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ARCHITECTURAL SPACE & NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN THE DARK CHILD & A SISTER TO SHEHERAZADE

MONA NAZAR HUSSEIN ABDELAZIZ

2001

Thesis
2001/22

The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Architectural Space and Narrative Structure in *The Dark Child* and *A Sister to Sheherazade*

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Degree of Master of Arts

by

Mona Nazar Hussein Abdelaziz
B.A. University of California Berkeley

May 2001

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Hassan Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor* is a text dealing with a variety of issues concerning architecture and planning. Hassan Fathy, a revolutionary Egyptian architect, grew up with a deep love for the country, which stemmed mostly from his mother's influences. She "had spent part of her childhood in the country, of which she preserved the pleasantest memories" (Fathy 1). Consequently, both Fathy and his mother yearned to return to the country someday. For Fathy the country symbolized the contradictory synthesis of the simple, happy paradise and the disease infested, darkened paradise. This picture resulted in the desire to rebuild this problematic paradise. Fathy's inexperience failed to get him into the School of Agriculture and eventually he ended up studying architecture. Through architecture he saw a way of improving the peasant's lifestyle. Fathy emphasizes in his writings the importance of architectural spaces in influencing people's quality of life. Specifically, dwelling, workplaces etc. must coincide and enhance the cultural integrity of any people.

One of the main concerns that arises in the opening chapters of *Architecture for the Poor* is not only the inhabitant's relationship to his/her living space, but also more basically the society's or culture's relationship to its architectural developments. Fathy states that

> Every people that has produced architecture has evolved its own favorite forms, as peculiar to that people as its language, its dress, or its folklore. Until the collapse of cultural frontiers in the last century, there were all over the world distinctive local shapes and details in architecture, and the buildings of any locality were the beautiful children of a happy marriage between the imagination of the people and the demands of their countryside. (19)

Hence for Fathy, it is tradition that must define our living spaces and more importantly it must influence the creative process that results in such living spaces.

Tradition then, becomes the artist's safekeeping. "[I] t is the artist's duty to keep this tradition going, with his own invention and insight to give it that additional momentum that will save it from coming to a standstill…" (25) Rather than being a hindrance to development, tradition is viewed by Fathy as being the essential basis for its continuance. Thus once tradition is cast aside or exchanged for alien elements, architecture ("one of the most traditional arts") assumes a false and unpleasant aspect.

If one examines Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Assia Djebar's *A Sister to Sheherazade* in terms of Hassan Fathy's ideas, an entirely new relationship between architectural spaces and structural narrative may be uncovered. In both texts, dwellings play a crucial role in not only character development, but narrative development as well. If one takes each character as artist or architect of their respective narratives, then the relationship between their living spaces and their art becomes a tenuous one, which in fact creates and pushes forth the respective narratives.

To begin with then, Laye's childhood narrative is one that progresses largely via movements among architectural spaces. For a large part of the narrative, these spaces are traditional ones such as the mother's hut or the father's workshop. Yet tradition is not the sole factor in the shaping of Laye's mentality. He attends school with a clear vision of continuing his education abroad at the expense of staying in the village and continuing in his father's footsteps.

This type of coexistence between tradition and westernization must, necessarily some critics would say, create conflict:

> How does Camara Laye experience a metamorphosis which began in 1945 and which is coming to an end? Is he torn between two different universes? How does

> he judge the one in which he has been raised, and of which he knows the singularity and the limits? What is he retaining from it and what is he rejecting? Here is, undoubtedly, the single most surprising element of the book. For Camara Laye, these questions do not exist. His cultural integrity is total. He does not feel separated from his people by an inner distance, but only by geographical space. (Blanzat 16)

Yet contrary to the above statement, a tension does exist, albeit a subtle one. It is reflected in the unstable relationship between architectural spaces and meaning throughout Laye's narrative. An early example of the gap that exists within a supposedly stable structure occurs in the first pages wherein he describes the inside of his father's hut:

> At the head of the bed, hanging over the pillow and watching over my father's slumber, stood a row of pots that contained extracts from plants and the bark of trees… it did not take me long to discover that they were the most important things in the hut; they contained magic charms-…each charm had its own particular property but exactly what property I did not know: I had left my father's house too soon. (19)

Here, each object possesses a certain charm, but these charms and their meanings escape Laye's comprehension as he leaves his father's hut to live with his mother according to custom. He therefore fails to attach meaning to objects intrinsically related to his father's hut. Meaning then, eludes space.

It is this gap then, which allows narrative progression. This rift may be defined as the division of the signifier from the signified. In other words, "since the meaning of a sign is a matter of what the sign is *not*, its meaning is always in some sense absent from it too" (Eagleton 111). This is precisely what happens in Laye's narrative. Meaning in terms of space is either absent or unfathomed. Consequently the narrative is in a constant state of what Derrida terms "differance". This means that "any attempt to define or interpret the significance of a sign or chain of signs, 'sign substitutions', whose self-effacing traces merely defer laterally, from substitution to substitution, the fixed and present meaning (or the signified 'presence') we vainly pursue. The promise that the trace seems to offer of a presence on which the play of signification can come to rest is thus never realizable, but incessantly deferred, put off, delayed" (Abrams 269). Specifically, Laye's consistent inability to attach meaning or comprehend the present meanings related to traditional space creates a constant delay of text as meaning is postponed until some point beyond.

This absence is a key aspect of the narrative. It is what allows progression in that meaning is always delayed to some point beyond. Roland Barthes explains this phenomena in *From Work to Text*: "Text is not achieved by some organic process of maturation, or a hermeneutic process of 'delving deeper,' but rather by a serial movement of dislocations, overlappings, variations; the logic governing the Text is not comprehensible…" (59) Hence Laye's constant inability to pinpoint some governing logic concerning surrounding spaces creates his text.

Moreover, Barthes states that

> The Text [itself] is plural. This does not mean only that it has several meanings but that it fulfills the very plurality of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not just acceptable) plurality. The plurality of the Text depends, as a matter of fact, not on the ambiguity of its contents, but on what we might call the stereographic plurality of the signifiers which weave it…(59-60)

Such an irreducible plurality applies to Laye's narrative specifically in relation to architectural spaces. Space for Laye is always associated with some sort of ambiguity, which prevents the text from stopping; for example: "I went to my mother's hut. The night was full of sparkling stars; an owl was howling nearby. Ah! What was the right path for me? Did I know yet where that path lay? My perplexity was boundless as the sky, and mine was a sky, alas, without any stars…I entered my mother's hut…" (27) Hence, the traditional maternal space that is normally associated with comfort and security is related to confusion. This is a confusion related specifically to the self. In other words, the self here may connote a plurality which Laye himself is unable to reduce. Again this delays meaning to some further point.

