

The Condition of Women in Silence and Memory: A Narratological and Sociocritical Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Sacred Night*

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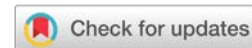
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Abstract

This study presents a comparative narratological and sociocritical analysis of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Sacred Night*, emphasizing the influence of silence and memory on the formation of female subjectivity. Both books depict women maneuvering through restrictive patriarchal frameworks in postcolonial Indian and Moroccan contexts. Deshpande's heroine, Jaya, expresses her emotional and psychological distress via an introspective first-person narrative, wherein silence symbolizes both suppression and underlying resistance. Conversely, Ben Jelloun's Zahra grapples with a fractured identity, oscillating between masculine and female identities, as her narrative unfolds via several voices that encapsulate the intricacies of gender and cultural memory. The research employs narratological tools—such as focalization, narrative voice, and temporal structure—alongside feminist and postcolonial criticism to demonstrate how both texts undermine conventional gender standards. Character naming, symbolic silence, and narrative layering serve as primary methods used by the writers to challenge cultural and gender-based oppression. The study contends that silence and memory function not just as thematic elements but also as dynamic narrative devices that facilitate the reclamation of agency. The research highlights literature's capacity to function as a medium for female resistance and socio-political change in postcolonial settings.

Keywords: Silence, Memory, Female Subjectivity, Narratology, Sociocriticism, Shashi Deshpande, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Patriarchy, Postcolonial Feminism, Narrative Voice, Gender Identity, Cultural Resistance, Indian Literature, North African Literature



1 Introduction

Women's representation in postcolonial Indian and North African literature is a critique of systemic silencing as well as a testament to lived experiences. Shashi Deshpande and Tahar Ben Jelloun's writings are particularly noteworthy in this regard. Their novels challenge prevailing structures through narrative form and provide a voice to women who have been marginalized by patriarchal, socio-religious, and cultural frameworks. Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1989) and Ben Jelloun's *Sacred Night* (1993) explore the twin burdens of memory and silence in the construction of female identity, turning the personal into the political (Deshpande, 1989).

The confessional first-person narrative of *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande reveals the emotional and psychological disarray of Jaya, the main character, as she negotiates the restrictive expectations of Indian domestic life. Deshpande creates a narrative in which silence is both a sign of repression and a place of possible agency through an introspective voice and episodic format (Sambamurthy, 2001). According to Rao, Deshpande's use of narrative restraint as a metaphor for cultural silencing (Rana et al., n.d.) reflects the subdued lives of many Indian women. Internalized patriarchy and traditional gender roles are questioned through the narrative technique of oscillating between memory and current experience.

In contrast, *Sacred Night* by Tahar Ben Jelloun offers a complex and rebellious story with Moroccan roots. The protagonist presents a nuanced viewpoint on gender performance, memory, and survival because he was raised as a boy in a culture that devalues daughters. The lines between fact and fiction are blurred by Ben Jelloun's use of oral storytelling and metafictional components, which highlight how narrative itself can be used for both revelation and concealment. Fixed ideas of gender and cultural legitimacy are undermined by the novel's fractured temporal structure and identity changes, according to scholars (Riemenschneider, 2024). *Sacred Night* uses memory as a means of rewriting trauma and regaining agency. It is not just a recollective memory.

This study uses a narratological framework to examine how the construction of women's subjectivity in both texts is influenced by narrative voice, structure, and temporal layering. It places these depictions through a sociocritical lens in the larger sociocultural contexts of postcolonial North Africa and India, where the boundaries of female agency are still set by traditional gender norms. Narrative form actively contributes to meaning formation and opposes hegemonic ideologies, as Bal highlights (Hiddleston, 2014).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how Deshpande and Ben Jelloun both reflect and challenge the circumstances of women's lives through the use of memory and silence as thematic and structural devices (Bal, 2009). By doing this, the study highlights how literature can be a discursive platform for socio-political critique and feminist reclamation.

