

[121] John Malcolm (1769-1833) was a Scottish soldier, diplomat, East India Company administrator, statesman, and historian, who traveled to Persia and India.

With his fellow travelers, Loti, the narrator, comes to Persia having just ended a trip in India (a trip that took place in 1900). The entire novel recounts all that Loti-the-narrator sees in Persia from his French perspective, describing the Persian landscape, people, and customs for his French readers. The language that he uses to describe Iran treats it as a spectacle—for example, the novel begins:

> Qui veut venir avec moi voir à Ispahan la saison des roses, prenne son parti de cheminer lentement à mes côtés, par étapes, ainsi qu'au moyen âge. Qui veut venir avec moi voir à Ispahan la saison des roses, consente au danger des chevauchées par les sentiers mauvais où les bêtes tombent, et à la promiscuité des caravansérails où l'on dort entassés dans une niche de terre battue, parmi les mouches et la vermine. […] Nous passerons devant des fantômes de palais […] Là, jadis, habitaient les maîtres de la Terre […]. Nous passerons, mais, alentour, il n'y aura rien, que le silence infini des foins en fleur et des orges vertes (3)

Loti-the-author opens this travel narrative in such a way that paints Ispahan almost as a ghost town, where greatness once existed yet which now falls into the shadows. Using the repeated phrase "qui veut venir avec moi" evokes a feeling of adventure that the reader will embark on with the narrator—an adventure that is highly exoticized, that does not seek knowledge or understanding of the local people. Loti also uses vague vocabulary such as "fantômes" and "silence infini", again to portray a sense of exotic mystery but also to portray Ispahan as a sort of forgotten town whereas at the time, Ispahan was one of the largest cities in the world. In this excerpt, Loti paints Ispahan as a forgotten landmark (using language such as "fantômes") that is underdeveloped, undercivilized. It lacks decent, safe roadways ; decent, solid housing ; and basic hygiene : "consente au danger des chevauchées par les sentiers mauvais où les bêtes tombent, et à la promiscuité des caravansérails où l'on dort entassés dans une niche de terre battue, parmi les mouches et la vermine". The semantic field of *danger*, *bêtes*, *niche, mouches, vermines*, conjures up images of a savage wasteland. In conjunction with his evocation of ghosts, the intimation of barbarity serves to erase Persian culture and instead paint it as a land of filth and grotesquerie:

there are ghosts floating around, rodents creep and flies buzz, and the people are savage and uncivilized. Loti's Persia effectively erases Persian culture and replaces it with a fantasy that fulfills a privileged desire for so-called 'exotic' adventure among readers.

While not centered specifically on women, Loti-the narrator does mention what he notices. For example, he repeatedly uses the imagery of ghosts in reference to Persian women as well: "Les femmes glissent et s'écartent comme de silencieux fantômes, enveloppées toutes, de la tête aux pieds, dans un voile noir, et la figure cachée par un loup blanc avec deux trous ronds pour les yeux; mais les petites filles que l'on ne voile pas encore, très peintes et la chevelure rougie de henneh, sont presque toutes adorables de beauté fine et de sourire" (deuxième partie, 25 avril). In this excerpt, Loti-the-narrator describes Persian women as ghosts, evoking imagery of not only a passive individual, but one that is deceased and haunting. In using such verbs as *glisser*, to slide, and *s'écarter*, to move away from something, and in pairing these verbs with the word *fantômes*, Loti-the-author paints the picture of a Persian woman as someone who floats silently, without agency, individuality, or inspiration, in men's shadows. Simply put, in the eyes of Loti-the-narrator, she is not a living part of this society, but a silent and haunting, floating chador. Loti paints the Iranian woman as a shadow who does not and *cannot* participate in her own society. This image is, of course, centered around her covered hair, her chador. The veil plays a prominent role not only in Loti's perception of Iran, seeing the women as ghosts covered by fabric, but also in that of other European and American intellectuals who visited Persia (or other Muslim countries). European and American travelers who saw Muslim women veiled in public assumed that this was a form of oppression. The focus on the alleged oppression of veiled Muslim women conveniently avoids discussions about their lived existence, their de-liberations in the private sphere, and the politicization, therefore policing, of their bodies. An Eastern

woman's body was not only written about by European and American travelers but was also always policed by her own government.

In *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (1992), Farzaneh Milani writes that "Iranian women, for centuries, were suppressed physically and verbally by the conventions of the veil and public silence. The norms and values that regulated women's physical concealment applied equally to their literary expression. Theirs was a private world, where self-expression, either bodily or verbally, was confined within the accepted family circle" (46). For a long time, Iranian women were expected to be virtuous by covering their hair and remaining complacent. Then, under Reza Shah Pahlavi's rule (1925-1941), a new order forced them to remove the veil in the name of a new Westernized and modernized society. Women were now harassed if they *did* veil themselves, which violated the rights of those wishing to veil themselves in the name of religion or modesty. In either case, whether women were told to veil themselves or not, they were never given the autonomy to choose for themselves and were punished severely if they did not follow the law. Several years later, following the Iranian Revolution, the veil became mandatory again and became synonymous with oppressed Muslim women in Western media. News outlets prominently featured veiled women, which became the main image that viewers associated with theocratic Iran. Western feminists like Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir wrote on Iranian women's liberation, even going as far as coming to Iran to meet with the Ayatollah to bring about change (or in Beauvoir's case, sending women representatives on her behalf). The attempt failed, as the Ayatollah did not respect women to let them speak with him, and he especially did not respect Western, unveiled women. For outsiders, the veil was a *problem* that desperately needed to be *resolved*. Yet the point that has been missed repeatedly is that it is not whether a woman is veiled or not which proves her oppression or

freedom. Rather, it is the incessant policing of a woman's body that causes her to lose autonomy and the lack of inclusion of women in their own histories. In *Un Féminisme musulman, et pourquoi pas?* (2017), Malika Hamidi argues that "en Occident, de nombreux ouvrages et déclarations de féministes au sujet du voile réduisent bien souvent les femmes musulmanes à cet "autre" opprimé. Cette réduction résulte d'une construction binaire dans laquelle les femmes occidentales se considèrent comme libres et libérées des contraintes de la domination masculine patriarcale" (111). Hamidi hints at how Western feminists are blind to the patriarchal structures of their own societies and have categorized Muslim women instead of listening in to their voices. Needless to say, Muslim women are much more than the veil seen on their heads—if it is even there at all: in Iran, women are forced to wear the headscarf due to strict laws that insist on their public modesty, but in other Muslim countries such as Algeria, many women choose to wear it, while many choose not to do so—unless required by law. When European travelers came to Iran, the veil was all that they noticed with regards to women: women were hidden behind a piece of material, a barrier that they could not penetrate. The Iranian government has changed its stance multiple times on whether or not women ought to wear hijab, but in both cases, this points to the patriarchal view of women as tokens of a society's morality or progression.

Because of this longstanding public debate about their bodies, many women in Islamic spaces in the past century have begun forcing their way into the public discourse that never included them. From the oppression that they have faced in their own countries, and the ways in which they are written and spoken about in the media, women in Muslim countries turn to new ways of rethinking their own place in society. Hamidi describes a new wave of feminism among Muslims who seek to reevaluate a woman's place in Islam: "Une génération de femmes musulmanes intellectuelles et militantes défie les interprétations des sources scripturaires

conservatrices qui prédominent dans les sphères religieuses. Leur objectif est de repenser les normes sociales et les structures islamiques en s'arrogeant le droit d'interpréter les textes sacrés de l'islam" (23). This newer generation of women in Islamic spaces points to an urgent necessity of reevaluating religious texts, because it is the interpretation of these texts which is at the basis of women's treatment in Islamic societies (regardless of whether they, themselves, identify as Muslim). Hamidi adds, however, that this is more than simply a revolution in understanding Islamic texts, but it is about women in Islamic spaces taking back the authority over their own bodies:

> Ce sont les femmes, et non pas seulement la religion, qui doivent être au cœur des réflexions théoriques. En outre, certains mouvements islamiques s'approprient les idéaux féministes et se posent aussi comme défenseurs et libérateurs de la femme. La réappropriation des sources scripturaires par les femmes est un enjeu majeur pour « démonopoliser » le discours islamique. Néanmoins, seule une nouvelle méthodologie d'approche pour définir un nouveau « rapport » aux textes permet de remettre en question les lectures plurielles du Coran, dont certaines sont discriminantes à l'endroit de la femme. (148)

Hamidi claims that it is women and not just religion that must be at the foundation of these reevaluations. In rereading foundational religious texts and reconsidering what it means to be a woman in these scriptures, the focus can be placed on moving forward toward a new society. Hamidi also uses the phrase "démonopoliser le discours islamique," which is to say that Islamic discourse led mainly by men must be decentered and deconstructed in order to remove the male monopoly on the discussion and on laws which dictate what a woman can and cannot do with her body. And not only must men make space, but also white feminists like Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir who favor "saving" women in Islamic spaces from their oppression instead of encouraging and inviting their self-expression.

