

"Beyond the Front Lines: Memories of War in Middle
Eastern and North African Women's Literature

وراء خطوط المواجهة: ذكريات الحرب في أدب كاتبات من الشرق
الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا

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Abstract

Significant war literature has roots in works written by men before the twentieth century. Slowly, women writers who remember and narrate gendered violence in war have been added to the literary canon. Their works represent a duality in which they are at war with their societies' adversaries and their own male-dominated cultures. This article consists of an examination of selected works by women who write about their memories of the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and Western embargo on Iraq, the Islamic revolution in Tehran from 1979 to 1984, and the Algerian War for Independence from 1954 to 1962. *Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile* (2003) by Nuha al-Radi, *Persepolis* (2004) by Marjane Satrapi, and *Children of the New World* (2005) by Assia Djebar. These works were chosen because they illustrate that gender, race and class provide means by which cultural memory is located in a specific context (Hirsch and Smith 4). This article is significant because it recognizes often silenced or ignored Middle Eastern and North African women writers' contributions to the evolving cultural changes of their societies ushered in by major military conflicts, and shows how they challenge what is considered Western-male-dominated war memoirs and diaries.

Beyond the Front Lines: Memories of War in Middle Eastern and North African Women's Literature

Introduction

Significant war literature has roots in works written by men before the twentieth century, such as Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869). Slowly, women writers who remember and narrate gendered violence in war have been added to the literary canon, and they have:

...covered wars for their newspapers, wrote war propaganda for their governments, published their wartime diaries, described fighting alongside men. They used their wartime experiences for their fiction and poetry, choosing the right to imagine war, just as men for centuries had written about war without actually experiencing it. Their determination to write about it has produced a women's war literature that can no longer be ignored or marginalized. (Sheldon xi)

Women's literature about war represents a duality in which they are at war with their societies' adversaries and their own male-dominated cultures. Although women are affected by the ravages of war, they are generally not involved in the decision-making process that leads to revolutions and conflicts. Nevertheless, they are often involved in activism, and tangentially, in resistance campaigns; they are "not just symbols of group identity, but they also support, and oftentimes actively participate in, nationalist causes, including nationalist conflicts thus complementing women's perceived role in the private sphere of the family with the public sphere of the nation" (Kaufman and Williams 7).

This article consists of an examination of selected works by women who write about their memories of the Islamic Revolution in Tehran, the Algerian War for independence, and the first war in Iraq. *Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile* (2003) by Nuha al-Radi, *Persepolis* (2004) by Marjane Satrapi, and *Children of the New World* (2005) by Assia Djebar were chosen because they illustrate that gender, "along with race and class, marks identities in specific ways and provides a means by which cultural memory is

located in a specific context rather than subsumed into monolithic and essentialist categories" (Hirsch and Smith 4). These works also demonstrate that Middle Eastern and North African women, like their Western counterparts, can write successfully about their memories of war, and that war is more comprehensive than front-line experience.

Muslim women writers believe it is better for them to speak about their lives, rather than Westerners. Often Western attempts to study the problems of Muslim women create resentment on the part of these women who complain that Western researchers come in with a grant and a tape recorder, ask questions, and then fly home to write their reports in the relative comfort of their own lives. Often, careers are boosted by these studies but little or nothing is provided to help improve the welfare and lives of the people who are studied. Many researchers ask questions that are meant to elicit intimate details of the lives of these people, but most have no idea of the extent to which this intrusion affects those involved. Outsiders who have little understanding of local culture come in and study polygamy, purdah (the seclusion of women from the public), and veiling, condemn these practices based on Western beliefs and traditions. Little if any attempt is made to understand these practices within their cultural context before totally condemning them. Many Muslims cannot understand this type of behavior and resent the implication that their societies are primitive and problematic while Western societies are irreproachable and flawless.

Research conducted currently is often more sensitive to the cultural memories of Muslim Women, but there is still a way to go in understanding the many problems they face within their cultural context. Every society has certain roles that it expects men and women to play and the Muslim society is no different in this regard. From a Western standpoint, the Quran may not outline an even playing field for men and women. When seen from within the society of Islam, men and women are not opposites, but complement each other. Jane Smith provides insight into the world concept of women in Islam,

Western feminists are beginning to recognize that historians of religion were a long time in realizing that the kinds

of assumptions one brings to the observation of another culture often lead to the asking of questions basically inappropriate to that culture...The point has been made repeatedly that the history of women in Islam reveals a clear pattern of male domination...But for the Muslim women this is not necessarily the case (Smith 529-530).

Al-Radi (2003) Satrapi (2004) and Djebbar (2005) challenge what is considered Western-male-dominated war memoirs and diaries, and draw on their cultural memories to present significant, enduring writing. Through their memories, they bring the horrors of war to the forefront of their literary explorations.