2 Review of literature

(Skillman, 2021) This article addresses silence as capital in sharing life experiences based on 20 years of collaborative story circle work with newcomer women. They frequently forget that women find agency in silence in a field that wants to elevate story. I study one woman's



migration tale and how she organized her silences from fieldwork to public event cocuration. I learned why her silences changed over time with a longitudinal association. Instead of magnifying her voice, I now increase her silences.

(Meskova, 2024) According to narrative voice is a complex concept influenced by formal and pragmatic elements, such as point of view, focalization, tone, modality, and spatiotemporal models. It reflects the author's intentions, ideologies, and values, reaching into the extra textual realm. This paper examines the functions of narrative voice in contemporary Latvian writer Gundega Repše's novels *Īkstīte* and *Alvas Klieziens*, focusing on the quest for the integrity of a female autodiegetic narrator and the complex process of women's difference.

(Chandra, n.d.) Examined that Magic realism is a literary style that blends ordinary and extraordinary elements, blurring the lines between reality and the supernatural. Originating from Franz Roh and popularized by Latin American authors like Gabriel García Márquez, it treats improbable occurrences like characters living across generations as natural. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, a psychological and social realism, resonates with magic realism through its symbolic treatment of silence, memory, and inner consciousness. The protagonist Jaya's internal world is emotionally intense, and the cyclical patterns of suffering, particularly among women, are subtly illuminated, echoing magic realism's narrative strategies.

(Khatrī & Sharma, 2023) This study provided Alienation is a term used in various fields, including philosophy, theology, psychology, and social sciences, referring to personal powerlessness, meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation, or self-estrangement. It implies an individual's sense of separation from themselves, others, and the outside world. Two Greek terms, "anomic" and "anomia," signify estrangement: "anomie" refers to social alienation, while "anomia" stands for self-alienation. The two most fundamental types of alienation are alienation from oneself and from society. An alienated individual is stranger to both themselves and others, as seen in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.

(MOSHAHARY, 2024) The paper examined the struggles of middle-class women in patriarchal culture. Indian feminist novelist Shashi Deshpande. She exposed how dominating men in the household and society harmed women. Her essays mostly discuss how India's patriarchal culture's rules and policies hurt women. Both high- and lower-class Indian women must follow family and societal traditions. Mainly males operate in society. *That Long Silence* by Deshpande explores women's struggle and tolerance in social and domestic conditions. Jaya, the main character in Deshpande's book *That Long Silence*, is middle-class and has problems. Writer Jaya is curious and questioning. However, her grandma opposed her progressivism. She advised her to be good at household responsibilities, behave properly after marriage, and remain quiet if she disagreed. Jaya's strict husband Mohan doesn't support her objectives either. Women stick to outdated superstitions.

(Mishra, n.d.) This study analyzed the complicated interaction between two conflicting expressive styles throughout the protagonist's journey. The story focuses on Jaya, a woman between cultural expectations, family duties, and personal goals. She oscillates between quiet, compliance, and self-expression, seeking to affirm her individuality and voice. This research explores Jaya's silence and her decision to break it. The author examines Jaya's silence on



important matters via a feminist perspective, examining cultural influences and gender standards. Additionally, the author examines the liberating power of speech as Jaya challenges cultural conventions and restraints. The chapter examines the factors that led to her escape from quiet, such as reflection, relationships, and personal development. This research illuminates the transforming potential of speech and the challenges of silence in self-identity and empowerment, highlighting the resilience and agency of women like Jaya.

(*SHINEE*, n.d.) This study is an interdisciplinary examination including history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and literature. Subaltern literature is essential for exposing concerns such as the oppression of lower-class individuals, disadvantaged women, and caste prejudice. Shashi Deshpande explores the many challenges encountered by Indian women in her work *That Long Silence*. Jaya is the cornerstone of this tale. She has exceptional intelligence and exhibits distinct thought processes compared to other ladies in her family. Subsequent to her marriage, she discreetly adopts the lifestyle of enslaved ladies inside her in-laws' household. In addition to Jaya, Shashi Deshpande presents many minor characters such as Ajji, Vimala, Vanitamaami, and Asha, each confronting distinct challenges stemming from marriage. At the conclusion of the story, Jaya attains self-awareness by shattering her prolonged quiet. The theoretical framework is grounded on three stages proposed by Elaine Showalter in the development of womanhood.