Both Djebar and Satrapi move away from the past male "ghosting" and silencing of Algerian and Iranian women and instead provide an original viewpoint through their own

reclamations in *Femmes d'Alger* and *Broderies* of their existence as women, both in relation to other women and in relation to a patriarchal society that limits their liberties to what the Qur'an states. Both authors challenge the preexisting notions of what it means to be a woman in these Islamic spaces (Algeria and Iran, respectively). In *Femmes d'Alger*, Djebar challenges the notion of a submissive woman. Over eight short-stories, readers follow the internal lives of several women who turn to female community to maintain their sanity in a male dominated revolution and thereafter. Satrapi's *Broderies* also negates the image of an oppressed Iranian woman who lives her life "modestly" in the shadow of men. It is important, too, to discuss *Broderies* as a choice of text, because it is Satrapi's less popular work compared to *Persepolis*.

While *Persepolis* has been the object of numerous critical studies, *Broderies* remains understudied as a graphic novel, which begs the question of the reason behind the contrasting reception of Satrapi's work: "the same year [*Broderies*] appeared in France, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* was published in the United States, and journalist Azadeh Moaveni entered the literary scene with *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*"[122], yet unlike *Persepolis* it was never given the attention by the media that these other texts received. A pertinent difference between Satrapi's *Persepolis* and *Broderies* is that Satrapi's focus in *Persepolis* is on naming political trauma from her childhood, whereas *Broderies* zooms in on adult women's sexuality. *Persepolis* tells many stories: the story of a country in crisis, the story of racism towards Iranians in the West, the story of families trying to stay together, and most of all the story of a young girl attempting to make sense of all these points while simultaneously simply growing up. At the very basis of *Persepolis*, there is also a strong sense of interiority. Readers witness the inner world of Marji's imagination, her

[122] Donaldson, 119.

internal monologues and conversations with God, her views of her own body as it changes and grows, her general angst. Readers also witness very intimate relationships: between Marji and her grandmother, Marji and her disloyal boyfriend in Austria, her imagined relationship with characters such as God and Marx, and her relationship with her parents, especially her mother when she gets older. *Persepolis* shows readers what happens to a country, a person, a family amidst traumatic crises. Though it follows Marji, this is a story of a revolution that changes *everything* for *everyone*. *Persepolis* does also approach sexuality and women's bodies: readers see Marji come to terms with her changing body, her experience becoming intimate with her boyfriend in Austria, and even witnessing a party among young people whose sole purpose was to be sexually intimate. Yet these experiences are all in the guise of a young person growing up.

Like *Persepolis*, *Broderies* also touches on the trauma of a large group of people, but it specifically zooms in on Iranian women, focusing heavily on their sexuality: precisely the topic they are never to address in the public sphere: "to write about Iranian female sexuality in a memoir means a bold break from Iranian literary tradition where women were not allowed to write their life stories let alone writing about their sexuality."[123] The fact that Satrapi centers the text around sexuality is in many ways a reclamation of the fetishization of Persian women in travel literature and the policing of their sexuality by their government. In *Broderies*, Satrapi invites readers into the parlor of the author's grandmother's home, where Marjane gathers with her aunts, mother, and grandmother. Throughout the graphic novel, the women remain in the parlor, discussing issues that readers would never hear about from them in the public sphere, their private sex and love lives: "the gathering represented in *Embroideries* provides women, who have been raped in their marriage, women who thought, 'living with a man was unfeasible',

[123] Jelodar, 70.

women who escaped their home because they've been forced to marry early, a place to freely share their experience."[124] In her article "The Texture of Retracing in Marjane Satrapi's 'Persepolis'" (2008), Hillary Chute asks: "what does it mean for an author to *literally* reappear—in the form of a legible, drawn body on the page—at the site of her inscriptional effacement? Graphic narratives that bear witness to authors' own traumas and those of others materially retrace inscriptional effacement; they reconstruct and repeat in order to *counteract*."[125] I suggest an application of this idea to *Broderies* as well: while Iranian women have for so long been limited to the private sphere, and talked about as if they had no agency, Satrapi places these characters precisely in the privacy of the matriarch's home, yet gives them a voice to discuss the most unbearable of experiences with men that they for so long were not able to speak on. These conversations between the women, which I will discuss in detail in the following section, defy the stereotype of a woman who has no agency, and showcase the tenacity of women who are expected to act modestly in public. Further, *Broderies* counteracts the image of the sad, oppressed woman locked in her home, with the image instead of strong women laughing about men's inadequacies and feeling empowered to turn to divorce or escaping when needed. Compared to *Persepolis*, which focuses heavily on revolution, on politics, and on worlds colliding, *Broderies* centers on the women who have lived the outcome of these politics, and who showcase the tenacity that existed in the private sphere all along. This text shows readers Iranian women who are powerful and unafraid, the precise opposite of the stereotypified image of the Iranian woman. Together, *Femmes d'Alger* and *Broderies* demonstrate snapshots of the

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[124] Leila Sadegh Beigi. "Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and *Embroideries*: A Graphic Novelization of Sexual Revolution Across Three Generations of Iranian Women." *International Journal of Comic Art*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2019, p.360.

[125] Hillary Chute. "The Texture of Retracing in Marjane Satrapi's 'Persepolis.'" *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, 2008, p.93.

intimate lives of women who are controlled in the public sphere, yet who demonstrate immense tenacity in the face of (colonial and patriarchal) misogyny. In their discussions about relationships with men, torture, and fear, both authors demonstrate a radical rejection of political (read: theocratic) control over their lives and the lives of other women in their respective countries. In telling these stories, the heterogenous historiographies of both revolutions are more clearly pieced together and readers come to understand a facet of women's lives in Islamic spaces previously inaccessible.

II. A Metaphorical Unveiling: How these Texts *Lift the Veil* Between Public and Private

Djebar and Satrapi echo one another in their demonstrations of modern Algerian and Iranian women who defy the stereotypes placed upon them as "oppressed individuals," in their invitations to readers to look past barriers and borders set up by the media and the State. These writers showcase what lies *behind the veil*, both metaphorically and literally, bringing readers closer to the intimate space that is so often forbidden to them. I chose these texts by Djebar and Satrapi because they stray from the mainstream expectations of what a story or novel ought to look like, which in itself adds to the notion of reassessing expectations in the public space. Neither of these texts evokes a fantastical plot—readers might consider the stories rather banal, following women simply living their lives. It is precisely this structure, however, which highlights the negation of an exotic or fetishized image of a woman in an Islamic space: she does not feed an exotic or sexual fantasy, but instead, she gathers with other women to express solidarity, to lean on one another, and to decompress against the expectations placed upon her in the public sphere.

The Hammam as an "Unconventional Archive"[126]

In *Femmes d'Alger*, Djebar brings readers closer to her characters, lifting the veil between public and private spheres of women's lives in Islamic spaces. She presents several short stories following a few different characters. Djebar finds a unique way to stray from expected textual and narrative structures. *Femmes d'Alger* weaves in and out of various narratives: the author ends chapters and begins anew without finishing the former, and then returns to the first story in the next chapter without finishing the latter. This establishes a confusing and jarring atmosphere for readers, while it builds the text as a multiplicity that I will discuss in the next section. In *Femmes d'Alger*, readers follow several women and families as they navigate life in Algeria, both during the revolution and in its aftermath. Because of the nature of the short stories being about multiple characters, readers do not remain in one place as they do in reading *Broderies*, a point to which I will return. What Djebar establishes, however, is precisely the feeling of interiority upon which Satrapi later also builds in *Broderies*, inviting readers into private and intimate spaces that would otherwise be forbidden to the public—"as a feminist historiographer, Assia Djebar looks at these places as unconventional archives that embody the stories of resistance of its female dwellers and subvert the very ideological function of these structures that force women into a marginal position that renders them invisible."[127] One of these spaces is the bathhouse (or hammam), where women, separated from the men, go (often with their children) to decompress and to find community. Reshmi Mukherjee writes in "Spaces of Resistance in Assia Djebar's *Ombre Sultane* and *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement*"

[126] Reshmi Mukherjee. "Spaces of Resistance in Assia Djebar's Ombre Sultane [A Sister to Scheherazade] and Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement [Women of Algiers in Their Apartment]." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2021, p.20.

[127] Mukherjee, 20.

(2021) that “the hammam […] is a radical space that enables women marginalized by class and/or gender to come together and break their silence. […] [It is] an open yet private space that facilitates the narration of personal memoirs; it culls the voices of women from across the different sections of postcolonial Algerian society and embodies it” (32). Djebar uses the bathhouse as precisely that: a space of decompression from the public sphere where women of different backgrounds come together to hear one another’s stories—but it is also a place where women do not answer to outer patriarchal forces. She shows readers that the hammam is a place for women of all walks of life, from mothers to friends to women safe to engage in sexual intimacy: “Ainsi, tandis que peu à peu des mères de famille avec enfants endormis et nourrissons geignants emplissaient la salle chaude, le couple des deux femmes installées sur la dalle, dominant les autres baigneuses, se renouait dans le rythme ahané, prenait forme étranger, arbre lent et balancé dont les racines plongeraient dans le ruissellement persistant de l’eau sur les dalles grises” (99). The hammam exposes a physical nakedness that is a metaphor for vulnerability and also contributes to the overall *lifting of veils*, over the intimacy of the private sphere and bringing readers into aspects of women’s lives that mostly male gazes had fantasized about. Mukherjee writes that in the context of the hammam, “naked bodies announce the freedom guaranteed by the space while serving as texts inscribed with individual stories of pain and suffering. These bodies carry the marks, signs, and signatures of various painful experiences that can visibly be read as substitutes for spoken language, thereby representing an alternative mode of communication” (33). In the hammam, Djebar describes women moaning or humming deep and sorrowful songs while others simply chat about their days—together, the women in this space let each other another simply be. The language that she uses, especially when entering the

bathhouse, is so descriptive that it pulls readers into this space, while avoiding a voyeuristic gaze.