Women Writers and the Patriarchal Literary Tradition

The authors of the works in this article, Al-Radi (2003) Satrapi (2004) and Djebbar (2005), are from patriarchal societies. Thus, as writers, the question is: "What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are both overtly and covertly patriarchal?" (Gilbert and Gubar 45). The answer to this question has been addressed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2001). The claim that both literary authority and literary history are patriarchal is derived from the study of the psychology of literary history grounded in the founding principles of Sigmund Freud and Harold Bloom; it is defined as "the tensions and anxieties, hostilities and inadequacies writers feel when they confront not only the achievements of their predecessors but the traditions of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit from such 'forefathers'" (Gilbert and Gubar 46). The language of this theory places prominence on the male author and alludes to the strongly patriarchal overtones of literary production while virtually negating the presence of the female writer in this sphere.

The woman is unable to usurp those that come before her by the very nature that her gender disavows her this privilege; this denial of agency is transferred to the literary sphere when a woman writer feels she cannot confront her literary precursors because they are male and

fundamentally different from her. Furthermore, a literary paternity seeks to reduce the female writer to one of two stereotypes, the silent angel or the monster with a literary voice. These two poles prevent the female author from defining herself as either a woman or a writer because "they drastically conflict with her own sense of self—that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity" (Gilbert and Gubar 48). For this reason, Gilbert and Gubar transform Bloom's (1973) idea of the "anxiety of influence" to an "anxiety of authorship." Bloom's theory posits that writers are jealous of their literary forefathers, and thus have an Oedipal fear of them. The unpublished writers, therefore, are pressured to break free of past literary influences and create their own voice, and kill the dominant "father" of their literary experiences. Gilbert and Gubar view this as a male-oriented model, particularly, the association with Oedipus. Their anxiety of authorship theory is offered as a substitute for Bloom's model.

The anxiety of authorship is defined as "a radical fear that she [the female writer] cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor,' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (Gilbert and Gubar 49). A fuller definition of the term is:

the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention—all these phenomena of 'inferiorization' [that] mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterparts. (Gilbert and Gubar 50)

Rather than fearing that she cannot compete intellectually and creatively with her predecessors, female authors, such as Al-Radi, Satrapi, and Djébar, must contend with the threat that taking their place

in a litany of male writers will put their sense of self under erasure as being both a woman and a writer are two contradicting identities.

In order for the female writer to deal with this anxiety, she must become a part of a matrilineage of authors. This “secret sisterhood” of female writers, such as Al-Radi, Satrapi, and Djebbar, is based upon the “unique bonds” forged by female authorship and the “isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis” that marks this particular literary subculture (Gilbert and Gubar 51). The idea of the secret sisterhood is in direct opposition to Bloom’s concept of heroic warfare against the predecessor. It is not necessary for the predecessor to be defeated into nonexistence, but rather it is the very fact that the predecessor does exist that is productive for the female writer. Al-Radi, Satrapi, and Djebbar represent those female authors who reveal the strength of women to take up the pen and help create the foundation for the subculture of female authorship through their cultural memories.

Al-Radi, Satrapi, Djebbar, and other women authors like them, do not lean on their patriarchal forefathers in the literary world by relying on their preexisting ideas for a starting point from which to define a new system. What women authors do accomplish is the foundation of a new literary order in which female writers can locate themselves and define their own authorship that is parallel with male authors. The works that represent the cultural memories of Al-Radi, Satrapi, and Djebbar are examples of how women writers can engage with the male authors that precede them while still maintaining identity as both a female and writer within a new and separate literary tradition.

Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile
(2003)

Nuha al-Radi is one of the more prominent Iraqi women writers, others include Betool Khedairi, best known for her novel, *A Sky So Close* (2002); Alia Mamdouh, winner of the 2004 “Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature” for her novel, *The Loved Ones* (2008); Daisy Al-Amir, whose work includes *Promises for Sale (Wu'ud li-l-bay')* (1981) about the Lebanese civil war; and Haifa Zangana, an author, as well as

a political activist, whose more famous work is *Women on a Journey: Between Baghdad and London* (2007). Of all the Iraqi women writers, Nuha Al-Radi's works have been the most widely reviewed and mentioned in books, newspapers, journals and the media. She comes from a prominent family lineage. Her family includes Mahmoud Shawkat, who as the last Prime Minister of the Ottoman Empire. Her father, Mohammed Selim Al-Radi received his education in the United States, and was an Iraqi diplomat and ambassador to Iran. Al-Radi received her early education in Delhi and Simla, and later, a liberal arts degree from the American University in Beirut, where she became a faculty member. When the Lebanese civil war broke out, she returned to Bagdad.