(*Jena*, n.d.) This study explored Shashi Deshpande's use of myth and folklore to explore the female psyche, which has silently witnessed suffering and societal villainy throughout history. The term 'myth' originates from the Greek word *mythos*, meaning 'story'. It attempts to explain the origins of the world by storing all human knowledge from the beginning. Myths, like allegory, are often metaphorical and include a whole tale or work. However, it is no longer restricted to a particular civilization and is no longer widespread in that community. It investigates how references enhance people and situations. She considers myths to be significant cultural and social effects. Several mythology are explored in the book *That Long Silence*. Sita, Draupadi, Gandhari, Maitreyee, Savitri, etc.

(*Rani*, 2025) Talented Indo-Anglian author Shashi Deshpande exposes the prevalent topic of women being exploited in male-dominated societies via the perspectives of female characters. Her *That Long Silence* depicts the terrible fate of people like Jaya, Jeeja, Kusum, and Avva who silently accept their fate due to fear, societal standards, or cultural customs. They battle within, only to carry the burden of quiet for years. However, the writer offers a solution and promotes self-assertion and voice for women. Through her main character, Jaya, she effectively conveys that quiet is never a solution to any crisis.

(*GHOUNANE*, n.d.) This paper aimed to examine the use of sexual discourse in Arabic literature, particularly in Maghrebian Francophone Literature. The paper also investigates the reasons behind Ben Jelloun's focus on female sexuality in his novel *Laylet el Qadr* (The Sacred Night). The study reveals that *Laylet el Qadr* addresses gendered identity and sexuality through female sexuality, and the novel is rich in topics such as androgyny, rape, adultery, and female sexuality. The tabooed vocabulary used in the novel primarily describes female body parts and sexual intercourse.



(El Amrani, 2024) According to Many diasporic writers in the Maghreb, particularly in Morocco, have largely neglected religious and spiritual themes in their works, focusing on race, class, and gender. This is largely due to the influence of Western secular literary tradition. Many Maghrebian fiction, primarily written by immigrant writers of Islamic background, often portrays religion, particularly Islam, negatively. Tahar Ben Jelloun, a writer often criticized for being self-orientalizing and 'prostitute' his works to Western audiences, is often misunderstood by his readers. This article explores the postsecular identity and diasporic religion in *A Palace in the Old Village*, using postsecularism and secular spirituality as analytical tools. The author argues that Ben Jelloun is not self-orientalizing Islam or celebrating French secularism, but rather upholding postsecular values and diasporic consciousness by addressing instances of extremism and communalism.

(Alheeh, 2022) This study analyzes Tahar Ben Jelloun's *This Blinding Absence of Light*'s depiction of postcolonial bodies in Moroccan captivity. This representation is analyzed using Julia Kristeva's "abject bodies" and Arthur Frank's "disciplined bodies" literary theories. The idea of "abject bodies" reflects the postcolonial regime's portrayal of political prisoners as primitive, dehumanized, and excluded. Prisoners may experience emotions of shame, estrangement, denial, and alienation due to humiliating depiction, leading to identity crises and self-doubts. The notion of "disciplined bodies" may be used as a strategy of resistance by inmates who challenge the state's mandated and projected image of their bodies. Prisoners can transcend their physical suffering and experience spiritual transcendence through self-control and regimentation, leading to meditation, emancipation, renewal, inspiration, and ultimate power.