There are, however, moments in the text when traditional spaces do represent security and comfort. For example when Laye goes to Tindican to visit his grandmother, he associates the huts there with the huts in Kouroussa. The difference is, however, that the spaces in Tindican embody none of the mystery surrounding the spaces that normally define Laye's childhood. They are described in the context of a simple, uncomplicated relationship: "On these visits I only entered the hut to leave my clothes there. My grandmother thought that since I had traveled from Kouroussa to Tindican, it was first necessary to wash me" (Laye 50). This moment and others similar to it, provide the narrative with a counter narrative or a parallel space into which to move momentarily.

Apart from these 'breathing spaces' the narrative is in a constant struggle to reach some point of definition. For Laye this movement begins with, and is ultimately terminated by the modern space. The key symbol of such spaces in this case would be the French school whose very function is the attaining of knowledge or meaning: "Nothing that we learned was old or expected...we never tired of listening" (Laye 79). This moment is a precursor or a foundation for the final break Laye makes with the traditional space. Once he becomes fully immersed in the modern one, the narrative is forced to end as space has been defined.

Assia Djebar's *A Sister to Sheherazade* differs from *The Dark Child* in the relationships between architectural spaces and narrative structure. The narrative begins when Hajila moves from a village dwelling to her marital home, which is a modern apartment: "Hajila, this modern apartment has been your home for six months now. The first day you came to see it with your mother, both full of respect for these long, empty rooms" (13). It is key here that a) the apartment is noted specifically as being modern b) that the very fact of its being modern induces a respect in Hajila, which connotes a type of awed silence, and that c) within the context of this modern space Hajila's unfamiliarity with it creates her silence. It is precisely this silence that allows, from the very beginning, the narrative to be spoken in someone else's voice.

If the initial move from a traditional to a modern space may be taken as a symbol of the discarding of tradition, then as a result Hajila's art or her narrative undergoes a type of displacement. It becomes in essence someone else's narrative with alien elements that are not hers, one that is almost imposed on her: "As if you were able to speak! Don't people realize that you are out of doors?" (42) This silence or stagnation is what Hassan Fathy would say is a result of substituting modern spaces for traditional ones: "why then should he despise the tradition of his own country…why should he drag alien traditions into an artificial and uncomfortable synthesis…" (25-26) This is precisely what Hajila does. Perhaps initially the move is against her will when she is forced to marry. Later though, the modern apartment becomes a launching pad or even a symbol for a movement away from tradition: "The two rooms were joined into one enormous salon! If there are women on one side and men on the other…How can one protect one's…one's modesty?" (13)

It is via this 'launching pad' so to speak, that the narrative moves Hajila into other previously unexplored spaces, which further allow for her silence and the imposed narrative. Isma, her counterpart, is not only the narrator, but is, in a crucial sense, the creator of Hajila's drama and thus her narrative: "You are 'going out' for the first time, Hajila. Once you are outside, all alone, you will walk" (19). Isma narrates this moment in a future tense, giving the impression that she is mapping out Hajila's destiny. This type of usage pushes Hajila and narrative forward constantly. Yet the narrator also uses the past and present tenses in her narration. Similarly though, the impression is given of an imposition, a narrative that will continue because of silence.

. The tensions that result in narrative progress do not depend on linguistic instabilities but rather on social instabilities where movements are conscious and spaces are distinctly classified. The narrative is distinctly aware of the private versus the public space. Yet whereas traditionally the private space would allow for an outlet-specifically a vocal one, because Hajila's space is not traditional, she is heard neither inside nor outside. More importantly, the silenced space is more directly a result of the gendering process involved. For example, the public spaces that Hajila ventures out into are what Fatima Mernissi calls 'male spaces' wherein women are not allowed save with the veil. (143) It is Hajila's constant unfamiliarity with her surrounding, untraditional spaces that encourage silence. And again it is her silence that creates the narrative.

Chapter 2
The Dark Child

The Dark Child is an autobiographical narration of Camara Laye's childhood spent in Kouroussa, French Guinea. He narrates events affecting his childhood until he leaves French Guinea to continue his education in France. Laye begins his narrative with detailed descriptions of his surrounding spaces and the effect they have on him. One of the first examples is the description of his father's hut, previously mentioned. Laye then goes on to portray aspects of the concession, which consists of several family huts and the workshop. Set in Kouroussa, this type of traditional space accommodates the lifestyles and working habits of its inhabitants. It is via this set up that we begin to place Laye's character within some sort of context.

From the onset, the narrator's relationship to these traditional spaces is a tenuous one. He says on page 19: "From the veranda under which I played I could keep an eye on the workshop opposite." And then again at the end of the paragraph: "Sometimes I came near the door, but I rarely went in; everyone there frightened me, and I would run away as soon as anyone tried to touch me" (19-20). Hence, already Laye is not only marginalized himself, but also any knowledge or meaning he might acquire by crossing the boundaries he has created for himself is deferred. He then says: "It was not until very much later that I got into the habit of crouching in a corner of the workshop to watch the fire blazing in the forge" (Laye 20). Immediately then, the function of space sets up the narrative for progression. It is within the context of Laye's relationship to such spaces that the narrative structure is defined. Specifically, it is his movement within and among these spaces that moves the narrative itself.

In the paragraph following Laye's description of being an outsider, he acquires a very different tone concerning the concession: "My private domain at that time was the veranda that encircled my father's hut, my mother's hut, and the orange tree that grew in the middle of the concession" (Laye 20). Whereas previously Laye saw himself on the outskirts lacking the inside knowledge, here he asserts that parts of the concession are his private domain. This connotes a certain knowledge of, and comfort in such spaces. It is also important to note that the concession is not only traditional in terms of structure, but also in terms of function. The fact that the orange tree can be seen "as soon as you crossed the workshop and went through the door at the back" (Laye 22) creates a type of harmony between living spaces, work spaces, and nutrition. This sort of harmony between space and lifestyle is precisely what the Hassan Fathy ideal strives to achieve.