In 1991, Al-Radi begin writing her diary in English, and updated it periodically until 1996. She continued updating it until 1996. It has been translated into several languages, and the 2003 edition contains a postscript with remarks on the invasion of Iraq. In *Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile*, Nuha Al-Radi provides a cultural memoir spanning ten years, beginning with her experiences during the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the Western embargo on Iraq, and ending with her exile in the United States and Lebanon. Al-Radi's memories of Operation Desert Storm began on the morning of January 17, 1991, when the United States, leading a United Nations (UN) coalition, made an air attack on Iraq. Bright flashes and streaks of colored light filled the skies over Bagdad. The coalition's mission was to end the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. When commenting on the first President Bush, who was in office during this time, and the commander of coalition forces in the Persian Gulf, Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr, Al-Radi stated:

If there's one thing I can't stand, it is that Bush and that horrid Rambo Schwarzkopf will be thought of as heroes after all this is over. Will they take responsibility for the destruction and bloodshed? Their sanctimonious attitude is unbearable, as if we are the only bad guys in the world....We are a third world country, well known for not having too much common sense. Why could he not have negotiated a peace instead of an

annihilation?' If the consequences were not so tragic, the whole situation would be quite funny. (Kakutani1-2)

The personal consequences of the war as shown in *Baghdad Diaries* range widely from the relatively innocuous, to the mundane, and finally to the horribly tragic. As a London-educated Iraqi, Al-Radi has an understanding of Western sensibilities that allow her to write in a way that is comprehensible for a Western audience.

Within the first few pages of the novel, the reader learns that the narrator's mother and aunt's windows have been smashed by a bomb blast. More disturbingly, the narrator learns that one of the puppies from a new litter has been killed by the flying glass; "our first war casualty."

Although Al-Radi is aware of these events, she is in denial of the war and cannot believe that the war was occurring. Because of her denial, she is determined to live her life the same way she did before the war. However, Al-Radi's neighbors acknowledge the war and take actions to protect themselves. Her neighbor, "Shucha, being a fastidious and efficient person, had taped all her windows and doors against nuclear fallout, and organized the windowless room under the stairs as her shelter and stashed it with provisions" (10). Other individuals behave in seemingly erratic ways, as Al-Radi writes of Munher Baid "riding around on his grandson's tricycle, scrunched up with his legs under his chin, pedaling round and round in his driveway. He said he was enjoying himself. He misses his grandchildren and is convinced that he will not see them again" (12). Still others share al-Radi's denial of the events. She describes the two old aunts of Zaid, who "seem oblivious to the enormity of what's happening around them, concentrating only on the immediate things, so old and frail yet so alive and entertaining" (12). This denial is a defense mechanism in reaction to the instability of their lives as they struggle to cope with the vagaries of war.

Perhaps the most disturbing and interesting insight into how everyday Iraqis cope with the war is Al-Radi's revelations about how mundane and commonplace the war soon becomes to the people of

Baghdad. Although the war had become commonplace for many of the Iraqis, they were not immune to its horrible consequences. Al-Radi writes of the many deprivations that she endured in Baghdad during the war and resulting Western embargo and financial sanctions, which included rationing of necessities, such as water, telephones, gasoline, and electricity. She reflects that, "On the eve of the war I went to the Rashid Hotel to pick up a letter that Bob Simpson had brought from Charlie in Cyprus. He also sent me some seed packets of Italian vegetables, a tiny leak in the US embargo. They will come in handy when we have water again" (9). Indeed, the effects of the Western sanctions were devastating. References to food rations are constant throughout the book, as Al-Radi notes government trucks throwing bread into crowds. Grassroots activists and United Nations officials opposed the sanctions without any results. For example, Denis Halliday, the former head of the "oil-for-food" program for Iraq gave a speech in Washington giving an estimate of child mortality "from five to six thousand per month." Halliday stated:

There are many reasons for these tragic and unnecessary deaths, including the poor health of mothers, the breakdown of health services, the poor nutritional intake of both adults and young children and the high incidence of water-borne diseases as a result of the collapse of Iraq's water and sanitation system-and, of course, the lack of electric power to drive that system, both crippled by war damage following the 1991 Gulf War. ("Autopsy of a Disaster")

Al-Radi's description of what she and others experienced during the war and, as a result of the sanctions, is in opposition to the media's accounts that focused on the battles wrought with weapons and bombs. However, she was acutely aware of the end of the war on February 27, 1991. Kuwait was liberated and Iraq's army was defeated. An estimated 100,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed in the fighting. Without providing the gruesome details of the battleground, Al-Radi focused on how the war left Iraq in turmoil. She provided accounts of the innocent victims who were rendered numb, helpless and traumatized. Her description of the continuing after effects of the War are haunting:

...300 tons of depleted uranium in the southern battle in Iraq are causing horrendous defects, babies with no heads, no eyes – there are no computers to make an exact count. It has seeped through the earth into the water system, which means agriculture is also affected. What is on the ground can still be cleaned, but it is a very expensive exercise...So it's a catastrophe for centuries to come. (166–67)

The effects of the war were personally bittersweet for Al-Radi. She became famous during the embargo for her well-crafted ceramics. A special collection of ceramics called “Embargo Art” consisted of debris from the war that depicted the Iraqi people's suffering and defiant spirit. Commenting on her ceramics, Al-Radi asserted, “We have reached rock bottom. We can't afford brushes and other materials—we have to work with what we can. My work shows that Iraqis are suffering, but we're not giving up (Anon 2). Unfortunately, she did not live long after the war. She died due to complications of the dire effects of the war on her health. She died of cancer in 2004, one of the many casualties of the New American Empire and its weapons of mass destruction (Fuchs and Craig 238).

Perhaps the greatest weakness of Al-Radi's book is its failure to put the Gulf war and the ensuing events in any larger political context. She barely mentions the events that led up to the war. Missing is a discussion of the one man, alone, who was considered responsible for the Persian Gulf War, Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq at the time. He ruled the nation with an iron fist, demanding the complete loyalty of his people. “Saddam, we will give our blood for you!” Iraqi children were taught to chant in the streets of Baghdad. However, this exclusion is balanced by Al-Radi's powerful characterization of the effects of war's effect on her Iraqi friends and family, “Nights and days full of noise, no sleep possible....For forty odd days and nights – a biblical figure – we've just been standing around with our mouths open, swallowing bombs, figuratively speaking, that is” (46).

The strength of Bagdad Dairies lies in the fact that it provides readers with an inside look at what the Iraqis endured and the

embargo's debilitating consequences. Although she was ultimately a victim of these devastating effects, "had al-Radi lived, she might have produced another memoir that traced how her identity as Western and secular came apart after 1991" (Fuchs and Craig 238). Nevertheless, through her cultural memory, she brought a human face to the effects of the Gulf War of 1991, and provided a window for the Western world to gain sympathy for the Iraqi people.

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2004)

The French series of *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* was published from 2000 to 2003 in four volumes by L'Association publishers, and has been translated into many different languages. Pantheon Books published an English version in 2004, translated by Mattias Ripa, Satrapi's husband, and Blake Ferris. Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis 1: The Story of a Childhood*, is in the format of a comic book, and tells her cultural memory of life growing up in Iran from the time of the Islamic revolution of 1979 to 1984. Satrapi chose to give her novel the title *Persepolis*, the Achaemenid Empire's ceremonial capital (ca. 550–330 BCE). (Satrapi's *Persepolis 2: The Story of The Return*, which chronicles her life in Europe after the War, will not be covered in this article).

When published, *Persepolis* had enormous critical acclaim, and received several comic book awards: "Prix Alph'art du meilleur scénario," "Prix du Lion" in Belgium, the "Prix France Info," and "Prix Alph'art Coup de Coeur" at Angoulême, and "100 Best Books of the Decade" by *The Times* (London). Marjane Satrapi's other books include *Embroideries*, *Chicken with Plums* (2009), and *Monsters are Afraid of the Moon* (2006).

The 1979 Islamic revolution prompted a change for Iranian women. When many male heads of households left for war, some women began working outside the home for the first time, and turned to occupations such as tutors, translators, and writers. Satrapi was ten when the revolution began, and through her child's eyes, she writes about how the revolution against the Pahlavi dynasty under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was necessary and how it was ultimately

overtaken by Islamic fundamentalists, resulting in an Islamic republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was the charismatic leader of the revolution. When asked about her inspiration for writing *Persepolis*, Satrapi explained:

I wanted to put a few things straight.. . . So many Europeans do not know

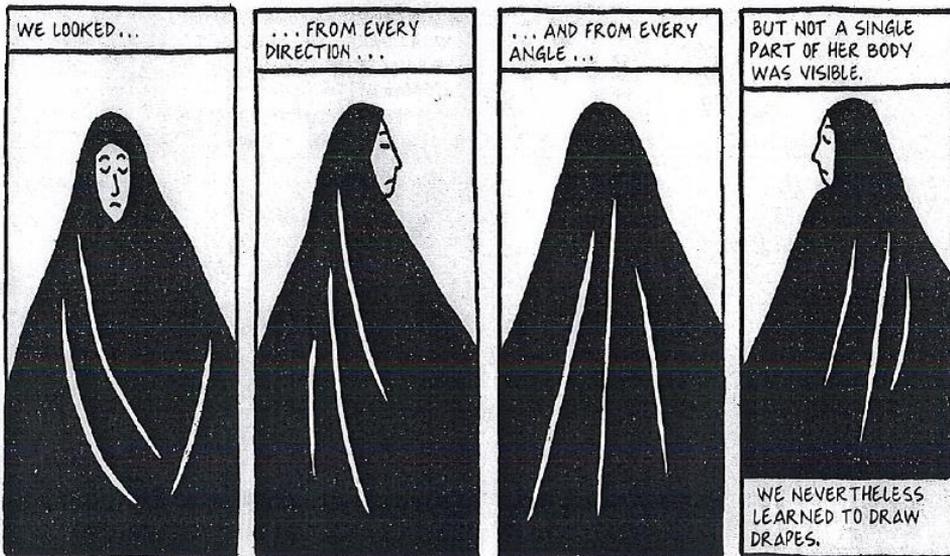
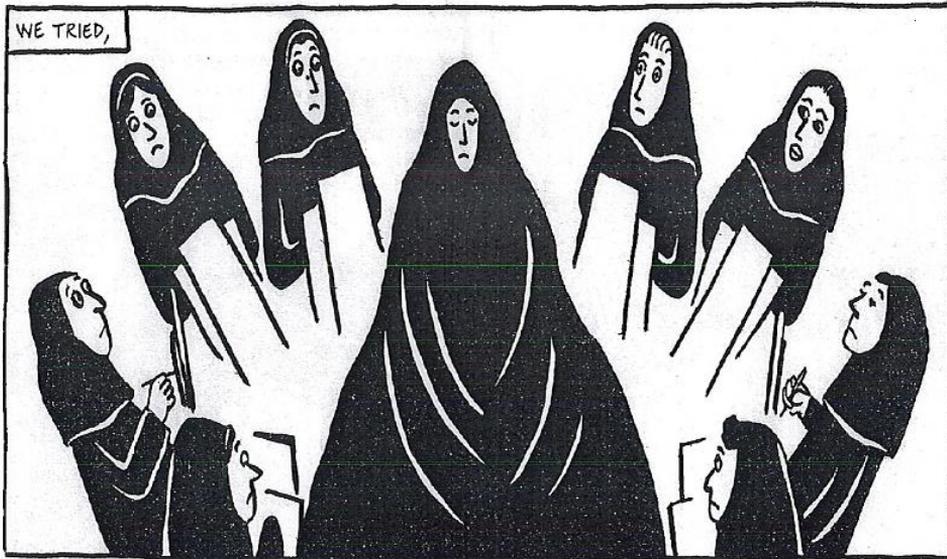
that difference between Arabs and Iranians. They don't know anything of

our centuries-old culture. They seem to think Iran has always been a country

of religious fundamentalists, that Iranian women either have no place in the

society or that they are hysterical black crows. In fact,...even during the worst period of the Iranian Revolution, women were carrying weapons. (qtd. in Kutschera 1)

To get her message across, in *Persepolis*, Satrapi effectively uses illustrations to accompany her narrative. The illustrations are stark black and white images that resemble woodcuts, composed of basic, simple figures and scenes that lack detail. The following pictures from the book show Satrapi's artistic style. The two pictures below are of Satrapi and her friends. She illustrates Muslim women as being undistinguished statues to show how they are often stereotypically portrayed by Westerners. In particular, western feminism "colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'Third World Woman'—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse" (Mohanty 61).



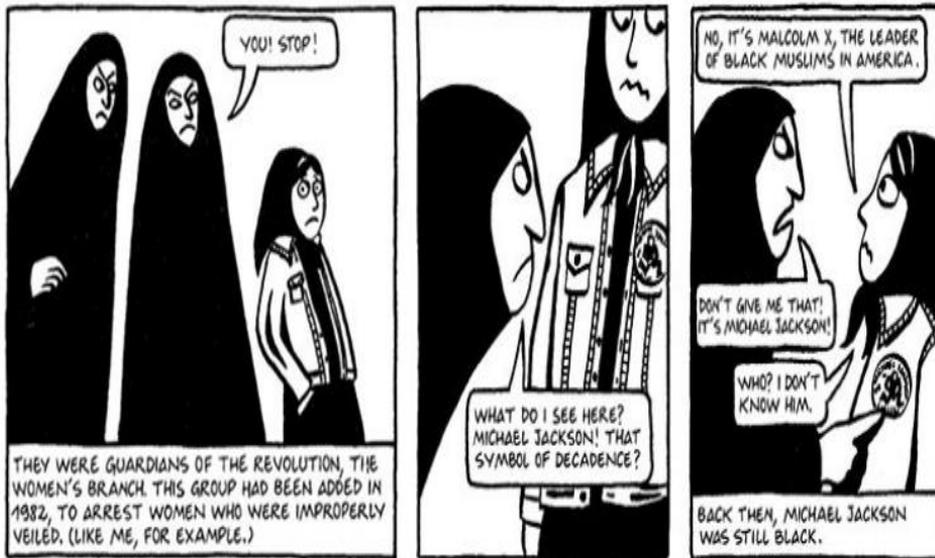
The picture below is a contrast of the stereotypical, voiceless Muslim woman. Satrapi wanted to give a more realistic portrayal of the Muslim woman as human with a robust character and strong sense of identity.