2.1 Research gap

Despite comprehensive studies on the themes of silence, identity, and gender in *That Long Silence* and *Sacred Night*, a deficiency persists in comparative narratological and sociocritical analyses of both works. Although academics have analyzed silence, alienation, female oppression, and sexuality individually within each book, there is a paucity of works investigating how silence operates as both a narrative technique and a socio-cultural reaction across diverse cultural contexts—specifically Indian and Moroccan. The convergence of narratology—encompassing voice, focalization, and narrative structure—with the socio-political realities experienced by women is little examined, especially on how female characters assert agency via or in spite of silence. This research seeks to address this disparity via a cross-cultural, multidisciplinary perspective.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative interpretative methodology, combining sociocritical and narratological analytical frameworks to examine how female subjectivity is constructed in two significant postcolonial texts: Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Sacred Night* (1993) and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1989). The methodology is intended to examine the narratives' structural makeup as well as the socio-historical and ideological meanings that are ingrained in them. This multidisciplinary method seeks to offer a sophisticated interpretation of the roles that



memory and silence play in the portrayal of women's circumstances in Indian and North African contexts.

3.1 Research Design

The research design is based on a dual-layered textual analysis along the following axes:

- **Narratological analysis,**
- examining narrative voice, focalization, structure, and temporality in relation to the construction of female interiority and resistance, using the theoretical frameworks of Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal.
- **Sociocritical analysis,**
- based on postcolonial criticism and feminist literary theory, to investigate how the texts in postcolonial Moroccan and Indian societies represent, uphold, or challenge sociocultural structures like memory, gender roles, patriarchy, and identity formation.

This combined analytical model facilitates a holistic understanding of how formal literary elements interact with broader social discourses on gender and power.

3.2 Corpus Selection

The primary corpus includes:

- Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*, which depicts the emotional and psychological limitations of an Indian woman navigating social norms and internalized silence.
- Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Sacred Night*, which highlights the intricate relationship between silence, cultural memory, and gender identity in a Moroccan context.

These texts were chosen for comparative narratological and sociocritical analysis because they directly address the themes of trauma, memory, agency, and silence within patriarchal frameworks.

3.3 Narratological Tools and Procedures

The narratological investigation focuses on the following dimensions:

- **Narrative Voice:** Analyzing the narrative voice's contribution to or subversion of gendered subjectivity, as well as whether the narrator is homodiegetic (first-person) or heterodiegetic (third-person).
- **Focalization:** determining internal or external focalization techniques and evaluating how they affect the representation of female emotional depth and consciousness.
- **Narrative Structure and Time:** examining how narrative time is organized (e.g., analepsis, prolepsis, ellipsis) and how it contributes to the expression of silence, trauma, and fragmented memory.
- **Characterization:** examining how female characters evolve through their interactions with speech, memory, silence, and resistance.

Textual evidence is gathered through close reading, and recurring narrative features are thematically coded and interpreted through feminist narratological models.

3.4 Sociocritical Framework

The study's sociocritical component places literary analysis in the particular political, ideological, and cultural contexts of Morocco and India. It consists of:

- How traditional norms and postcolonial gender hierarchies affect women's autonomy.



- How female roles are shaped by the sociocultural symbolism of memory, domesticity, and silence.

- The impact of nationalism, religion, and modernity on gendered identities.

- Using voice, body, and space as metaphors for oppression or resistance.

The socio-political reading of the texts is enhanced by the use of secondary sources, including feminist literary critiques, peer-reviewed journal articles, and socio-historical texts on gender in South Asia and North Africa.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

- **Close Reading:** To find sociocultural themes and stylistic patterns, each text was closely examined several times.
- **Thematic Coding:** The information was arranged according to thematic categories, including resistance, gendered silence, narrative agency, memory and trauma, and identity conflict.
- **Dual-Lens Analysis:** To guarantee both textual accuracy and contextual relevance, the results were interpreted using a combined narratological and sociocritical lens.