> Fraicheur à présent de la seconde salle, avec tout autour des marches de pierre où l'on s'assoit. S'adosser contre le mur craquelé… Une sorte d'alcôve noirâtre dans un coin, où les femmes l'une après l'autre, au sortir de la chambre chaude, se rincent debout abondamment, se dévêtant du pagne furtivement, avec des pudeurs secrètes. Assises ensuite, toutes rosies, semblables, elles s'apprêtent à s'alléger : conversations ou monologues déroulés en mots doux, menus, usés, qui glissent avec l'eau, tandis qu'elles déposent ainsi leurs charges des jours, leurs lassitudes. (100)

The point of the sensory vocabulary is to have readers feel the coolness of the stone, the heat from the steam, hear the sighs of relief and relaxation from the women, and most importantly, understand the private world of their self-care, both physical and mental: cleansing bodies as well as unburdening minds: away from a titillating space of voyeuristic expectations, Djebar's hammam is a safe space of sighs and conversation, of exchanges. In so doing, the author lifts the veil between public and private spheres: letting us into this space gives us a glimpse into a private world where secrets, joys and worries are shared, and women are free to be themselves. Not only do we witness women temporarily freed from patriarchal expectations, but we are given the chance to self-reflect on our freedom. Djebar does not only bring the hammam to readers, but she brings readers to the hammam. She also hints at the communal aspect of the bathhouse—it is not necessarily a place for a woman to go be alone (though she can do so), rather it is an escape for women to come together away from the societal pressures of keeping modesty and remaining in the household. The hammam is thus a central component to Djebar's demonstration of how women come together in the private sphere to create space for one another, and to find internal community. In bringing readers into the hammam, Djebar lifts this metaphorical veil between the public and the private and invites us to hear women in their inarticulate moaning, their singing, and their talking, all while nude in a steamy dark room within the public bath. Djebar

communicates the sounds, smells, and sights of the bathhouse to readers who can thus perceive of the existence of an alternative space for the bodies and minds of women to experience freedom and collective belonging.

Afternoon Tea: Le Ventilateur du Cœur[128]

The structure of Satrapi's *Broderies* also defies expectations, in this case in its genre as a graphic novel. Though technically a graphic novel, *Broderies* does not follow the traditional structure of a graphic novel or a novel "tout court". The text does not have panels or gutters, but seems to be one long, endless scene which varies slightly from page to page:

> The pages of this book are filled with text; much of the dialogue is in speech bubbles, but there is a significant amount of dialogue and narration outside conventional speech bubbles and text boxes. The pages embody the joy of unrestrained speech as the words spill out onto the page. All the text in this book is in cursive handwriting—a stylistic device that not only emphasizes intimacy and informality but also adds to the sense that the narrative unfolding here is taking place outside of the usual graphic narrative structure: text boxes, frames, and panels. The images of the canvas and of the needle and thread make a visual statement about the interconnectedness of stories, repeating once again the theme of weaving together intergenerational narratives (Naghibi 111)

In *Broderies*, Satrapi toys with readers' traditional expectations of a graphic novel, asking them to consider a different approach, in the same way that she asks them to reconsider their approach to understanding Iranian women. There are no traditional frames or panels (and therefore no gutters)—instead, each full page tells an equal part of the story, mimicking a more natural storytelling technique that does not rely on organization and structure, but that exits the mouth as quickly as it enters the brain. Donaldson writes that "this gutter-less technique, in which the narrative spills off the borders of the page, visually invites readers to not only witness but to join

[128] *Broderies,* no page indication.

in the story."[129] On each page, text takes up roughly the same amount of space as drawing. Satrapi does use speech bubbles, but not exclusively, which adds to the layered ambiguity of the storytelling technique. Not having a set structure with speech bubbles and standard panel distribution takes readers away from the preestablished agreement between author and reader and instead brings them closer to the intimate private sphere at the very basis of the text. Without structures to guide them, readers are asked to engage with the story in such a way that forces them to become a part of this world of intimacy. In the example below, Marjane's grandmother sits in her parlor alone drinking tea. Half the page is taken up by text, and the other half with a drawing.

Figure 14

[129] Donaldson, 114.

The drawing style itself is one of Satrapi's signature, using intense black and white contrast which Satrapi states "doesn't allow you to bluff at all", unlike color[130], and more cartoonlike faces, paying special attention to facial expression: "in head, torso, full-frontal and profile shots, each woman has distinct physical features: differently shaped noses, eyes, lips and eyebrows, moles in unique spots, and varying hair textures and styles. These features are expressive and adapt to highlight shifting emotional and physical states.[…] Each woman is an individual with her own *histoire*, and this comes across in characterization and organization."[131] Satrapi combines text and image together to create a fluid experience for readers, void of panels like in a traditional graphic novel: "The illustrations, based on a real story with real characters, portray the informal and intimate atmosphere of an evening gathering of women in Satrapi's grandma's home. The lack of panels suggests the lack of physical action, which situates the narrative as an intellectual and emotional experience."[132] On this page alone, there are three different types of text. First, there is a narrative box with a hand-drawn wavy border at the top of the page which reads: "le samovar du midi et du soir", thus labeling the scene and framing it in time, which follows shortly after the opening scene in which the larger family sits at the lunch table together. Now, the matriarch retreats to her salon to drink tea and gossip with the other women. The second type of text on the page is a small paragraph offering background information on the tradition of tea and gossip. Evidently, this description comes from the voice of narrator Marjane :[133] "Le thé qu'on préparait à ces moments-là avait un tout autre rôle. Tout le monde se

[130] Donaldson, 123.

[131] Donaldson, 123.

[132] Beigi, 358.

[133] We know that Marjane is the narrator because in a previous page, Satrapi writes, "le samovar, c'était mon devoir" alongside an image of the grandmother asking Marjane to tend to the tea.

réunissait autour de cette boisson afin de s'adonner à son activité favorite : LA DISCUSSION. Mais cette discussion avait aussi sa signification bien à elle." Directly below this description, the matriarch (in a black dress and pearls, a typical urban grandmother's outfit) is drawn seated with her tea in hand, paired with a speech bubble which reads: "parler derrière le dos des autres est le ventilateur du cœur…". Satrapi structures the page in such a way that allows the character to respond to the "voice-over" narration, creating a sort of multiplied narration. Evidently, the grandmother is isolated in this instance—we do not see any other characters on the page, yet she still has a speech bubble which tells us that she speaks aloud, perhaps words Satrapi cites from memory, compared to a thought bubble which would imply interiority. This gives readers a sense of closeness to the characters and a feeling that a metaphorical veil between the character and the reader is lifted. As readers, we gain a sense of informality and closeness, as if Marjane and her grandmother welcome us into their home to take part in and understand the samovar tradition. It is in this moment that "readers unfamiliar with Iran are guests given the privilege of partaking in a civilized quotidian activity that is steeped in rich cultural traditions."[134] We are not, as readers, presented with a series of panels to follow a story. Instead, we enter the story ourselves, to drink tea with these women and to listen to their collective pasts.

Interiority as a Form of Resistance

This lifting of the veil by both authors brings readers into the interior, the space behind barriers and veils, the space where stereotypes and expectations do not necessarily apply. This is crucial to readers' understanding of what it means to be an Iranian or Algerian woman in the

[134] Donaldson, 120.

post-revolution. In *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (2012)[135], Kevin Quashie considers interiority from the perspective of Black culture:

> The idea of quiet is compelling because the term is not fancy—it is an everyday word—but it is also conceptual. Quiet is often used interchangeably with silence or stillness, but the notion of quiet […] is neither motionless nor without sound. Quiet, instead, is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life—one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fear. The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. In fact, the interior—dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less potent in its ineffability. Quiet. (6)

Quashie argues that Black culture is placed in a single box, one of outward expression that keeps Black people and culture within the confines of a certain idea of public or outward expression. He writes that "This assumption [that Black expressiveness is exclusively public] is troubling because it ties black expression to the discourse of resistance; that is, without other concepts with which to understand expressiveness, resistance becomes the lingua franca of black culture" (21). That is to say that Black culture is presented in a way that does not allow for the interior to be spoken about. He gives the example of the civil rights movement, arguing that all the outward public protests are discussed but never the internal battles, never the interior life. To this, he asks: "is it possible to portray the civil rights movement in a way that celebrates the inner life, in a way that uses the notion of interiority as a template for thinking about black collectivity?"(76). I suggest Quashie's concept of the "sovereignty of the quiet" is applicable to Algerian and Iranian women's collectivity. Can we discuss the Algerian and Iranian Revolutions and their aftermaths without acknowledging and exploring the quiet interior lives of those most affected by it? Whereas women have been the most affected by the new Islamic governments of the post-revolution and the worldwide mediatic cherry-picking of their representations, why is it that we

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[135] Kevin Quashie. "The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture." *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, Rutgers University Press, 2012.

do not care to consider their interior lives and selves? Focusing solely on outer, public events and dress code does not allow for the full scope of Algerian and Iranian women's experiences to be understood, and it does not make space to approach what is at stake when we leave these internal struggles and communities out of the discourse.