It is within this context that Laye continues the portrayal in a tone that may be construed as nostalgic. He describes the orange tree in detail and then explains the process or the ritual which constitutes the picking:

> Then my father, who as head of the family-and a very large family it was-governed the concession, gave the order to pick the fruit. The men who did the picking brought their baskets one by one to my father, who portioned them out among the people who lived in the concession and among his neighbors and customers. After that we were permitted to help ourselves from the baskets and we were allowed as much as we liked! My father was open-handed; in fact, a lavish giver (Laye 20).

At this point for Laye, the concession, which consists of several family huts is a space that defines moments of satisfaction and happiness with family and neighbors. There is no ambiguity concerning these spaces or the people who inhabit them. This moment, like one that appears later on, provides the narrative with a parallel space or counter narrative wherein the Hassan Fathy ideal sustains itself momentarily.

Yet this moment, interestingly enough, is followed by another, which for Laye constitutes a moment of intense uncertainty. He comes across a little black snake, which unlike any other is considered sacred. This sacred spirit is immediately linked, for Laye, with the spaces he inhabits. He sees it for the first time "proceeding in the direction of the workshop" (Laye 22). He also claims that "everyone in our concession knew that this snake must not be killed-everyone except myself…" (Laye 22) At once the relationship between space and tradition (as symbolized by the snake) becomes a mysterious one, as he is the only one in the concession who, at this point, fails to grasp the meaning of this tradition.

Consequently Laye attempts to locate meaning and this is done in the paternal space: " My father bade his friends farewell and sat under the veranda of the hut: I seated myself near him" (Laye 23). He begins to question his father about the little black snake and even as the explanation is taking place he says: "Yes…although I did not understand very well" (Laye 24). Again, it is within the context of the traditional paternal space that meaning fails to be achieved. Moreover, despite the fact that Laye does not understand, he makes no further attempt to. Hence the father-son relationship becomes characterized by distance, which extends to the related space. Symbolically, Laye fails to attach meaning (signified) to space (signifier).

The confusion resulting from this gap in the structure of meaning immediately extends to all traditional spaces that define Laye's childhood. He says of the workshop: "And I was no longer sure whether I ought to continue to attend school or whether I ought to remain in the workshop" (Laye 27). He then says of his mother's hut: "I went to my mother's hut…Ah! What was the right path for me? Did I know yet where that path lay? My perplexity was boundless as the sky…I entered my mother's hut" (Laye 27). There are two important moments here, the two being inextricably linked. The first one has to do with the delaying of meaning, specifically the meaning of the self. For Laye, these traditional spaces (the workshop and the mother's hut) are distinctly related to the lack of self- knowledge which on one level, drives the narrative forward in search of self (specifically the self related to defining spaces). Within the context of such spaces meaning or signified cannot be attained. The second important point has to do with narrative progression. The delaying of meaning is fundamentally the delaying of narrative. In other words, as meaning is delayed so the narrative is forced to delay or progress until some further point.

In the third chapter Laye's narrative moves from one traditional space to another. He goes to visit his grandmother in "Tindican, a tiny village west of Kouroussa" (Laye 43). Interestingly enough, in comparison to Tindican, Kouroussa and the spaces associated with it suddenly lose the mystery of tradition and become city sights which hold not any of the "marvels" of country life. Moreover, the traditional spaces of Tindican, which are almost identical to the ones in Kouroussa, carry lively detailed descriptions without the confusion or the mystery surrounding them. He describes his uncle's concession:

> My uncle's concession was enormous. If there were fewer inhabitants and it was less important than ours, it spread out nonetheless over an extensive countryside...The granaries were like so many little huts built on stone foundations to keep out the dampness. Except for them, and for the corrals, my uncle's concession was much like ours, but the wooden fence which protected it was stronger. In place of woven reeds, they had used heavy stakes which had been cut in the neighboring forest. The huts, though built like ours, were more primitive (Laye 48).

Laye's brief movement to Tindican provides the narrative with a spatial parallel where his momentary occupation of and relative detachment from these particular spaces create a breathing space. Laye experiences a moment where traditional spaces provide the comfort and simplicity Hassan Fathy claims they should.

This experience extends to the traditional maternal space as well, which in Kouroussa like other spaces, is associated with a failure to comprehend. In Tindican the grandmother's hut is very similar to the mother's. He describes the inside of it in terms of simple, everyday functions: " There was even a calabash like my mother's for storing milk, covered like ours to keep out the soot, and hung in exactly the same way from the roof..." (Laye 50) Moreover, his relationship to this hut is a very simple one: "On these visits I only entered the hut to leave my clothes there. My grandmother thought that since I had traveled from Kouroussa to Tindican, it was first necessary to wash me" (Laye 50). Again, these parallel spatial descriptions provide the narrative with an interlude from the subtle gaps that shift it continuously.

As we move into chapter five, the narrative pays special attention to the maternal space and Laye's relationship to it. Laye begins the chapter by telling us that he was the only one of his brothers and sisters who lived in his mother's hut due to lack of space: "My mother kept my brothers and sisters in her hut while nursing them. But as soon as they were weaned-among my people children are weaned very late-she turned them over to my grandmother. I was the only one of her children who lived with her. But I did not have the second bed to myself: I shared it with my father's apprentices" (Laye 65). This compression could symbolize, for Laye, the limited possibilities of the traditional (space) thus justifying his eventual break with such spaces. It is this living arrangement that moves the narrative towards a key point in Laye's development of the African woman.

The fact that the familial huts and the workshop are all in one concession allows the type of living arrangement that Laye experiences with the father's apprentice. Consequently he is able to observe aspects of his mother's character as she deals with the apprentices, which create a turning point in the narrative. Laye says on page 66:

> Those who had reached manhood had their own hut. The youngest, those who, like me, were still uncircumcised, slept in my mother's hut. My father certainly thought they could have no better lodging. My mother was very kind, very correct. She also had great authority, and kept an eye on everything we did; so that her kindness was not altogether untempered by severity.

At this point the narrative focus moves away from the paternal space and influence towards the maternal one. These movements and Laye's attitude concerning them is vital. For one thing, Laye is being moved from space to space-he has no say in the matter. More importantly, despite his lack of understanding of such spaces, he portrays no antagonism towards his defining spaces. This is important in generating a fusion between two elements key to narrative progression. Specifically, Laye respectfully accepts the traditional (space) despite his miscomprehensions. He is then temporarily representing Fathy's view that tradition is empowering. Laye later moves away from this mentality when he begins to make a literal break with traditional spaces.