4. Analysis

4.1 Narrative Voices

That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande is structured around a first-person autobiographical narration delivered by Jaya, a middle-class Indian housewife. The novel uses a first-person homodiegetic narrator, allowing readers direct access to Jaya's inner world of reflections, anxieties, and suppressed frustrations (Genette, 1980). The narrative opens in medias res, with Jaya and her husband Mohan relocating due to an official enquiry, and this displacement catalyzes her journey into past memories and inner conflict. The narration is mostly introspective and confessional, offering a stream-of-consciousness style that blends past and present seamlessly. As an intradiegetic-autodiegetic narrator in Genette's terms (Rabatel, 2005), Jaya becomes both storyteller and participant, engaging in a retrospective examination of her silence within a patriarchal marriage. Her voice is characterized by hesitations, ellipses, and rhetorical questions, representing the fragmented identity of a woman conditioned into submission.

Jaya often shifts between the "I" and implicit "you" when reflecting on societal expectations, occasionally addressing an invisible listener—perhaps the reader, or perhaps her own conscience—thereby performing the function of communication as defined by Jouve. The narrative structure is non-linear, heavily reliant on memory, flashbacks, and personal anecdotes that not only trace her emotional evolution but also subtly critique gender norms. The inner monologue dominates, pushing dialogue to the periphery and further intensifying the solitude of her voice. This intimacy of the narrative voice reinforces the central theme of women's silence, making the reader complicit in Jaya's introspective rebellion. Her silence becomes both literal and metaphorical—reflecting her domestic subjugation and internalized fear of rupture. The choice of narrative voice thus underlines the tension between voice and voicelessness that shapes female experience in a conservative Indian setting.



In contrast, *Sacred Night* (La Nuit sacrée) by Tahar Ben Jelloun employs a complex narrative structure with a fragmented and polyphonic narration. The novel, a sequel to *The Sand Child*, continues the journey of the protagonist Ahmed/Zahra who was raised as a boy in a patriarchal Moroccan society but chooses to reclaim her identity as a woman. The narrative shifts between first-person and third-person, between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators. The story opens with Zahra's direct narration, placing the reader within her fractured consciousness. However, the tale is repeatedly interrupted by anonymous storytellers, villagers, and other external voices who provide contradictory perspectives about Zahra's story. This multi-voiced narrative technique aligns with the traditional *halqa* style of oral storytelling prevalent in North African culture, blurring the lines between fiction and memory, self and other.

Zahra's voice, although central, is not always authoritative. In some sections, she is rendered voiceless or spoken for, especially when others narrate her story. The narrative technique underscores the protagonist's fragmented identity and the societal refusal to let her define herself. At times, she reclaims her story by narrating in the first person, but these moments are often unstable and introspective, reflecting the psychological toll of being denied agency. The "I" in Zahra's narration is layered with ambivalence, resistance, and re-invention. Furthermore, the use of embedded narratives, such as interludes by storytellers and fictional journalists, serves as a metafictional device questioning the authenticity of any single narrative voice (Running-Johnson, 2003).

Unlike Deshpande's *Jaya*, who narrates her personal transformation in relative isolation, Zahra's story is communalized—narrated, challenged, and reshaped by others—mirroring her struggle for identity in a society that categorically denies female autonomy. The narrative voice is thus not only a vehicle for storytelling but a symbolic battlefield where patriarchal discourse and individual female agency collide. The alternation between narrators and the multiplicity of viewpoints amplify the themes of gender, identity, and resistance within both personal and socio-political frameworks.

A comparative analysis of the two novels reveals that both protagonists operate from within a narrative framework of silence and memory, yet their voices emerge through different textual strategies. In *That Long Silence*, the consistent homodiegetic narration allows for a deeply internal and psychological mapping of female experience. The silence is literalized in Jaya's failure to speak out, even as her internal monologue builds toward a potential future articulation. In contrast, *Sacred Night* explores silence as a socially imposed erasure, where Zahra's voice must compete with public discourse, male narrators, and mythic storytelling traditions. While Jaya retreats into silence and slowly begins to articulate her discontent, Zahra confronts her silence by reclaiming authorship over her identity, albeit through a fragmented and polyphonic narration.