Quashie describes this inner space as "not what is sure and singular and public, but what is interior and complicated and dynamic" (20). In both *Femmes d'Alger* and *Broderies* the authors draw on this sense of interiority, of letting readers into a private and intimate space where others in the public cannot or have not gone before. This is also a *complicated* space as Quashie writes, unlike the more public spaces that are perhaps more one dimensional. In *Femmes d'Alger*, for example, several spaces within the stories bring us into the interior, such as the bathhouse and the home. In one scene in the section titled *avant*, for example, readers are inside the apartment home with exiled Algerians Aïcha, Anissa, their sister, and their mother. The scene itself precedes the death of an exiled neighbor and is quite banal considering what it leads to, yet it perfectly captures the feeling of interiority which I previously discussed. The chapter begins: "Ce matin-là, j'avais fini le ménage un peu plus tôt, vers neuf heures. Mère avait mis son voile, pris le couffin ; sur le seuil de la porte, elle avait répété comme tous les jours depuis trois ans : -il a fallu que nous soyons chassés de notre pays pour que je sois obligée d'aller faire le marché comme un homme" (141). In this snippet of daily life in exile, Djebar brings readers into the domestic sphere with a mother and her children while the father and brother work in the day. Readers infer that the daughter is doing housework and we see the mother prepare to shop for groceries. The simplicity of the vocabulary conveys chores familiar to all female readers, inviting closeness to characters as they begin another day in exile yet stick to daily chores. The mere fact of hearing the mother complain about grocery shopping makes readers privy to a

paradox and the complicated nature of life in exile: the mother resents the fact that she now must veil herself and shop for groceries, when before perhaps her husband would do the shopping. There are several moments such as this throughout *Femmes d'Alger* which pull readers into the interior experience of Algerian women. While there are men present throughout the book, these moments of interiority are based around women. When men are present in the chapter, they do not share a sense of communal space like the women—they are present in all spheres, in workspaces and in the home, but there is a certain disconnect between the women and the men. In the scene above, for example, there are no men present initially. It is the women who are in the home when the death of the neighbor takes place, it is the women who are home to clean and purchase groceries for the family, and it is the women with whom readers feel a sense of closeness. When men do appear in the scene, the women have already taken care of the majority of the drama. The men come home from work as individuals and not as community, to be served[136] or to involve themselves as patriarchal figures, having the final say in conversations with the women or within the family. Most important, however, is the general absence of men. Of course, this is a story for and about women, to highlight their struggles, to showcase their tenacity and how they keep their community afoot. Djebar does include men such as fathers and brothers, but they are minor characters—they are mainly away at work while the women sustain community. On the one hand, writes Katarina Melić in her article "Hearing Silent Voices: Women and History in Assia Djebar's Novels" (2017), "Djebar montre comment, dans ce nouveau paradis, les femmes vivent en fait une dégradation de leur situation ; la porte du harem s'est refermée, les femmes ne jouissent pas de leur liberté, les hommes semblent avoir oublié les

[136] "J'aimais servir Père ; c'était, je crois, le seul travail domestique qui me plaisait" (146).

femmes."[137] At the same time, however, Djebar showcases how, even if women have been forgotten in the wake of revolution, they are equally headstrong and will not be silenced: "Assia Djebar rompt avec le silence de l'écriture qui s'est imposé après la première période, et transforme celle-ci en une voix collective qui se donne pour devoir de dévoiler les nombreux silences qui couvrent l'histoire de la femme en Algérie, et de là, celle de l'Algérie."[138] In highlighting the multiplicity of women's voices, Djebar points to these interior spaces in which women's community is freely expressible. Spaces like the hammam or the interior of an apartment (on multiple accounts, in multiple scenes) might seem banal, yet their treatment by Djebar offers a vantage point to offset the orientalized spaces and women depicted by art and literature (Gérôme's harem paintings, Delacroix's odalisques, Loti's ghosts). Replacing or displacing a long tradition with more authentic representations contributes to educating readers about Algerian womanhood in the post revolution.

In *Broderies,* Satrapi does not feature as much mobility as Djebar does in *Femmes d'Alger*, yet like Djebar she evokes a sense of complexity and multiplicity. She begins the text with all family members (men and women) sitting around a table for an intimate meal together. Following the meal, the men retreat to another room and the women remain in the salon to drink tea together and share stories that would otherwise be eclipsed by men's stories. We are pulled from the communal, public space where a woman is held to certain gendered expectations and we are brought into a more complicated space where women are less bound by those outward expectations of gendered performance. The banter of the women, their raw stories of marriage and sex told in the loosely structured pages of the graphic novel stand in contrast with the

[137] Katarina V. Melić, "Hearing Silent Voices: Women and History in Assia Djebar's Novels." *Etnoantropološki Problemi*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2017, p. 226.

[138] Melić, 224.

muteness of the stereotypically oppressed Iranian woman wearing her hijab in public. Like in *Femmes d'Alger*, though men are a part of these stories, they are not the protagonists. The women in *Broderies* carry on with their lives in spite of the men who have hurt or betrayed them, which is a metaphor for Iranian women versus the Iranian patriarchal government. As these characters share stories of rejecting men or turning away from them, Iranian women suddenly become much less of a mystery and much more relatable as human individuals. Remaining in this salon together and witnessing these stories creates a sense of closeness to characters who are not depicted either as heroines or "others", but as average Iranian women engaged in a routine gathering. In addition to turning their backs to othering and heroization as modes of representation, the text resists the reduction of Iranians and Iranian women to their public, veiled self.

In both *Femmes d'Alger* and *Broderies,* readers feel a sense of interiority, closeness to the lives of women who maintain the family and household and who build community among one another to uphold their culture and traditions, specifically in private places such as the bathhouse in Algeria and in Marji's grandmother's parlor in Iran. This interiority is more complex than simply being invited into women's exclusive spaces. While in both texts readers are invited into these spaces, readers are also displaced in both. In *Femmes d'Alger*, there is a transitory aspect: we move around from home to bathhouse to man's work. And while we do, in *Femmes d'Alger*, find a sense of the interior, of the inner life of Algerian women, we also witness how they move about in this world. All this movement is to show that women's existence and bodies are not stagnant. They are not withheld in these interior places. Rather, they play different roles within the interior versus the exterior. In *Broderies*, the book is set in the grandmother's salon, yet at the same time the narrative moves from memory to memory, drawing flashbacks (a point to which I

return in the last section), and readers experience this temporal displacement even if the eye never leaves the drawn space of the salon on the pages. Quashie writes that the interior is complicated, among other descriptors, and it is exactly that. Images of the Algerian and Iranian revolutions full of violence and oppression, especially towards women, while true, narrowed perspectives, as well as that of the propaganda's representation of young Algerian girls carrying guns. These images were not fabricated, but they were curated to feed a certain image of the Algerian or Iranian women that dismissed ordinary women in their homes, simply trying to carry on with life. Djebar and Satrapi offer a different perspective: one that lifts a veil on the inner lives of women, but also suggests the profound dual nature of their mere existence. Being an Algerian or Iranian woman—be it pre or post revolution— entails, on the one hand, a traditional and gendered performance within their society, but on the other hand, a performance of tenacity and audacity that blossoms in the domestic sphere, unseen and unrecognized unless female artists take to their pen and brush. Djebar and Satrapi are not only reckoning, however, with this complexity between the private and public sphere, but they also highlight the multiplicity within these women's stories. In the following part, I analyze how these authors make a case for the complex nature of Algerian and Iranian women's identities, this time by evoking a sense of multiplicity, of multiple voices and stories creating one greater, nuanced notion of what it is to be an Algerian or Iranian woman, reminding us that there is no one image that can stand as a marker for these identities.

III. Multiplicity : How Djebar and Satrapi Convey the Complex Nature of Muslim Women's Identities

My project has, thus far, been centered around debunking a one-dimensional perspective of what it means to be a second-class citizen in a country in transition. Mediatic representations of Algerian and Iranian women, which inform public opinions, all point to stereotypical images of women which are not necessarily *mis*representations, but are not *full* representations, including how they fit into the greater revolutionary zeitgeist. For example, in the case of the Algerian revolution, the focus was placed on either young women holding guns or on older "traditional" women also wearing hijab. Not only were these images not reflective of the lived experience of these women specifically, but they also did not speak to the full scope of the events in their respective countries. In the case of the Iranian Revolution, histories often leave out how much women fought back and protested in the streets against men taking control of their bodies, and how important their roles were in the revolution. Instead, visual and print media focused solely on images of women in black chadors which make up a smaller percentage of Iranian women. The over generalization of representations of Algerian and Iranian women is also problematic because of the lack of diversity in the voices shared. Joan Scott writes that in order to answer the question of why the world seems to be obsessed with the image of the veiled woman as the spokesperson for all Muslims or people in Islamic spaces, we need to first consider the way in which those creating these laws think only in Manichean binaries: "traditional versus modern, fundamentalism versus secularism, church versus state, private versus public, particular versus universal, group versus individual, cultural pluralism versus national unity, identity versus equality" (5). She clarifies that "these dichotomies do not capture the complexities of either Islam or 'the West'. Rather, they are polemics that in fact create their own reality: incompatible cultures, a clash of civilizations" (5). Presenting women in Islamic spaces as silent, strictly veiled, therefore oppressed, eliminates the nuances of their tenacity and audacity to keep fighting

oppression, be it oppression in their own country or oppression brought on by damaging stereotypes in Western media. The stereotype also erases the fact that it is a *collective* story that cannot be told from only one individual's perspective. By collective story, I mean that these stories are representative of not just one person's or character's struggles, but they represent masses of women in Islamic spaces who have had identical or similar experiences, who have been censored, silenced, or killed so that they could not speak or intervene in systemic patriarchal oppression. Melic writes, for example, that Djebar "insiste sur la nécessité de ressusciter par l'écriture les nombreuses voix réduites au silence" (220), and that "c'est à travers la sororité que Djebar s'efforce d'inciter ses sœurs à enlever toutes les sortes de voiles" (225). This idea of sisterhood should not be read as a global sisterhood, but as a shared understanding among women in Islamic spaces, a shared trauma among women who have been robbed of the opportunity to share their lived experiences, and who are then reduced to unfortunate stereotypes: "Chaque femme a une voix, même dans un silence éloquent; elle parle pour elle-même, pour toutes les générations derrière elle et devant elle, pour les femmes dont les sons ont été en effet coupés par le patriarcat, pour les femmes qui ne peuvent être ni vues ni entendues, séquestrées à l'intérieur, voilées à l'extérieur, telles de fantômes."[139]