Hence whereas at the beginning it is the mysterious powers related to the father and the paternal space which define the narrative progression, beginning from chapter five, it is the mother's role and her powers that assume this position:

> The woman's role in our country is one of fundamental independence, of great inner pride. We despise only those who allow themselves to be despised; and our women seldom give cause for that. My father would never have dreamed of despising anyone, least of all my mother. He had the greatest respect for her too, and so did our friends and neighbors. That was due I am sure, to my mother's character, which was impressive; it was due also to the strange powers she possessed (Laye 69).

This moment is a good example of how narrative progression is dependent on the function of space. It is a description of the living arrangement within the maternal

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space, which leads to a shift in focus from the symbolic meaning of the paternal space to the maternal one. Now it is the mother's powers that are incomprehensible: "I hesitate to say what these powers were, and I do not wish to describe them all. I know that what I will say will be greeted with skeptical smiles. And today, now that I come to remember them, even I hardly know how I should regard them" (Laye 69). Repeatedly, there seems to be an inability to attach meaning to space. This gap consistently moves the narrative to some point beyond.

In the following chapters both narrative and literal movements between traditional and "modern" spaces begin to take place. Laye opens chapter six by saying: "I was very young when I began school, first attending the Koran school, and shortly afterwards transferring to the French. Neither my mother nor I had the slightest suspicion how long I would be a student in the latter. Had she known, I am sure she would have kept me at home" (Laye 77). Hence, mid narrative we start to have a spatial tension where Laye is being torn between two spaces: the traditional space (represented by the mother's home) and the modern space (represented by the French school). This rift is also magnified by the fact that while within the context of traditional spaces, Laye consistently failed to define. Within the context of the modern space, it is precisely meaning which is pursued and attained. This portrays a mentality that Fathy would define as imposed. In other words, rather than "establishing and accepting tradition" (25), Laye, within the context of colonization prefers (if unintentionally) the spaces and mentality of the "other". This imposition of spatial identification, Fathy asserts, will stifle or negate art. This view will later be realized when the narrative comes to an end in direct connection to modern spaces.

Yet Laye does not all of a sudden move away from the defining traditional spaces. There is, for a while, a back and forth movement. After he describes the relationship between school and the home, he moves into a description of the "the society of the uninitiated" which he calls "rather mysterious." It becomes significant then, that immediately after labeling the ritual or tradition mysterious, Laye links it to the concession: "As soon as the sun had gone down the tom-tom had begun to beat. Even though it was in a remote part of the concession, its notes roused me at once…" (Laye 93) Moreover, a little later Laye links the very essence of the unfathomable to the traditional space. He first describes the procession and his feelings concerning the main character Konden Diara. Laye doubts his humanity in a sense and literally fails to define him. In other words, he fails to attach a signifier to the signified: "And here was Konden Diara-but was he a man? Was he an animal? Was he not rather half-man, half-animal?" (Laye 95) It is crucial then that Laye awaits the Konden Diara in the concession: "I was standing at the entrance to the concession waiting. I too, was holding my *coro* ready to play it with the stick clutched in my hand. I was waiting , hidden by the shadow of the hut" (Laye 95). This passage inextricably links Laye's consistent inability to define tradition and the traditional spaces which inform these cultural specificities. Specifically, Laye waits at the entrance to the concession for Konden Diara, a traditional figure whom he categorically fails to grasp.

Despite this gap Laye experiences though, there are moments when his traditional spaces do represent security and comfort from the very mysteries that they embody (as in the earlier orange tree episode). While in the middle of the Konden Diara ritual, and gripped with fear, it is the hut that comes to mind as a haven: "How I wished I was far away form this clearing, back in the concession, in the warm security of the hut! Would this roaring never cease?" (Laye 102) Again, this momentary lapse provides the narrative with a figurative space or a parallel into which it is allowed to move temporarily. It tolerates an instant of counter narrative where the Hassan Fathy ideal prevails and traditional spaces provide comfort and security and a chance for progression.

Laye continues his portrayal of the initiation ritual by discussing his experience with circumcision. In this specific situation, the hut wherein they are to abide for a certain term is supposed to represent a luxury or a comfort of sorts: "This hut, which was very spacious, would henceforth be our dwelling place. The spacious square in which it stood was fenced off by such tightly woven reeds that no inquisitive eyes could see through them" (Laye 118). The fact that this hut is guarded against inquisitive eyes implies a boundary. Within this highly traditional hut exist meanings that outsiders cannot grasp though they might attempt. Ironically this time Laye is on the inside both literally and (supposedly) mentally. Yet again, there pervades a fear rooted in a deep misunderstanding of experience (and these experiences are inherently connected to space). At the moment of circumcision Laye asks himself or the reader: "Was I afraid? I mean, was I even more afraid, had I at that particular moment a fresh access of fear?" (Laye 123)

Once Laye is on the inside of this specific space, a new dynamics is created. There now is unveiled a tension within and between traditional spaces. Laye makes a symbolic and literal move away from the maternal space into this other exclusive male space " I bounded over the few yards that separated me from the gate and suddenly I saw my mother. She was standing in the dusty road a few steps away from the fence. She too was forbidden to come any closer" (Laye 130). Laye then experiences an emotional imbalance which is, perhaps, the foregrounding for the eventual move out of his mother's hut:

> Ought I to attribute this emotional instability to
> the transformation that had been worked in me?
> When I had left her I was still a child. Now…But
> was I really a man now? Was I already a grown man?…
> I was a man! And now this manhood had already begun to

> stand between my mother and myself. It kept us infinitely further apart than the few yards that separated us (Laye 151).

Perhaps then, this distance is an accumulation of the previous gaps in meanings related not only to the specific maternal space, but also to the traditional space in general. However, the space he occupies at the moment differs in a key respect (and this is perhaps what widens the gap): There is no mystery involved. Meaning is momentarily attained within the context of this specific space. Laye says of the post circumcision lessons: "The teaching we received in the bush far from prying eyes, had nothing very mysterious about it; nothing, I think, that was not fit for ears other than our own" (Laye 128).