Narratively, both texts demonstrate a critical intersection between gender and narrative voice. Deshpande's novel, through its linear introspective tone, simulates the confinement of domestic life and the slow churn of self-awareness. Ben Jelloun, on the other hand, uses disorientation and multiplicity in narrative voices to symbolize Zahra's fractured identity and the cultural taboos surrounding gender fluidity. Both authors deploy narrative voices not

merely as storytelling devices, but as ideological instruments, foregrounding women's struggles for self-definition in deeply patriarchal cultures.

4.1.1 4.2 The Symbolism of the Designation of Characters

4.1.2 Solidarity in the Quest for Freedom

In *That Long Silence*, the protagonist Jaya's name itself becomes symbolic within the semiological framework, embodying both contradiction and potential. "Jaya" in Sanskrit means "victory," yet her life within the text is marked by defeat, silencing, and passivity in a patriarchal family structure. The **symbolism of her name is thus ironic**—she represents the Indian woman silenced by social expectations but inwardly yearning for a personal and collective triumph (Christensen, 2010). Throughout the novel, Jaya shifts between being the dutiful wife and the awakening feminist subject. The name functions not only as personal identification but also as an **ideological signifier** (in Barthes' semiotic terms) for the larger struggle of middle-class Indian women caught between tradition and transformation.

The male character, Mohan, is curiously under-symbolized. His name is generic and unremarkable, which reinforces the novel's thematic critique: patriarchy thrives not through the exceptional, but through the ordinary and unexamined. Mohan's invisibility as a symbolic figure contrasts with the **overloaded symbolic burden placed on Jaya**, echoing how women are disproportionately defined and constrained by social signifiers.

Deshpande further extends the **semiotic range of her characters** by invoking unnamed women—Jaya's mother, aunt, and other female relatives—who are often referred to by their roles (mother, widow, wife) rather than names. This systematic erasure of identity functions symbolically to show how women's personhood is dissolved into familial and social roles. Yet, their fragmented stories—often relayed by Jaya in brief memory vignettes—form a **collective chorus of female silence**, providing intertextual solidarity. In this sense, the multiplicity of female figures and their symbolic anonymity become markers of a suppressed but shared history, positioning Jaya not as a solitary voice, but as one node in a wider symbolic web of silence and resilience (Moi, 1995).

Similarly, *Sacred Night* employs the symbolic naming and designation of characters to highlight gendered and social hierarchies. The protagonist, Zahra (formerly Ahmed), chooses her own name after years of gender imposture. "Zahra" means "flower" in Arabic—a name signifying both femininity and fragility, but also resilience and rebirth. This **self-designated name** becomes a semiotic act of resistance, as it counters the identity imposed upon her by her father and society (QABBANI, 1998). Her renaming is thus a moment of symbolic rupture—she transitions from being the **"Sand Child"**, an object molded by patriarchal desire, to a **"Sacred Night"**, an entity shrouded in darkness yet claiming divine mystery and female agency.

The title itself—*Sacred Night*—symbolizes Zahra's search for spiritual and bodily autonomy. Night, in the symbolic lexicon of the novel, operates as a space of concealment, ambiguity, and storytelling. It also becomes a metaphor for the **interior life of women**, obscured by cultural repression yet rich in memory and potential. In contrast to daylight—which in Zahra's world



represents exposure, danger, and male surveillance—night signifies the **possibility of reinvention and collective memory**. Her journey into the night is not only temporal but symbolic: an **exploration of herself and the subaltern histories of other women**.

Ben Jelloun reinforces this symbolic dimension by withholding clear names from many characters—Zahra’s mother, other women in the asylum, and even the storytellers. This withholding reinforces the **systemic erasure of female identities**, and yet paradoxically, the **plurality of unnamed women** becomes a form of symbolic sisterhood. Their stories, though told in fragments and often anonymously, resonate with Zahra’s own narrative, creating a shared symbolic field of female oppression and resistance (Lionnet, 1997).

Moreover, the shifting appellations of Zahra—child, boy, madwoman, prostitute, patient—reflect society’s attempt to fix her identity through **symbolic violence**, as theorized by Bourdieu . Each label attempts to negate her agency, but Zahra's refusal to be reduced to a single designation destabilizes these imposed meanings. Her resistance to classification is itself a **semiological rebellion**, allowing the character to exist not as a fixed signifier, but as an evolving subject.