Writers like Djebar and Satrapi remind us that much of the trauma experienced by Algerians and Iranians during and after their respective revolutions was also part of a *collective* trauma—and that the women experiencing and fighting back did so together. In both of their texts, these writers offer a sense of collective memorializing through multiple voices in conversation. The titles themselves are homages to this idea. *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* is a title of two meanings. Most obviously, the title gestures to Eugene Delacroix's

[139] Melić, 226.

artwork of the same name from 1834 which is on the cover of Djebar's edition. The title, both for Delacroix and for Djebar, references plurality—*femmes d'Alger* and not *femme d'Alger*. When Djebar names her collection of short stories after this landmark Romantic artwork she *re-entitles* the women who were previously appropriated by a white French painter who visited Algeria and offered "exotic" women in tableaux catering to Orientalizing taste. Djebar writes in her Postface about the circumstances that led Delacroix to his painting, how he was invited into the home of the chief engineer of the harbor of Algiers:

> Un ami de l'ami, Cournault, nous rapporte les détails de l'intrusion. La maison se trouvait dans l'ex-rue Duquesne. Delacroix, accompagné du mari et sans doute de Poirel, traverse « un couloir obscur » au bout duquel s'ouvre, inattendu et baignant dans une lumière presque irréelle, le harem proprement dit. Là, des femmes et des enfants l'attendent "au milieu d'un amas de soie et d'or". L'épouse de l'ancien raïs, jeune et jolie, est assise devant un narguilé ; Delacroix, rapporte Poirel à Cournault qui nous l'écrit, « était comme enivré du spectacle qu'il avait sous ses yeux » (239).

In her description of the circumstances, Djebar chooses the words *intrusion and intoxication* ("ennivré") . It is, indeed, an intrusion, not only for Delacroix to enter the harem, but also for spectators to be able to look into the harem. Djebar's problem is precisely with this intrusion, the phallic penetration of a feminine space by not one but three males (Delacroix, the husband, and a certain Poirel). She argues that the way in which these women are presented does not allow for them to be expressive, to live their truths because they have been captured and affixed in the painting, frozen, not able to speak for themselves or to demonstrate any other facet of their identities. In turn, they are stuck in the painting only to be observed, to be consumed, for people like Delacroix who see them as sensual, intoxicating or "envivrants" objects of desire.

> Le rêve lointain et proche dans les yeux perdus des trois Algéroises, si nous tentons d'en saisir la nature : nostalgie ou douceur vague, c'est pour, à partir de leur absence si manifeste, rêver à notre tour la sensualité. Comme si derrière ces corps et avant que la servante ne laisse retomber le rideau, s'étalait un univers dans lequel, avant de s'asseoir devant nous, nous qui regardons, elles vivraient continuellement. (243)

Djebar argues that the way in which these women are painted drives even the most cautious spectator to see them as sensual objects, as a detached idea that is not real. She references a curtain falling again, a certain veil which separates their private world from ours, and this is precisely the veil that Djebar and Satrapi work to lift. Not because these women owe it to us to invite us into their worlds, but because it is crucial to see through what a white, European painter exoticized. Djebar writes that "entre elle et nous, spectateurs, il y a eu la seconde du dévoilement, le pas qui a franchi le vestibule de l'intimité, le frôlement surprise du voleur, de l'espion, du voyeur. […] Flotte donc, entre ces femmes d'Alger et nous, l'interdit. Neutre, anonyme, omniprésent" (244). In repurposing the same title that Delacroix uses for this painting, Djebar invites readers to reconsider the women who are frozen in that artwork. Is there more to their collective stories? Do they have their own thoughts and worries and joys? Are they intelligent? In writing her short stories and in imagining the inner lives of these women, Djebar appropriates an interdiction: but instead of violating the forbidden space she en-voices the women within, she embodies them to demonstrate movement and free will. Still, we intrude on their lives, but we are not voyeurs: we witness their motions and speech. They are not trapped in the harem; they are free to retreat to the bathhouse.

The title *Broderies* refers to a scene in the book in which the women discuss how to have one's hymen sewn up to pretend to be a virgin, to not anger the husband on the wedding night: "a reference to vaginoplasty (specifically the surgical tightening of the vagina for sexual purposes), "broderies" signifies the dually subversive nature of the text."[140] This act of literally having one's hymen sewn up is indicative of the patriarchal ownership of women's bodies: women are expected to adhere to certain moral rules such as keeping their virginity before marriage, and if

[140] Donaldson, 122.

they do not, their husband (as we are speaking in heteronormative terms to begin with, under Iranian law) will punish them, a severity of which we are unsure. At the same time that the title refers to the sewing of a person's hymen, it also refers to the ways in which women's stories can be sewn together to create a metaphorical quilt of stories: "vaginoplasty, briefly raised three quarters through the book, is but one of many topics discussed: marriage, divorce, love, sex, virginity, cosmetic surgery, and so on. Seemingly scratching the surface in regard to each topic, the comic book manages to represent multiple experiences and perspectives, emphasizing the art and craft of 'broderies.'"[141] Embroidery, in this case, represents the joining of a multitude of voices and experiences to showcase this collective history, to which I previously made reference. Donaldson also points to how Satrapi, herself, pieces together these stories in her graphic novel: "in place of needle and thread, Satrapi uses pen and ink, and with these instruments of authorship and fine art, she graphs a patchwork of pictures and words—pop culture comics—to record a conversation among eight women in a living room in Tehran" (122). But embroidering is a craft that goes beyond mere sewing together: it suggests aesthetics, a quest for beauty, finesse, and imagination, which I discuss more in the following section. The metaphor of embroidery hints at the conditions of women in Iran who must both go to enormous lengths to uphold standards created by men and who, at the same time, break away from these standards to piece together their own idea of what an Iranian woman ought to be.

A World Without Men

Aside from their titles, these texts are centered not only on multiple voices, but specifically on the amplified and plural voices of *women*. Djebar and Satrapi tend to explore

[141] Donaldson, 122.

spaces without men. In *Femmes d'Alger*, Djebar demonstrates an internal tenacity among women that reclaims their identities and voices and showcases their refusal to be forgotten or spoken for. I explained previously how Delacroix came to paint his first version of *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* after visiting Morocco and then Algeria. This intrusion into the harem which I previously discussed is important because Djebar's choice of title, and the publisher's selection of the painting as the cover of her book, are powerful points of reference *and* protest against Delacroix as a symbol of the European colonial gaze. I wrote in the previous section that Djebar uses this title as an opportunity for readers to ask themselves what lays beyond the frozen image of these women in the harem. I argue that Djebar does not only ask the question of what lays beyond the frozen image, but she also shows us directly, to what extent these women are powerful and tenacious outside of this one moment devoured by the colonizer's eyes. In other words, Djebar's first act in presenting a communal world without men, or a world *in spite of* men, is to reclaim this title and image for Algerian women. In her afterword to *Femmes d'Alger*, Clarisse Zimra writes that:

> This "world without men" is not necessarily inimical to men, but it has no use for them as long as they insist on limiting the lives of women. Nor does Djebar, in this intertextual rewriting of Delacroix's vision, advocate a Pollyannish cross-pollination between Western and non-Western values. She has been battered enough by the postwar politics of her country to have lost her illusions. More modestly, and perhaps more courageously, she speaks for a personal freedom that would liberate men and women from the shackles of tradition, wherever and whenever these features hinder their mental and physical wellbeing. In so doing, she speaks for us all. (211)[142]

In reclaiming *Les femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* both as an image and as a concept, Djebar works to liberate Algerian women from the tradition or stereotype of the harem. She shows them carrying out regular tasks such as grocery shopping or braiding their hair, as well as

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[142] Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. Translated by Marjolijn de Jager. University Press of Virginia, 1999.