As the narrative progresses into chapter nine, the architectural spaces that define Laye's experiences slowly begin to change. There is not only a movement away from the traditional dwelling, but now the "modern" French schools obtain an important role in Laye's life. He is fifteen when he leaves for the Technical College in Conakry and it is the first time he is to leave his parents for an extended period of time

Once in Conakry one of his first disclosed impressions is of the "European-style house he stays in. The ambivalent emotions he describes are very reminiscent of the past moments in the concession. He claims that although the house is very comfortable, he still "missed his little hut": "All my thoughts centered on Kouroussa. Once again I saw my mother and my father, my brothers and my sisters, my friends. I was in Conakry and yet I wasn't. I was really at Kouroussa. But no- I was in both places- I was ambivalent" (Laye 148). This moment is extremely significant. It marks a turning point in the narrative where Laye is literally caught between two spaces. Both spaces (traditional and modern) are at this point beyond full comprehension. Previously it was the "differance" or the "endless play of generated significances, in which the reference is interminably postponed"(Abrams 269) of the traditional space which defined narrative progression. At this particular moment in the text however, there is a turning point. From this moment on, the narrative begins to move outward towards another modern space, which for Laye embodies meaning and definition.

This movement is epitomized in chapter eleven, towards the end of the narrative when even Laye's hut begins a transformation. His mother, in order to please him on his visits home, begins to make changes in the hut so that it would have a more "European look." Now the traditional space that had been previously imbued with ambiguities, begins to acquire definition-maternal love and begins to represent the "comforts" of the modern space: "Originally it had been like the other huts, but gradually it began to acquire a European look. I say say 'began to' for the resemblance was never exact. Yet I was keenly aware of the changes, not only because they made the hut more comfortable, but even more because they were tangible proof of how much my mother loved me" (Laye 170). Hence, the modernizing of a traditional space for Laye represents comfort and love. In fact it is at this moment that space attains meaning for him-his mother's love. Moreover, the space which had previously defined a certain life experience now shapes a new more European life style: "But it was hardly spacious enough to accommodate all the innumerable friends, girls as well as boys who visited me in the evenings" (Laye 170).

It is this final symbolic break from the traditional space that allows Laye's own literal break and move to France. Although the break itself is not, for Laye, an easy one: " 'Are you glad to be going?'…'I don't know. I don't think so'", and although at the beginning of his journey the "map [of the Paris metro] meant nothing to [him]" (Laye 187), it is precisely this break that allows the narrative to end. Once the traditional spaces have been replaced by modern ones, there no longer exists a gap. Laye ends his narrative clutching a map as he ventures into the ultimate symbol of the modern space-France. As the map symbolizes knowledge and specifically knowledge of space, space necessarily attains meaning (or holds the promise of meaning), and the narrative is forced to end. Hence continually, it has been the delaying of meaning until some further point that has been driving the narrative forward.

Chapter 3
A Sister to Sheherazade

Whereas in *The Dark Child* it is the gap between the signifier as space and the signified as meaning that shifts the narrative, in Assia Djebar's *A Sister to Sheherazade* the function of space is more socially informed, specifically by sexual politics. Isma, the narrator disenchanted with her marriage and insistent on living abroad, finds a second wife for her husband. She then narrates Hajila's experiences as she moves her from her marital apartment to the forbidden "male" street in search of the lost freedom Isma holds herself responsible for. This tension plays itself out in a modern style apartment far from the traditional Hassan Fathy ideal. It is tradition, Fathy claims, that will /migliore enable and enhance artistic progression, mentre whereas an imitated modernity will ring as false and unoriginal. If this theory is applied to Hajila's narrative, certain aspects of narrative structure and movement will be disclosed.

The relationship between space and narrative structure is multidimensional. Hajila's drama is set in a modern style apartment that she moves into from her village home upon marriage. It is her unfamiliarity with this specific space that allows her co-wife Isma to impose her personal interpretations and predictions in the form of a narrative. Isma then consistently alternates Hajila's narrative and her own, in an apparent attempt to reinvent her own experiences. Consequently, Isma's relationship to her defining spaces becomes crucial, as it provides the defining structure for Hajila's experiences. And as Isma is "an urban woman who is educated and has lived abroad" she insists on narrating "Hajila's emergence from the domestic space in which her husband has confined her" (Woodhull 85).

As Isma views the domestic "female space as a tomb from which women must emerge" (Woodhull 85), the relationship between the outside and the inside spaces becomes extremely significant. A social tension between the public and private surfaces and it is through this tension that the narrator permits a certain mentality (which she imposes on Hajila) to pervade the narrative. Winifred Woodhull in *Transfigurations of the Maghreb* asserts that this tension or opposition provides for the organization of the narrative: "much of the narrative is organized by an opposition between spaces of confinement and spaces of liberation, with Isma's narration moving Hajila from the house to the streets, from the shelter/prison of the veil into the sunlight, and from a 'maternal cocoon' (152) to the wide world, '[her] body radiating solar light as [she] traverses the spaces of the town' (62) (translation modified)" (85). There exist, however, problems with this type of exposition. For one thing the definition and division of confinement and liberation are essentially Isma's and could, in reality, hold no bearing on Hajila's own definitions. Moreover, the spaces presumed to be liberating (such as the street) actually silence Hajila. How can there be liberation with no voice? There are, however, key spatial elements that contribute to the interaction between the public and the private which are: the modern apartment, the street and the Turkish bath. The apartment, as mentioned earlier, is the space that creates the silence vital for the resulting narrative. The street, the space Isma calls Hajila into via the apartment, results in the transformation of self. Finally, the bath is the traditional alternative to the public space, which Isma uses as a key symbol in ending the drama.

Hajila's narrative begins with her "standing in the kitchen which is to be the setting for the drama" and she is "suddenly overcome by grief" (7). Immediately two important factors stand out. For one thing, although it is Hajila's drama from the very beginning, she is not the narrator. Rather, she is called into a space. The second important fact is that at once, Hajila's drama and thus her narrative is linked to the modern space that she occupies.

A couple of pages later, and very early on in the text, there occurs a double partition of space. Space is divided into the private and the public spaces and consequently the female and male spaces. The public or outside space is thus exclusively male: "The man has really gone out; the man, all men!...The street awaits you...You can present yourself to the world, you fortunate males" (8-9). More important than the division itself, is the fact that this modern space magnifies the division as to allow the narrator to justifiably inculcate Hajila's mentality with it: "You move slowly to and fro through the apartment. The open windows seem to beckon you" (9). Within the context of these spaces as of yet unfamiliar to Hajila, Isma (Hajila's co-wife and narrator) seizes the authority to recount Hajila's movements and emotions in an almost puppeteer like manner: "You raise your arm. You rub your right cheek with the palm of your hand. You wipe your cheeks. You move your hand as if you were blind. Oh, to weep inwardly, shedding no tears!" (9) In other words, Isma is able to manipulate Hajila's movements within the narrative context precisely because Hajila's unfamiliarity with the modern space yields her voiceless and hence unable to recount her own movements.