4.3 An overview of Algerian society

This part will use the sociological and sociocritical frameworks of Ravoux-Rallo (1993) and Duchet (1971) presented in chapter 3.4.

4.1.3 The condition of women denounced

There are many direct references to society are numerous in both novels. Malika Mokeddem denounces a traditionalist, macho, and fundamentalist society. *L'Interdite* offers different perspectives—unlike *Ombre sultane*—through the two narrators and also other characters, such as Salah and Dalila, both friends of Yacine. They offer the reader their perspective on society. Dalila, a young Algerian girl who interacts throughout the novel with Vincent and then Sultana, rebels against the roles of boys and girls instilled in them from a very early age: "The school book is always the story of a good little girl who helps her mother, while her brother plays outside." (Mokeddem, 1993). She denounces the power of boys within the family. "Yes, I have too many brothers. They make too much noise. They argue all the time." They argue with me, and they even argue with my mother. They always say to me: 'Don't go out! Work with your mother! Bring me a drink! Give me my shoes! Iron my pants! Look down when I'm talking to you!'. "When my mother talks about herself, my brothers, they say Samia is a whore. It's not true! Samia, she just wants to study and walk the streets whenever she wants and be left alone.". Dalila sums up the image of the woman who must stay home and take care of the home; studies and the outside world are forbidden to her. "You have no one who wants to marry you off and prevent you from studying and walking and finding the space you want." they find the themes developed in *Ombre sultane*.

L'Interdite offers male perspectives on society, unlike *Ombre sultane*. Salah declares, “We are the kings when it comes to self-destruction and regression... they have been killing Algeria slowly, woman by woman.”. Later, he says, “I understand that women want to leave this

damned country.” but condemns the departure of men: “they should come back and repair what they allowed to happen.”.

Assia Djebar also denounces this patriarchal society dominated by customs and traditions. From childhood, little girls learn their role “The ban falls on every girl of this age”, are deprived of education and locked up “since that day when, as ten-year-old girls, we were sequestered and decreed women.”. Subjected to arranged marriage, like Hajila, the woman becomes the slave of her husband after having been that of her father and brothers. “As for the man who goes out, who comes and goes, who enters to give orders, to demand the low table served, the man, all men, must be fed.” “Feed the sons by day, feed the husband by night, and may they all drink the light of the vast day!”. The exterior space is reserved for men; women are deprived of it. “On the stage of the world that is denied us, in the space that is forbidden to us, in the floods of light that are taken away from us.” Deprived equally of light and the gaze of others, they are prisoners. “The master, installing a private harem in his home, took pride from then on in the total invisibility of his women.”. The narrator condemns not only the man but also the women who participate in the transmission of traditional customs: “I have not known a mother who could transmit her fear to me!”.

Paralyzed in the presence of her new husband, Hajila is reduced by the narrator to daily tasks in the opening pages: "You clear the table... you fold the tablecloth, you wipe the light wood of the table" and to the space of her body ""your" hand... "your" forehead, "your" arm". This description of Hajila's despair begins her awareness of her situation and her desire for emancipation: her will to appropriate the exterior space, to walk without a veil and to face the gaze of the other.

4.1.4 Women's liberation and emancipation

The narrator in *Ombre sultane* highlights the courage of women who refuse confinement and defy prohibitions at the risk of reprisals. "A drunken man has the right to wander, but a woman who goes "naked", without her master knowing, what punishment will the transmitters of the revealed, unwritten Law reserve for her?". Reducing the male character to anonymity, she multiplies the references to women, as we described in the previous chapter, as well as their relationships, reversing the power balance between men and women. She thus implicitly claims that the solution lies in the relationship between women, solidarity, and sisterhood. "Respite comes: the husband will take a co-wife; finally feel liberated, perceive themselves as autonomous, and queen!" and the transmission of her new ideas to the next generation. “I hold my little girl’s hand, I draw her into the sun, I will help her not to sink!”. Isma frees herself with her voice and helps Hajila in her approach. “Isma, the impossible rival randomly weaving a story to free the concubine, tries to recover the consumed past and its ashes.”. She encourages women to demand access to forbidden places. “Reclaim possession of the space.”.