Although Satrapi's illustrations are stark, the cultural memory of her young life in Tehran is rich and vivid. Her recollections largely focus on the ethical struggles faced by her family in the face of the revolution. She came from a privileged family who were left-leaning, which is ironic, because her great-grandfather was the last emperor of Iran. Satrapi tells of her educated and liberal mother's struggle to teach her daughter equality in the face of a regime that often stifled female education and independence. Satrapi longs to escape from what she considers a repressive society. Although Satrapi and her family long for freedom from the turmoil, they are conflicted between their desire for a better environment and love for their homeland. When their Jewish neighbors are killed by an Iraqi missile, Satrapi's family has the influence and means to leave the country. Others were not so lucky, Satrapi implies. Her family struggles terribly with the decision of whether to stay in Iran, or whether to try to start a new life in America. Ultimately, the family's love of their country drives them to stay in Iran. Further, they note that in America, they would lose almost everything that they had worked for, including their cultural identity and history.

Satrapi longed for Europe, because she thought of it as the “ideal secular liberal home.” She became obsessed with western culture, as did some other Iranians, and western icons like Michael

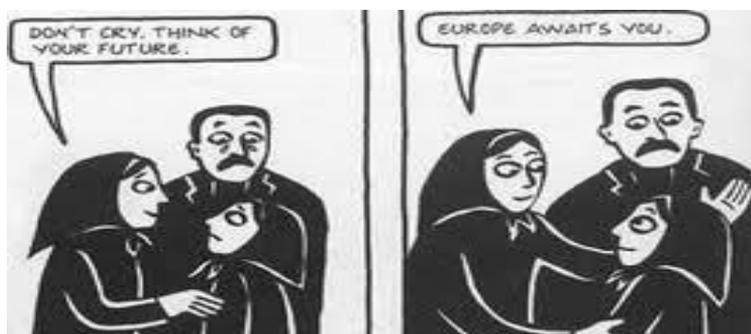
Jackson became powerful symbols of freedom. When Satrapi wore a Michael Jackson button and punk shoes in public, the female Morals police, who were appointed the promoters of virtue in the society, detained her because her western appearance was unacceptable. As shown in the following strip, she tried to offer a defense and said that the button symbolized Malcolm X, the controversial leader of black Muslims in America and not Michael Jackson.



In addition to being accosted by the Morals police, Satrapi and her family endure many hardships, made only the more difficult by the loss of their luxurious lifestyle. In its place, the family and Satrapi suffer shortages of basic necessities, as well as the profound losses of family members. Satrapi bonds with her likable Uncle Anoosh, who is ultimately imprisoned and murdered by the new regime. Several of her playmates are also killed as a result of the war, and her family is in constant fear. Throughout *Persepolis*, Satrapi implies that her family's former prestige and wealth likely shielded them from the worst effects of the war. The following strip tells of how they are able to maintain some semblance of privilege.



Perhaps the most revealing part of Satrapi's cultural memory is her continuing theme of the struggles of freedom and equality in an oppressive regime. Satrapi's parents rear her to be independent and educated, and yet they are fearful for her safety in a regime that will not tolerate freedom or independence, especially among women. For her safety, at the end of the story, her parents send her to Austria as depicted in the following strip:



Ultimately, Satrapi's story is less effective than al-Radi's *Baghdad Diaries* in telling the story of the ordinary individual who is impacted by war. The reader is constantly aware that Satrapi's culture memory is shown through the eyes of one of the few privileged members of Iranian society. While her book clearly depicts many of the struggles of war, it is more a story of the loss of privilege and station, and a struggle for equality and freedom than a narrative of the

effect of war on the average individual. Nonetheless, *Persepolis* is perhaps at its most powerful in revealing the devastating effect of war on personal freedom and equality. Through her childish eyes, the reader understands how war can destroy not only life but freedom and as well. In this sense, *Persepolis* is a more powerful portrayal of the effect of war on the death of freedom than al-Radi's *Baghdad Diaries*. While a powerful work, *Baghdad Diaries* fails to delve deeply into the loss of personal freedom that results from the war, and instead focuses more on the personal, daily realities of the war.