Juxtaposed with this narration is a chapter titled "Isma" where aspects of the narrator's own experiences are detailed: "To be able to bite an apple, rush headlong down the stairs, humming a tune as I go, a taxi-driver in Paris-why not in Paris-whistles admiringly at me" (11). What is striking about this passage is the narrator's complete confidence in self and occupied space so that the narration, unlike Hajila's, is distinctly her own. More importantly, Isma's personal narrations serve primarily as a counter narrative, an ideal or goal, towards which she pushes Hajila's narrative.

Chapter three is Hajila's again, and is titled "Out of doors." It is significant then that the very first sentence is "Hajila this modern apartment has been your home for six months now. The first day you came with your mother, both full of respect for these long, empty rooms" (13). There is, once more, a connection between the modern apartment and the "forbidden" outdoor space. Specifically, this modern space informs the eventual outings which form the essence of the narrative. Moreover, this modern apartment represents-fundamentally-the discarding of tradition (as Hajila's venturing into public spaces unveiled). This is evident in the layout of the apartment, which Hajila's mother objects to: "The two rooms were joined into one enormous salon!..'If there are women on one side and men on the other…How can one protect one's…one's modesty?'" (13)

Hence within this context, and occupying the space of Hajila's silence, Isma narrates her out of doors. She tells her "You are going out for the first time Hajila…Once you are outside, all alone, you will walk" (19). Again, Isma moves Hajila and the narration forward through an apparent act of creating the drama herself. What is interesting here is that as Isma creates-or perhaps precisely because she is the creator and not Hajila herself-Hajila is ignorant of her own movements and of her surrounding spaces: "Is that the same sea, there, that you can glimpse from the balcony" (19). In other words then, Hajila's art or her narration is, in a very fundamental sense, stagnant due to her ignorance.

Yet Hajila's ignorance is not the only significant element here. There is also the fact that Hajila's knowledge (albeit limited) of, and her desire to explore, the outside space stems directly from the windows above. This entire situation is precisely what Hassan Fathy classifies as exchanging tradition for alien elements. This becomes especially apparent on the following page where Hajila's outing ends in a feeling of shame: “You thought to yourself, first with a feeling of shame and then of humiliation that it was wrong to return the greeting of a man out of doors” (20). This moment reflects the interaction between spaces, where Hajila’s expeditions into the street are a direct result of her occupying a modern, unfamiliar space. Hence at this moment, and within this spatial context, tensions between the traditional and the modern result.

Hajila’s shame is strategically followed by another excerpt where Isma narrates her own experiences. There is, once again, a sharp contrast in spatial usage. Isma tells us that in most of the places her husband and she have lived, “the windows remained bare of any hangings, no net, no satin nor pleated taffeta.” Moreover, in this particular room she questioned the fact whether they “really had to hang curtains” (22). The bare windows here represent not only open spaces, but symbolize in essence the baring of the body, or the shedding of the veil. Hence, Isma does not associate open spaces or bared bodies with shame as Hajila does. This is important specifically because this room with bared windows is in a traditional home, specifically her mother in law’s: “Still half-asleep, I can hear the sounds of the women of the family outside in the courtyard, going about their morning domestic activities” (24). In other words, for Isma there exists no tension between the traditional and the modern because she has succeeded in ridding herself completely of traditional elements.

Once again (almost as if setting up her own experience as a sought after ideal) Isma follows her own narrative with Hajila’s. This time she has her take off her veil out of doors: “There, you make your sudden decision to take off that veil! As if you wished to disappear…or explode!” (30) Here Isma has Hajila take off her veil to reveal the world much in the same way she previously bared the windows to reveal the outside. Repeatedly, within such spatial perspectives, Isma provides her own narrative as a counter narration towards which Hajila's narrative strives.

In chapter seven which Isma entitles "The Others" she begins to allow Hajila to possess some sort of knowledge about the outside spaces and the objects and people that occupy these spaces:

> And so every day you make your escape. You become quite familiar with the little public gardens and squares of this neighborhood. To find your way about, you recall where you went the day before, and the day before that, and so on. You have never seen the red-haired stranger again. Perhaps she's still laughing, holding her baby in her outstretched arms, perhaps she's waiting for you in that little garden (24).

Here Isma assigns Hajila a memory. It is this memory that results in a familiarity with the public spaces and the desire for more knowledge of these previously forbidden areas, which will later allow for Hajila's transformation. Moreover, the memory is connected inherently to the future and what it promises, as Isma tempts Hajila in a sense, with a possibility of the woman whom she perhaps strives to be.

Yet this miniscule allowance of autonomy does not affect the narrative in the sense that Hajila remains silent and continues to be narrated: "As if you were able to speak! Don't people realize that you are out of doors?" (42) Again, Hajila's silence is related to her occupation of the "forbidden" public space which has been previously connected to the modern space. Thus consistently, Hajila's stagnated narrative has to do with her relationship to space.

A few paragraphs later, Hajila returns from her excursion. There is an odd moment where a blurring of spaces occurs:

> You wait impassively. At last they have all gone. The day begins: the walls seem to be closing in on you, the furniture gets in your way. You are seized by an irresistible urge to obliterate the outline of objects. The open windows are yawning chasms of blinding blue. You kneel down-no! it is not one of the five moments of prayer. You lie

> down on the floor, under the open window. Your eyes are filled with sky; you lie still and empty. You do notfeel yourself present in that place, nor yet anywhere else; Bursts of sound reach you from outside. You absorb them (43).

This moment is critical for several reasons. For one thing, there is an attempt to symbolically eradicate the social boundaries between the private and the public spaces. Hajila experiences a spiritual instant where the window of the modern apartment allows the public space to enter the private and vice versa thus creating blurred boundaries. More importantly Hajila loses herself in this moment so that she no longer feels herself present. This loss could be seen, within the context of this discussion, to represent the substitution of the self created by an imposed narrative and new spaces for Hajila's former "traditional" self. Although this transformation may seemingly allow the narrative an extremely significant turning point where Hajila, as far as she is being narrated, seizes some control over her own drama, when the narrative ends it is revealed as a false control.