going through severe trauma such as death and mourning. Djebar shows readers women who are not angry at men, but who do not *need* men. Zimra writes in her afterword that in each short story in *Femmes d'Alger*, the real tragedy and damage brought about by war affects the men more severely, "for the women, however imperfectly, have each other. They have a history that binds them together because, as the great-grandmother of the "Horde" makes plain, it has come down to them through the centuries of the oral tradition: a chain of women bound by a chain of stories by means of which they resist simultaneously the brothers' amnesia and the conqueror's brutality" (208). Djebar demonstrates this sorority among Algerian women frequently throughout the book—and this idea of women being able to turn to one another in times of crisis is precisely how Djebar goes about presenting this sorority. In an earlier section of this chapter, I discussed one scene in the section titled *avant,* in which readers are inside the apartment home with exiled Algerians Aïcha, Anissa, their sister, and their mother. In this scene, the exiled women hear commotion coming from next door, from the neighbors who are also exiled Algerians. They soon come to find that the neighbors' young son has been killed. In this scene, men are absent—they have all gone off to work and the women are left to address the murder. It is the women who help each other overcome the death of a small child by cooking for each other and talking with one another. They plan the burial and make all arrangements until the point at which the men return to join them. Before any of this, however, readers witness an intimate moment in the apartment, before the women help with their neighbors' mourning, where they comfort one another and ground one another:

> Les cris commencèrent vers dix heures, une heure après environ. Ils venaient de l'appartement voisin et se transformèrent bientôt en hurlements. Toutes les trois, mes deux sœurs, Aïcha, Anissa et moi-même, la reconnûmes à la manière qu'avaient les femmes de l'accueillir : c'était la mort. […] A ce moment, Mère entra. Elle posa le couffin par terre, s'arrêta le visage bouleversé et se mit à frapper sa poitrine de ses mains, spasmodiquement. Elle poussait de petits cris étouffés comme lorsqu'elle allait se trouver

> mal. Anissa, bien qu'elle fût la plus jeune d'entre nous, ne perdait jamais son sang-froid. Elle courut fermer la porte, enleva le voile de Mère, la prit par les épaules et la fit asseoir sur un matelas. « Ne te mets donc pas dans cet état pour le malheur des autres ! dit-elle. N'oublie pas que tu as le cœur malade ! Que Dieu nous garde toujours à l'abri ». (142)

In this scene, readers are brought into the intimate space of the apartment when the shrieks and cries are heard. Djebar writes that the sisters recognized the yelling by the way in which the women received it, knowing instantly that it was a cry of death. This short yet powerful line indicates a pattern to which the women have grown accustomed. It shows us that this is not the first cry of mourning that they have heard, and that surely it will not be the last. Living in exile during a revolution means witnessing repeated violence and heartbreak—in this case, the women are so accustomed to such a feeling of grief that they resort to autopilot mode, falling into the roles that ensure that they care for one another. The mother comes back inside and begins to beat her chest. The youngest daughter tends to her mother immediately, removing her headscarf and calming her, telling her not to become upset by another's misfortune. The automatism of care shows readers again that this is a practiced routine, one with which they are so familiar that it is second nature, because grief is a part of their daily life. And not only is grief part of their daily life, but so is overcoming grief, making sure one does not become overwhelmed with sadness, which could easily happen while living in exile from one's country. This scene demonstrates to readers not only this level of habitual grief, but again how women turn to each other and take care of one another. They do not wait for men to return to ameliorate traumatic situations—amidst death, mourning, and grief, the women in their multiple roles and stories help each other to get through grieving. In this death scene, it is evident that it is not only one woman who is affected, but the entire group—this brings us back to the notion of multiplicity, of the echoing of grief and trauma that must be studied as a whole and not in convenient fragments as is it often is. In the following section, I examine another aspect of this private sphere, which is how Algerian

and Iranian women in the post-revolution long for imagined times and how they think about time in general. This feeling of longing for another time is an aspect of the private sphere that is often left unconsidered. To think about time in such a way, that is to say always looking to the trauma of the past, is to never fully let go of the past and of the trauma. The women in these texts reckon with serious difficulty related to unrealized lives and dreams, and they demonstrate to what extent they are perhaps frozen in another time.

In *Broderies*, the matriarch leads the way for women to separate themselves from the men following the meal, but it is much more than that. The entirety of *Broderies* depicts a group of women sharing their stories, mainly involving past loves and marriages, and how they found strength in themselves despite the patriarchal expectations of a woman's role in a man's life. In the following scene, for example, the women discuss their past marriages or lack thereof, showcasing the strength that they carry in matters of the heart.

Figure 15

On this page, Marji's grandmother (top left) tells the other women about her multiple past marriages. Marji's aunt responds by saying that one marriage was enough to steer her away from men for a lifetime, which demonstrates the ability to be alone, to not need a man. Most thought provoking, however, is the dialogue between Marji and her other aunt. At the bottom of the page, her aunt says to her: "il faut que tu fasses très attention au choix de ton futur époux. Ne te marie jamais avec le cœur mais avec le cerveau". Essentially, Marji's aunt is telling her not to choose a spouse for *love*, but for practical and perhaps even tactical reasons. Most women would most likely hear the opposite from a loved one, to marry someone they love, regardless of the circumstances. Why, then, give this advice? Why tell Marjane to marry with her brain and not her heart? The aunt's words point to the strength of Iranian women surviving the most paternalist of societies post-revolution. Telling Marji to be logical in her decision to marry reflects the ways in which Iranian women learned never to fully invite a man into their spaces, and to never fully rely upon a man either. Furthermore, this kind of thinking demonstrates that they do not feel the need for codependency with a man. To marry a man is a tactical decision, for a woman to see how she can take advantage of the union, regardless of whether there is love between the two, and how the man can benefit her. The fact that we see multiple women on this page discussing their lack of a need for a man again adds to this echoing of female voices, picked up by the repetition of their heads across the page.

In *Women Write Iran*, Nima Naghibi writes that "[*Broderies*] actually ends on a note of metaphorical castration" (112), citing a scene in which "Grandfather Satrapi wakes up from his nap and wanders into the women's gossip session only to find himself betrayed by his wife, who orders him to return to sleep: 'it's better for you,' she says" (112). This final scene is juxtaposed with the opening scene in which the women clean up from the lunch that they have served to the

men. In the closing scene, the women serve only themselves and do not allow a man (even the family patriarch) to penetrate the metaphorical walls they have put up to be able to speak freely about their lives. Here, women take up the unisex space they desire to speak freely without worrying about the presence of men, who are evidently not invited into the space and are explicitly excluded when they try to enter. Furthermore, women hold this space among themselves sacred—a man does not belong and is not allowed in their safe sanctum. In "Femmes, humour et voix narratrice dans les romans graphiques de Marjane Satrapi" (2014), Martine Motard-Noar suggests that "Dans *Broderies*, si les femmes n'ont pas la possibilité de faire la sieste, elles ont la liberté de se réunir autour d'un samovar et de discuter après avoir fait la vaisselle. Si elles discutent de mariages forcés, elles semblent aussi faire preuve de résilience. Leur parole se libère, jusque dans la crudité du langage tenu envers les hommes et leurs parties génitales."[143] This is not the only instance in the book that points to women taking their power into their own hands. The title itself, *Broderies*, lends itself to two different interpretations, which I mentioned before. On the one hand, it is the multiple stories of Iranian woman coming together to create a global experience of Iranian womanhood. On the other hand, and more relevant to a discussion of a world without men, is the surgery to which it refers, to sew up one's hymen to feign virginity on her wedding night. Donaldson writes that "this procedure—like nose jobs and other modes of body modifications mentioned in the book—reveals how Iranian women contend with state and cultural monitoring of their bodies" (122). The simple fact of this procedure being mentioned is taboo-breaking because it is not something that is discussed in public. To bring readers into a space in which they even hear about such a procedure is to show them precisely what measures a woman might take both to retain ownership of her body and at

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[143] Martine Motard-Noar, "Femmes, Humour et Voix Narratrice Dans Les Romans Graphiques de Marjane Satrapi." *Women in French Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2014, p.34.

the same time to survive the patriarchal expectations of her society. Furthermore, the older generation passing down this knowledge to the younger generation makes evident that this is not an individual act, but rather one that multiple women have transmitted to each other to assist one another against paternalist societal norms, in this case virginity. In other scenes of the graphic novel, the women show repeatedly how they reject the notion that their body is for a man's pleasure. Satrapi draws scenes in which they escape arranged marriages to much older men and loveless marriages with men who they previously idealized. These scenes together demonstrate to readers the fact that while Iranian women have been and continue to be oppressed due to a paternalistic Islamic State, they at the same time continue to be tenacious, to escape these binds, and to maintain their power as women. Between the multiple stories of women in Marjane's family brought together as one greater history, and the family members specifically teaching the younger generation how to sew their hymen shut, *Broderies* as a title pays a powerful homage to the fierce Iranian women who have maintained their private strength and agency despite public oppression—this is not one woman's story, but the stories of a community. With the multiple varying stories of Marjane and her family members all discussing the different ways in which they have overcome heartbreak and trauma, readers see how women stand tenaciously together, with a multitude of voices and stories, against patriarchal silencing and oppression.