Children of the New World (Les Enfants du nouveau monde)
(2005)

Assia Djebar, which is the pen-name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayen, is a novelist, filmmaker and translator, and her work focuses on Algerian women. She has been acclaimed as the most influential writer of North Africa, and received the distinguished Neustadt International Prize for Literature. In 2005, Marjolijn de Jage translated *Children of the New World* from the original French novel, *Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962). The novel has wide appeal and has been translated into many languages.

Although it is fiction, *Children of the New World* provides insight into Djebar's cultural memory of the six-year Algerian War for Independence and against French colonialism that lasted from 1954 to 1962. It depicts a new world that was more cohesive, because "at the eve of the war of independence, all political tendencies and social movements, including feminist movements, joined forces under the FLN (National Liberation Front) to lead a national war against French colonialism" (Salhi 98). *Children of the New World* seems to offer a more complete, more insightful, and more vivid account of North African women's experience, including the effects of Islam itself on their daily lives, than do two other Algerian works of non-fiction: *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001) by Fatima Mernissi, and *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History* (2004) by Benjamin Stora. Mernissi's *Scheherazade Goes West* focuses not so much on North African women's lives, or on North African life in general, for that matter, as it does on male-female relationships in Muslim and non-Muslim cultures.

Stora's *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History* details the intricate and complicated causes and effects of the Algerian Civil War, and information about its aftermath. The book can be used as an historical reference when reading Djébar's *Children of the New World*.

Children of the New World features women and men of all types, i.e., a cross-section (albeit a limited one) of mid-1950's Algerian society. The characters are, for example, an eclectic mix of feminist and traditional women, of scholarly men and men who are merchants, and of both supporters and opponents of Algerian independence. The events in the novel take place within just one day in 1956. The setting is Blida, a guerilla-held mountain town. Djébar's characters' motives and actions are ironically surprising, which further underscores the idea that, especially in a time of war, neither others' appearances nor one's own assumptions about others are necessarily reliable. For instance, being a political radical, as Djébar demonstrates vividly at one point, does not always make a man into a feminist, and a woman who wears a veil is not necessarily less courageous, in her own moment of truth, than is one who wears Western clothing.

The novel begins with the death of an elderly woman, who is one of the many civilian casualties of the War. The woman is standing in her courtyard when she is killed by a stray bomb fragment. This significant event underlies the novel's major theme, which is the impact of war on civilians, particularly women. During the revolution, women had to make social adjustments when the men left their homes to participate in the fighting, "In every house where, ordinarily, four or five families were living, one family to a room, there is always one woman, young, old, it doesn't matter, who takes charge" (14).

The novel's events underscore diverse loyalties among the female characters, especially, their inner conflicts about themselves versus men; themselves versus their community; and themselves versus Islam. One of the main characters in the novel is a young, uneducated female named Cherifa who rebels against her society's marginalized norms. Her first act of rebellion was when she left her first husband who was, "a man whom everything in her had rejected" (23). When she

left him, this became the first acknowledgement of her own power to control her life: "I should leave, and she thought with vehemence that it would be a lie to continue living there. This impetus which had pushed her, she felt it also as an awakening; yes, all her life before today had been only a long slumber" (27).

Cherifa's second rebellion occurred during the revolution when she finds out that her second husband, Youssef, is in imminent danger because of his clandestine operations. Cherifa, must circumvent Islamic tradition in the process of protecting her husband, Youssef, from their neighbor, Hakim, who is a member of the underground and a policeman presently investigating Youssef's possible membership in a insurgent organization. One of Hakim's jobs as a police force member is to torture insurgents, but this is an activity that Hakim, ironically, detests. Hakim's wife has become distant from him lately, as he admits to himself during his investigative process of his neighbor, Youssef. And so, for that matter, has the whole community, because of the job he is doing. This causes Hakim to think about where his true loyalties lie, and how far he has been compelled to stray from them during this war and the insurgency. To warn her husband of impending danger of being capture as a result of Hakim's investigation, Cerifa walks across town alone and unaccompanied by a male. She travelled the treacherous distance despite people's glaring, hostile looks. Cerifa realized she was not an invisible veiled shadow, and that "she did exist; a driving obsession had possessed her and thereby made her unstoppable. 'Get to Youssef! He is in danger' (162). This act of bravery to save her husband changed Cerifa and empowered her.

Another young woman, Lila, who has a French education, is similarly empowered. Her husband, Ali, is a member of the guerrillas who are located near her mountain town. Lila gets into trouble when she hides a relative named Bachir who is guilty of sabotage. She is arrested and feels honored as a result, because she accepts that this is the price she must pay for the privilege of being a part of the struggle for Algeria's independence, "What wonderful luck to finally be just anybody on an earth, in an age that will never be repeated" (217).