In the following chapter, which again is Isma's own narrated experience, she reiterates some vital facts about her own tenuous relationship to her defining spaces: "Later, in another city, in a new country, we are gradually recovering the rhythm of our nights, the respiration of our days, when suddenly the mother's ghost returns and reminds us we are exiles. Am I the only one to be obsessed by this exile?" (51) To begin with, it is in "alien" spaces that Isma begins to reinvent her former self as represented by the gradual reestablishment of a previous lifestyle. Moreover what haunts Isma in her new space is the ultimate symbol of tradition-the mother/mother in law figure. Hence, what Isma is forcing Hajila's narrative towards she is already doing herself. She consistently gears the narrative towards a point of complete exchange of defining spaces-traditional for modern, private for public. In this exchange, Isma imagines she has achieved freedom.

The next chapter of Hajila's narrative reflects the transformation in self that occurred earlier. First however there is a return to the former feelings of imprisonment and the division of the public and private spaces:

> You have resumed your afternoon expeditions.
> You return in the evening noting that the sun has
> set behind the window of the drawing-room, which
> you had left open. You stand still, bending your head
> to catch the last echoes within you before they disappear.
> Once again, your vision is hemmed in by walls (55).

Here, more so than in other passages, Isma creates a distinct boundary representing her ultimate goal. The outside spaces connote sound, vision and knowledge while the inside spaces represent silence and ignorance. The sounds echoing within Hajila (almost as if signifying voice) disappear as she approaches the apartment. Moreover, the apartment space represents blindness or ignorance as the walls bar her vision. This moment, although for Isma might represent a stepping stone toward her imagined liberation, is in essence the epitomization of Fathy's assertions. It is this modern apartment imposed in a traditional culture that initially allowed for Hajila's silence; the stagnation of her own drama (her art, her narrative). Here this modern or imposed space, which allowed false boundaries to be set up, creates within its walls silence and ignorance.

A few pages later a confrontation occurs which is to set the stage for the eventual and final unfolding of Hajila's drama. After a period of impotence, Hajila's husband finally has intercourse with her for the first time. This moment is a struggle and Hajila's recourse is her gathered knowledge of the outside world:

> Must you surrender? No, think of the streets, they stretch out within you,
> bathed in the sunshine that has dissolved the storm clouds; the

> walls open; trees and hedges glide past. You can see the space out of doors through which you sail each day. When the man's penis ruptures you, with one rapid sword-thrust, you scream out in the silence breaking your own silence, 'No!...No!' You surface. 'Just relax!' the voice murmurs, near your temple. You are being torn apart; within you shadowy passers-by turn back and stare at you, steady streams of unknown people with bulging eyes (58).

This scene is not only the precursor to the upcoming confrontation, it is also a reassertion of a previous moment, this time more dramatic. It is once more the outside space that not only represents voice, but here actually induces it. It is through the strength gathered from her knowledge of these spaces that Hajila's voice suddenly breaks her former silence. Once she has broken this silence she is able, a few pages later, to demand of her husband a visit to the Turkish bath. Here not only is Hajila's voice heard, it is for the first time heard emphatically: "'I've a right to the Turkish baths!' you declare. 'I shall go to the Turkish baths!'" (62)

The passage mentioned above is also important in that it provides a tenuous parallel to the symbolic bedroom scene with Sheherazade where her sister lies beneath the nuptial bed keeping watch:

> *In any case, Dinarzade, the sister, will be keeping watch near at hand: She will be close by while they embrace; she will look on at their carnal feast, or at least give ear to it. And the sultan's bride will be reprieved for one day more, then for a second; to be sure, the tales she spins help save her, but first and foremost it is because her sister has kept watch and woken her in time.* (95)

The implication here seems to be that Isma is the sister who keeps watch over Hajila during the act of intercourse and saves her by "waking" her in time. This waking could be read as the symbolic "awakening" or "liberation" that Isma intends it to be. Yet this bedroom scene does not provide the clear reading the narrator would like us to think it does. For although Isma might regard her role as guard over Hajila, Hajila, unlike the sultan's bride, has no voice. She is not weaving any tales let alone her own. This situation is extremely ironic as "Assia Djebar herself asks in her introduction to her French translation of *Woman at Point Zero,* 'What is a feminist novel in Arabic? First of all it is a voice'" (Hitchcock 210). Despite the fact that *A Sister to Sheherazade* is not in essence an Arabic novel, it is written by an Arab woman about an Arab reality. Hence Hajila's lack of voice allows Isma to play the double role of storyteller and guard. Consequently Hajila and her story are marginalized.

After these scenes, the Turkish bath is portrayed for the first time as an alternative space. In other words, this is the traditional female equivalent of the public space: "You're no longer listening. You cannot wait to get to the bath-house, to be among all those worn-out bodies, finding relief in the soothing atmosphere. If you are really never to go out again, at least to be able to open up one's eyes, breast, armpits! To lie, resting one's back on the scorching marble slab, wet hair spread loosely, belly, genitals, legs, where one can commune with oneself at last, that real self whom no one knows" (64). This alternative traditional space is what Hassan Fathy would claim is the true liberating structure. And Isma's narration unknowingly supports this view. It is within this space that Hajila can truly become naked both in the literal and symbolic sense. Her nakedness here is complete, whereas in the streets it is only partial. This complete nakedness must necessarily symbolize an absolute freedom. This idea is confirmed in the last sentence where Hajila's "real self whom no one knows" is allowed to surface. This type of freedom remains unattainable in both the modern apartment and the public space.

The issue of the Turkish bath is set aside momentarily as Isma resumes her narration. In a chapter called "The Return" some consistently critical aspects of her spatial relationships are revealed. She returns to her home town after many years of living abroad and confronts her ex-husband (now Hajila's husband) in order to retrieve her daughter. The following exchange occurs upon their meeting:

> 'But you insist on living abroad! You know the law wouldn't let you have custody!"
> He was sounding me out.
> 'Why shouldn't I come back here for good? Looking after my daughter would be sufficient reason, wouldn't it!'
> He looked at me suspiciously, an ugly expression on his face (69).

This moment in Isma's narration puts the entire text in some sort of context or focus. Isma left her husband and daughter and her home in order to live in France (here as in *The Dark Child* the ultimate symbol of the modern space). In other words, Isma makes a conscious decision to leave the traditional home space for the modern "alien" one-even if it means giving up her child. This type of shifting in lifestyle, priorities or values is specifically what occurs when, as Francoise Lionnet says, "Assia Djebar creates dispersed images that reflect the contingencies of multiculturalism, whose social relations are constantly in a state of renegotiation" (173). This "state of renegotiation" is precisely the point towards which Isma pushes Hajila as will be revealed at the end of the narrative.