IV. Time in the Post-Revolution: A Longing for Imagined Times

In both *Femmes d'Algers* and *Broderies* the authors allude to the passage of time as a central function of living in the post-revolution, indicating that in both Algerian and Iranian diaspora, time is an essential part of how one understands their own identity. Often, individuals are stuck in the past due to trauma from violent events that occur during and after revolution. Or,

simply put, they are trapped in the past because of a distaste/lack of acceptance for the present. In *Femmes d'Alger*, Djebar addresses time in a much more concrete way than Satrapi. While *Broderies* flows freely between past and present, *Femmes d'Alger* is divided into concrete sections: *Aujourd'hui* and *Hier*. Djebar compartmentalizes these periods, which captures how individuals who experience trauma process time: Djebar must separate the two in her mind in order to properly piece them together. While the section titled *Aujourd'hui* is filled with stories about women and families in Algeria, living daily life, going to work, going to the bathhouse, and other daily banalities, the section titled *Hier* shows readers a glimpse into the mourning and sadness associated with revolution: these stories are mainly filled with death, exile, and grief. Djebar places an emphasis on the past, indicating a sense of longing or inability to move on from a past trauma: the section titled *Aujourd'hui* spans seventy-seven pages, while *Hier* spans ninety-two pages. This gives a sense of the past being more impactful than the present, which makes sense given the trauma of the revolution and the resulting displacement. Djebar, however, shows readers different thought processes around timing, again demonstrating a multitude of voices. In the chapter "Il n'y a pas d'exil" in the section titled *Hier*, readers follow Aïcha who is in exile in France with her family and who is forced to be set up romantically with a family friend's son. Aïcha is not given a choice in the matter, and she is frustrated because she wishes to move on from "old ways", from a tradition that for her, lives in the past now that she is in exile in another country. When her future mother-in-law approaches her, she tells her: "Tu es fiancée, dit-elle d'une voix triste. Ta mère a dit qu'elle te donnait. Accepteras-tu ? -et elle me fixait avec des yeux suppliants" (158). To this, Aïcha responds:

> Qu'importe ! dis-je, et je pensais réellement en moi-même : qu'importe ! Je ne sais ce que j'ai eu tout à l'heure. Mais elles parlaient toutes du présent, et de ses changements, et de ses malheurs. Moi, je me disais : à quoi donc cela peut-il servir de souffrir ainsi loin de notre pays si je dois continuer, comme avant, comme à Alger, à rester assise et à

> jouer…Peut-être que lorsque la vie change, tout avec elle devrait changer, absolument tout ! (158)

While Aïcha is certainly frustrated more with tradition, and while she is not necessarily speaking directly about time, this passage shows readers a different perspective compared to those of the other women. While the women surrounding her wish to grasp onto the past, to what is familiar, Aïcha wants nothing more than to let go of the immense trauma that she has faced. She asks herself why one would leave, to go into exile, if they wish to act as if nothing has changed. Aïcha's response is not in line with the women in *Broderies*, or even with the other women in *Femmes d'Alger*, who hold the past dearly. This reminds us of the multiplicity and echoes of many voices and stories, and not only those which fit a specific narrative.

In *Broderies*, Satrapi's narrative remains in the present, but readers experience multiple flashbacks with each family member recounting her story. In fact, though the setting is in the present, almost the entire book revolves around the past. Each page is filled with stories of past loves and marriages, childhoods, and gossip about other women's experiences in the past. In *Broderies*, Marjane and her female family members do not discuss the present—it is almost as if they refuse to acknowledge it. Because of the nature of the Iranian revolution that scarred so many individuals, especially women and children, there is a sense of longing for the lives they led before, or for the familiarity that they held before. Naghibi writes that "these life narratives emphasize the importance of memory, and of a careful remembering (in the sense of a piecing together) of personal stories of families and friends that have remained half told, lost in the frenzied shuffle between nations, between an Iran of their past and a (North) America, or Europe, of their present and future" (127). The women in *Broderies* tell each other stories about their youths, about their first marriages or loves—and in so doing, they highlight this need for *careful remembering*, as Naghibi writes, for holding on to these parts of themselves that are now distant

memories. The importance of time here is not just a longing for another time, but in many ways, it demonstrates a lack of healing from (and being stuck in) the past. For instance, in the following example, we return to Marjane's aunt Amineh who tells the story of going to be with her husband in Berlin when she was a young bride, before soon realizing that he would never be who she thought he would, that he would never care for her in the way that she had hoped. Readers see her arriving at the airport in Berlin, only to be met with an associate of her husband who could not have bothered to come retrieve her himself, which deeply hurt her, as she later recalls.

Figure 16

In this scene, readers see both the flashback in the foreground and the present in the upper left-hand side, where we can see Marjane and her aunt discussing the story. While Amineh tells Marjane the story in real time, she also relives what happened to her in the past in such a way

that brings the past to the foreground instead of the present. The opposite scenario would be Marjane's aunt in the foreground with her memories in a thought bubble or in the upper corner of the page—but it is the past around which Amineh centers herself. It is the past that not only haunts her but holds familiarity for her. For women in the post-revolution, there can exist a sense of dread for the present, living in a theocratic dictatorship that is not at all what they had hoped for. In turning to the past, they can find comfort and familiarity, and they can work to preserve this period of familiarity and safety. Satrapi also does not make a distinction between past and present: she draws both simultaneously, signifying that time and memory are not linear. Though the women meet in the present, they return solely to this time, almost with a group understanding that one is not to discuss the present.

The fact that *Broderies* centers itself on stories of past loves lost and of a more familiar time shows readers an aspect of the private sphere to which we again generally do not have access. Women continue with their lives in Iran, going to college, holding successful jobs, and maintaining the calm in their families. Beneath the routine tasks is the *internal* suffering, the longing for a time during which they did not hold anger or resentment towards the State. Naghibi writes, for example, that "these diasporic Iranian memoirs share a portrayal of the revolution as an individual and collective trauma, and all are driven by nostalgic memories of the prerevolutionary era. The dominant sentiments foregrounded in these memoirs are those of loss and mourning for another time and another place (pre-revolutionary Iran) and another life (the one they would have led had the revolution not occurred)" (132). And though in this case Satrapi draws nothing related to politics or the revolution, we can sense the collective trauma from the revolution, the collective reminiscing for more familiar times that now feel lost. One might ask why Satrapi chooses to draw these stories of love and sexuality instead of having the characters

reminisce on not having to wear hijab or any other *political* marker of another time. In centering the stories on love and sexuality, and most importantly, on rejecting male centered oppression and dominance, Satrapi shows readers the tenacity of women who refuse to let go of the more complex parts of their identities. And even though now under an Islamic Republic they may not be allowed to behave in the same way in public, they hold on to a time during which they were strong, when they left their husbands in foreign countries, and when they refused to marry men three times their age, perhaps precisely because these are the stories that might be forgotten. In *Broderies*, time functions on a continuum: between the past and the present, Satrapi draws Iranian women who do not let go of their power internally, who gather with other women and find community to share in nostalgia for lost past.

For both Djebar and Satrapi, temporalities frame revolutionary and post-revolutionary life. Due to the extreme trauma that Algerian and Iranian women faced, from being raped by soldiers (as discussed in chapter three) to being exiled from their homes, there exists a general desire not to let go of a past anterior to the revolution, of the times during which their lives (read: their futures) did not feel threatened. In both texts, holding on to the pre-war past is an essential function of survival. In another section of the above-mentioned chapter in *Femmes d'Alger*, Aïcha points to the past again, saying that "Durant cette guerre, on n'a compté ni les jours ni les mois. Et le temps d'avant-guerre semble un temps englouti, dont le souvenir lui-même s'efface" (162). She reminds us here that time, during periods of war and revolution, was not even something to consider—one had to focus, rather, on survival and on the present moment. After such events, Aïcha says that "le souvenir lui-même s'efface", and therefore, for so many of the women in these books, it is crucial to hold on to those fading memories, to that time which is

fleeting. Not only for it to not be erased for the individual, but it is also again to protect the group. Clarisse Zimra argues in her afterward that:

> since it is the women who were able to nurture the old ways, it may well be that in them resides the power to heal a society fractured by multiple conquests: a society that has looked to the West (the memories of the Moors' empire), then to the East (the unfurling of Islamic faith); has suffered through the Turkish occupation, the French colonization, and the subsequent war; and is now going through all the warring discords of the Pan-Arab failure, with its epigone, the swift rise of Islamic fundamentalism. When such a society, oblivious of its past, renews the confinement and abuse of its women, it is practicing a selective and lethal form of amnesia" (201).

Zimra highlights the struggles that Algerians have faced as a whole, and the fact that the violence that women, specifically, have endured is often left to be purposefully forgotten by the State. She writes that it is women, then, who ought to be the ones who hold on to the memories of the past so as to not repeat the trauma and disorientation. In holding onto the past, the women do not only protect themselves, but they protect an entire community of women with a sense of sisterhood. In *Broderies*, the women who recall the past in such a formulaic way (pouring the tea meant it was time for "la discussion") also hold this space for community. The women do not come together in the matriarch's salon to discuss politics or war, but they discuss who they are and the perils of being subject to predatory and paternalistic expectations by men. They discuss their hearts being broken and the lessons that they learned—all of which is both on an individual level but also to make sure that the stories remain present amongst the community, to never forget the past. In not letting go of these memories, the women in *Broderies* refuse to allow their identities to exclusively be shaped by the phallocracy and the theocracy.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Algers* (1980) and Marjane Satrapi's *Broderies* (2003) as they reflect the private sphere of Iranian and Algerian women's

lives that was never available to the public. Both ambitioned to displace the stereotypical mediatic representations of these women. Together, these texts present an archetype of the Algerian/Iranian woman that goes against the exoticizing and objectifying stereotypes of the "oppressed oriental woman." Instead, she holds her country together with her hard work and audacity to keep forging ahead. In this chapter, I briefly contextualized how male European travelers, artists and writers portrayed Algerian and Iranian women focusing mainly on their hair covering as a concrete marker of oppression and desiring to penetrate this barrier. This is an issue that women in Islamic spaces continue to battle—being written about without their input, without an understanding of their cultures and values, which keeps them trapped in the cycle of being limited to an oppressed stereotype that projects their need to be "saved". Djebar and Satrapi show readers Algerian and Iranian women who exist in their own rights, who take matters into their own hands, who hold community close to them to keep strong in the face of both institutional oppression and stereotypes that keep them in a cycle of oppression and dismissal. The characters in these texts ask questions of who they are versus who they were. They lean on one another because often no one outside of their community understands their interior selves, their true concerns, and their humanity. *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and *Broderies* show readers a kind of Algerian or Iranian woman who was always there, a woman who, just because she wore a headscarf (whatever the reason may be), was deemed incapable and oppressed, in need of saving, and therefore invisible and at the same time exotic and desirable. These writers offer readers a chance to join the group, to see women for their humanity and not for the oppressive clichés that hold them in a box.

V. CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LIBERATED?

In the preceding chapters, I identified the ways in which five writers—Djebar, Meralli, Satrapi, Djavadi, and Minoui—from Iran and Algeria, write against the preconceived ideas of both the Western world and their own countries of origin of what it means to be a woman in an Islamic space. These writers contend with questions of exoticism, orientalism, racism, and sexism, as well as strict censorship by the State. They fight back against fetishized images of de-veiled nude women in the harem, of the oppressed Muslim women who float like ghosts under their hijab yet who do not speak a word, of the women who serve their husbands and never themselves. These images are associated with a Western understanding of what a woman is and does in an Islamic space. She lacks a unique identity outside of her hijab, which allegedly oppresses her according to Western media which projects that she must be in need of being saved. This stereotyped image of the *oppressed Muslim woman* was born out of the travels of Western men who visited Muslim or Eastern countries and based their writings on their Eurocentric, orientalizing observations. In many ways, these Western perceptions of women in Islamic spaces as oppressed and voiceless still linger: it is the image of the Muslim woman who does not speak out, who keeps her veil tightly secured, but who anchors the family. The authors in my corpus write precisely against a notion of Muslim women in need of saving.

One the one hand, these writers contest this westernized image of the "oppressed oriental woman who ought to be saved." On the other hand, they also fight back against the nationalist discourse within their own countries (Iran and Algeria) that erases women's trauma as a result of their respective revolutions. In the triumphant historiography of independence movements from the West, a woman who has suffered violence at the hands of her own country is a "non-dit," to borrow terminology from *Je vous écris de Téhéran*. In the case of the Algerian revolution,

women figured heavily in the country's successful independence from French colonial rule, from active participation in guerilla warfare as part of the FLN, to essential support in feeding and housing combatants, to communication links in passing messages between communities and networks. In Iran, women fought hard for the success of the revolution and were in fact the first to lead protests in the streets of Aliabad. In each country, women experienced deaths and violence, both done unto themselves and on those around them.

Fast-forward to 2023: women take center stage in Iran to revolt against the death of one of them in custody of the police. Their revolt confirms both a continuation of Iranian repressive policing of women's bodies and the audacity of Muslim women publicly confronting their government. In 1979, Khomeini instituted the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran which glorifies women as keepers of the family:

> The family is the fundamental unit of society and the main centre for the growth and edification of human being. This view of the family unit delivers woman from being regarded as an object or as an instrument in the service of promoting consumerism and exploitation. Not only does woman recover thereby her momentous and precious function of motherhood, rearing of ideologically committed human beings, she also assumes a pioneering social role and becomes the fellow struggler of man in all vital areas of life. Given the weighty responsibilities that woman thus assumes, she is accorded in Islam great value and nobility.[144]

While women are allowed to hold jobs in government offices and in the public sphere, the constitution clearly identifies women as glorified keepers of the family unit. And while the Algerian constitution is more open to protecting women's rights in certain areas, women are also reminded that their value is attached to their role in the family unit: the Algerian Family Code, published by the government in 1984 "[requires] a male marriage guardian, [bars] Muslim

[144] Iranian Constitution, amended in 1989.

women from marrying non-Muslim men, and [restricts] grounds for divorce for women."[145] Still in Algeria, a law was passed in 2021 that "required half of the candidates on party lists to be women"[146] so as to appease women's complaints that they were not included in decision-making spaces. Yet even then, loopholes were found which essentially allowed for lists to be published without women's names on them so long as they were open to the public. "To make matters worse", argues Ahmed Marwane, "the new elections law adopted an open list and direct elections system, which meant that voters could choose the candidate they prefer from among the lists. In a patriarchal society, […] most voters are likely to choose men rather than women, severely curtailing the prospects of female candidates."[147] In these legislative documents, women are reduced or limited to a domestic sphere under patriarchal power, even if technically they are able to work and live their lives "freely." Regardless of women's agency during revolutionary times, these documents showcase that women remained officially confined to a patriarchal order dictating the role of women as family keepers.

The five authors in my project take on the responsibility to rewrite women into art and history, to write *Her* story. They expose their trauma and the violence they witnessed, and they open conversations to highlight their contribution to their respective countries' liberation despite State-sponsored censorship seeking to erase their stories, therefore their agency. In chapter two, Satrapi and Djavadi write their ten-year-old selves back into history, highlighting the struggles of young children coming of age during the revolution. They raise issues of police brutality and

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[145] "Women's Rights Have Improved in North Africa, but the Struggle Continues." *OpenDemocracy*, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/womens-rights-have-improved-in-north-africa-but-the-struggle-continues/. 2021.

[146] Ahmed Marwane. "Women and Politics in Algeria: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back." *The Washington Institute*, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/women-and-politics-algeria-one-step-forward-two-steps-back. 2021.

[147] Marwane. 2021.

racism, all experienced as trauma for a young child. The trauma of the revolution for the Burnt Generation was never acknowledged by the Islamic regime, though it devastated an entire generation of people who later had to come to terms with the memories of violence and the rifts in their identities. In chapter three, Meralli and Minoui highlight the institutional violence that is the result of revolution, as well as the erasure of women as fundamental components of resistance movements in Algeria and Iran. These novels trace the power of female liberation *despite* paternalistic censorship: though women are silenced by paternalistic figures (Beatrice's father and the media in *Algériennes*, the police and the media in *Je vous écris de Téhéran*), the protagonists insist upon their recognition as equally fundamental agents of revolution. Despite violent censorship (jail, torture, erasure), the women in these novels fight to be remembered, to be included in the historiographic discourse of nation building. In chapter four, Djebar and Satrapi open the doors to the inner circles of women which are typically unattainable to the public. They counteract the exoticized images conjured by early European artists and writers like Loti and Gérôme by demystifying the "impenetrable spaces" that were previously only described by the white European male gaze. Djebar and Satrapi dare to create a space for women's sexuality to be discussed—beforehand (and still) a taboo, therefore excluded from the public sphere. In liberating "la parole" they challenge masculinist control of women's freedom of speech, they showcase a sisterhood counteracting patriarchal censorship and erasure, and they celebrate women's tenacity in the face of patriarchal oppression.

Djebar, Meralli, Satrapi, Djavadi, and Minoui tell different stories about women and revolution, yet they all return to the same question: *what does it mean for a woman in/from an Islamic space to be liberated ?* Women in Islamic spaces have long been tokenized as symbols of societal virtues: if they remain veiled, it means that their society is oppressive; if they are

unveiled, it means that they are educated and that their society is progressive. As Said writes in *Orientalism*, women have long stood *for* certain ideologies and not *as* individuals. What happens, however, when women take the stand? Writers such as Djebar and Satrapi showcase the fact that women in Islamic spaces have always been present and fighting for their rights, despite the male centered stories that are given priority in the public sphere.

But to ask what it means for a woman in or from an Islamic space to be liberated requires first and foremost to reevaluate and de-center an understanding of liberation according to Western standards. In Western discourse, liberation may conjure up the work of second wave feminists like Simone de Beauvoir or women suffragettes like Susan B. Anthony. Yet deliberating about the Muslim hijab has most often ignored the perspectives of Muslim women themselves. I return to the citation by Nadiya Lazzouni that I presented in the introduction of this project: "on nous parle de nous mais on ne nous pose pas la question."[148] When Lazzouni says that we do not ask Muslim women *la question*, she is referring to the question of how Muslim women view their hijab. I argue that one can apply "on ne nous pose *pas* la question" to every area of women's lives in and from Islamic spaces. Satrapi, Meralli, Djebar, Djavadi, and Minoui take the challenge of asking about, and listening to, the raw experiences of women from Islamic spaces to envoice their struggles, nuances, and complexities. Satrapi and Djavadi represent children who suffer at the hands of a revolution they do not understand and yet are somehow demonized because of it. Meralli and Minoui testify that women were violently beaten and abused by the State to silence them or punish them for revolting. Djebar and Satrapi celebrate Muslim women who find normalcy in the wake of revolution, women who hold space for each other in an intergenerational community, so they can share their vulnerabilities. Adopting various

[148] "Nadiya Lazzouni 'Tout Le Monde Théorise Sur Le Hijab Mais on Ne Donne Pas La Parole Aux Concernées'", 2019.

genres—the novel, autobiographical writing, graphic novels—these Francophone women writers from outside the metropole seek to re-signify *liberation* and invite a rewriting of feminism that is inclusive.

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