A third woman who participates in the struggle for independence, and in turn, becomes empowered is Salima, a thirty-one-year-old teacher. As a result of her participation in underground clandestine activities, she was imprisoned. Like Cerifa and Lila, she is honored to have the opportunity to participate in the revolution. While in prison, she reflects on her past:

Was it really just yesterday, that epoch? Here it is fifteen or sixteen years ago. . . Then she was the only Muslim girl in town who pursued her studies. A father who just happened to die when she was at the age where she should have been cloistered, like the other girls. (128)

Other characters complete the portrayal of women during the revolution, such as a teenager named Hassiba who becomes a member of the guerrillas, and Touma, a young girl whose brother, Tewfiq is ordered to kill her, because she is considered to be a "loose girl." These women, along with Cherifa, Lila, and Salima combine forces with men "to create not a Third World society but a new society entirely, where women work beside men, though within their own roles" (64).

Children of the New World effectively offers readers both a diverse and a vivid sense of the reality or the human cost of the war: on many levels; and from distinct (and conflicting and conflicted) vantage points. Narrative voices are alternately those of students; resistance organizers and other political figures; and also of average wives caught in extraordinary circumstances. The widespread proliferation of reason and the demise of many codes of behavior are illustrated by Djebbar's portrayal of all types of people, such as professional and working-class men, and traditional and modern women. The main characters are challenged by situations that were not a part of their earlier lives. Each of them is forced to think in more critical ways and construct the best approaches to the brutal events they encountered. However, as a result of these experiences involving individual reasoning, they discover political and social alliances that characterize the new Algerian national polity. This is the way that Djebbar's cultural memory presents a revolutionary modernism.

The main focus and energy of Djébar's cultural memory, however, remains on its female characters in particular, and on the increasingly narrow; fraught, truncated lives they must live under their current circumstances. One sees that contrary to the pervasive image of Muslim women as being docile and subservient to men, the characters in the novel are never entirely docile and do not see themselves as secondary to men. Moreover, they find ways in which to express themselves and have some semblance of individuality.

Conclusion

Cultural memory forms a connection with the construction of identity, because being able to remember is necessary to be a part of a group. Women authors' cultural memories about the effects of war are unique, because they "tend to be much wider and more subtle in scope than battle-tales, since they are interested in the social context of belligerence and its connection with personal relations and the quality of ordinary life" (Tylee 13). Al-Radi, Satrapi, and Djébar's interests in writing memoirs resulted from the social and political turmoil of their countries and the emergence of unwanted wars. Their works help in the production of cultural memories because they provide examples of how war literature reflects and transforms both individual and collective cultural memory. To accomplish this, they have used various formats. Al-Radi used the subjective diary format, which has no constraints in content that would limit her interpretation of daily events. Typical of the diary format, her entries vary in length, and often focus on unrelated events or issues. Al-Radi is not a professional writer like Satrapi and Djébar, but an artist by training. Her diary writing style is powerful, but abrupt, and consists of simple sentences. Her authentic voice is overshadowed by her strong anti-Israel and anti-American sentiments. Satrapi chose the cartoon format, which is interspersed with narrative. Although it has been criticized as lacking sophistication, Satrapi's style has made it familiar and universal. The messages in her drawings, urge readers to see themselves in the character, Marji, and to understand how humor was used as a way to deal with the pain in her life. As Satrapi reflects, "We can only feel sorry for ourselves when our misfortunes are still supportable . . . once this limit is crossed, the only way to bear the

unbearable is to laugh at it” (Satrapi 81). Djebbar presented her cultural memory in a part fiction/part fact novel format. She is able to provide a broad view of the trials and vagaries of war experiences from various women’s perspectives, rather than from only her own, in contrast to the first-person narratives of Al-Radi and Satrapi, The characters are well-rounded because of the insight into their psychological makeup. She presents a near-voyeurism view of the characters’ perspectives. Although each of the women has an experience embedded in vivid emotions, they are reflections that keep readers separated from the atrocious events of the war and, instead, immersed into their personal responses to these events.

Although written in different formats, *Baghdad Diaries*, *Persepolis* and *Children of the New World* provide a complex portrayal of how war has impacted the lives of those who are not on the front lines. These works can help readers to avoid stereotyping women, and Muslim women in particular, as secondary characters. Whatever their situations, they do have their own minds and cannot be described as completely obedient – or innocent. They find ways to live out what is important to them, even if railing against values that would keep them limited in what they undertook or the degree to which they express themselves publicly. These works are an impressive contribution to the body of war literature represented in the form of cultural memories, because they convey the experience of war and also reflect how the war experience often becomes a turning point in the life of people, influencing their understanding and framing of the past and its connections with the present.

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