Sultana returns from exile, having fled "the threats and prohibitions of Algeria." (Mokeddem, 1993). She faces them again upon her return. "I have forgotten nothing. Neither this stinging curiosity. Nor this interference that assumes all rights. When the inquisition is elevated to civility, questions are summons and silence becomes an admission of infamy.". "She shamelessly inflicts her masculine plural and her feminine apartheid... I have not forgotten that



they attack, for lack of having learned the caress, even that of the gaze, for lack of having learned to love.". She thus denounces the perpetuation of the same model from generation to generation. She rejects the prohibitions and faces up to them: "I split a mass of eyes. I walk against eyes, between their fire.". The lexical field of illness, which we developed in the previous chapter, tacitly illustrates the state of society. Mokeddem thus accentuates the distress of women with references to "koulchite". She denounces the actions of the FIS, associating them with epidemics such as "smallpox and typhus, cancer and leprosy, plague and AIDS of the spirits" and with "the endemic". The writing of the novel corresponds to the beginning of the civil war in Algeria, for which the movement bears responsibility.

Sultana, like Isma, is the spark that inspires other women to act and react:

The women here are all resistance fighters. They know they cannot tackle head-on a society that is almost entirely unjust and monstrous. So they have taken to the bushes of knowledge, work, and financial independence. They persevere in the shadow of men who stagnate and despair. They do not indulge in useless and dangerous provocation like you. They feign and hide to avoid being crushed, but they continue to move forward.

She continues: "My presence in the village only precipitated what was already brewing.". Indeed, the women had declared shortly beforehand: "We are even ready to take up arms again, if necessary!". As in *Ombre sultane*, solidarity and courage are the keys to the revolt. In response to the burning of the house where Sultana was staying by the village conservatives, the women set fire to the town hall, a symbol of fundamentalism, thus demonstrating their determination to fight tyranny and discrimination for freedom and independence.

Djebar and Mokeddem offer us a similar vision of society in which women are victims of patriarchy, tradition, and/or fundamentalist ideologies. They denounce the condition of women and suggest that the solution lies in female solidarity. While Djebar presents a Manichean view of society, with the male characters all reflecting the perpetrators of tradition, Mokeddem offers different models of male protagonists: conservatives and progressives. She depicts a state of emergency; the novel ends with Sultana announcing her departure following attacks, the crystallization of the women/fundamentalist struggle. Mokeddem does not mention in her story the terrorist attacks of the ten dark years Algeria were experiencing at the time of the novel's writing. As for Djebar, she expresses her uncertainties about the future, with the novel's final words affirming fear for women and their future.

5. Conclusion

This research critically explored how *That Long Silence* and *Sacred Night* use silence and memory as narrative and ideological instruments to expose and challenge patriarchal tyranny. Jaya's introspective first-person narrative in Deshpande's work shows Indian women's internalized silence and her path toward self-awareness and rebellion. Her quiet is forced and a room for resistance. Through stream-of-consciousness and non-linear temporality, the tale traces the psychological cost of gendered expectations and shows how memory may rebuild identity. Ben Jelloun's *Sacred Night*'s fractured, polyphonic form decentralizes narrative authority and emphasizes Zahra's gendered and social flexibility. Her rebranding, label



rejection, and changing narrative voice challenge patriarchal conceptions of gender. Naming and communalizing her voice represent a cultural battle against erasure and gendered discrimination. These writings demonstrate that narrative form is radical. Deshpande and Ben Jelloun highlight postcolonial women's lives via silence, recollection, and subjective fragmentation. This research finds that both novels employ literature to defy cultural restrictions and recover agency. They demonstrate the transforming power of female voice and unity in challenging patriarchal practices throughout cultures.

6. References

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