Immediately following this exchange Isma visits her extended family saying "the next day I was far too busy visiting every member of my extended family: aunts, cousins, most of them showing signs of age, like best clothes kept for special occasions in a cupboard, with moth-balls, and from time to time taken out to air, all creased and crumpled. These women were withering from being permanently shut up indoors" (69). Thus Isma structures her narrative in a way so as to justify in a sense, her movements.

Yet these traditional spaces themselves inherently allow for female movements and voice. They are specifically built with patios and courtyards. Isma herself describes such spaces in the chapter titled "Patios":

> I can remember a Moorish house, the oldest and largest in the area where I was born. Arcades of

> twisted marble columns, galleries whose ceramic
> tiles of copper-colour, pale blues and faint greens
> retained their harmony in spite of age: two storeys
> rose up around the courtyard, where I was fascinated
> by the fountain when I came every afternoon in the summer
> to visit an aunt (76).

The courtyard then, allows for women to venture outside uncovered and the patios create a venue for self-expression: "Patios of my childhood! Settings for the daily assembly, you were at the heart of all the domestic conspiracies which continue to haunt me" (76). Isma however, insists on a certain interpretation of these traditional spaces the lives that they define, as apparent by her methods of description. For example, when describing the patios and the daily conversations that these women engaged in, she portrays them as "conspiracies" that haunt her to this day. When discussing other conversations that took place she says of these women: "Other paradoxical aspects of blood relationships were explained by the women. As if they could not forget the fact that their daily existence was so impoverished of interest" (77). Isma then, as narrator imposes on the existences that these spaces define an interpretation which allows for, and justifies her own narrative and the narrative she assigns Hajila.

Once the narrative begins to come to a close, the importance of the Turkish bath is finally revealed. The bath or the hammam both in this text and in others is a traditional space that is central to everyone's life. Hassan Fathy says of the hammam: "It should be emphasized that the hammam was used by everyone, rich and poor, even those who had private hammams in their own houses, because it was a public meeting place…" (88) Winifred Woodhull in *Transfigurations of the Maghreb* describes Hajila's relationship to the bath: "A 'liquid prison,' the bath at night becomes a space in which hierarchies between men and women, and between urban and rural populations, are unsettled" (86). Isma herself describes the hammam as "a refuge where time stands still" (152).

It is within this context then that the narrative begins to end. Isma meets Hajila at the bath and hands her the spare key to her apartment. This is to allow once again the outdoor expeditions after Hajila's mother has forbidden her to leave the apartment. As she hands her the key, Isma tells Hajila: "Touma prevents you going out, except for this weekly bath. It's up to you to decide whether you keep the child you're carrying, or whether you get rid of it. Get out of the house, go and consult a doctor or a friend, anyone you like. Get out for the sake of getting out!" (153) Woodhull views this moment as one of transformation: "It is interesting to note that Hajila's transformation takes place in the ambiguous space of the Turkish bath. For the women inside who communicate as Isma does with Hajila, it becomes a 'place of nocturnal rebirth…[and] secret collision ' (148) and not surprisingly, it is here that Isma hands Hajila the key that will open her domestic prison onto the outside world" (85-86). Although Woodhull's interpretation is a viable one, it ignores the connection between the hammam and the ending to the narrative.

After this meeting in the hammam, Hajila is hit by a car. This incident marks the end of Hajila's narrative as Isma chooses to tell it. She says: "I move away; I'm leaving…What is the use of telling myself what I know already: that you will lose the foetus, which is already dead in your heart; and that you will live, with your yoke lightened, freed from your shackles" (159). There are two important details in this ending. The first one is that Hajila's narrative ends in direct connection to a traditional space. Isma ends her narration within this context symbolically terminating the traditional space and implying a new narrative wherein Hajila defines her own existence. The second important aspect is that we as readers never realize this "new" narrative that Isma assumes will be a direct parallel to her own. She has Hajila give up child and space as she herself has done. We only, as always, have Isma's own interpretation of the events and their outcome. Hajila's own dormant narration then allows Isma to literally narrate her, recreate her and then predict her future.

Chapter 4
Conclusion

When discussing *The Dark Child* and *A Sister to Sheherazade* in terms of spatial functions, it becomes necessary not only to analyze the narrative structure in relation to space, but also the character's relationships to their societal and cultural spaces and consequently to their own narratives. In beginning with Laye's text, it is essential to note that the existing tensions that define and inform the narrative are multidimensional. There exist tensions not only between the Western and African elements, but also within the African dimension exist tensions between the local and Islamic cultures (Sellin 227). The analysis here, however, is rooted within the context of the traditional versus the modern (Western) space. It is these spaces that consequently influences the narrative structure. Specifically, Laye's childhood experiences are largely informed by traditional spaces such as the father's workshop or the mother's hut. Moreover, his movements also take place between spaces such as father's hut to mother's hut, mother's hut to school and finally Kouroussa to France.

Yet what is important is not so much the movements themselves, although they do contribute to the narrative progress, as Laye's own relationship to these spaces and how it defines his experiences and ultimately his art (or his narrative). Again, this relationship is, in general an unstable if gracious one. As a result of the co-existence in Laye's childhood of the modern and traditional elements, he fails to adequately define space throughout his narrative. Traditional spaces such as the hut or workshop consistently pose problems of meaning for Laye in the face of his French education. Space acquires another dimension: space that inherently embodies meanings alien or incomprehensible to Laye. This gap, although inherently social/political in its origin, actually plays itself out on a linguistic level. For example, Laye's inability to understand certain rituals, charms or even objects that are connected to such spaces may be a result of the tenuous co-existence of several cultural factors: Western, African and Islamic. Fundamentally though, these social tensions are not portrayed decisively as such. Rather, the narrative is moved on a linguistic level by the constantly unrealized relationships betweens the signifier as space and the signified as meaning. This is, in essence, what underlies Laye's art. Consequently it is once Laye exchanges the traditional space for the modern and attains meaning, symbolized by his clutching of the map of France, that the narrative ends.

This idea that the Western space is innately invested with meaning while the "other" is devoid of meaning is discussed in J.M. Blaut's *The Colonizer's Model of the World* where he discusses the diffusion of a Eurocentric history in terms of geography. He critically analyzes the phenomenon of what he terms spatial elitism. He claims the world has been divided into an Inside (Europe) and an Outside (Non Europe). Moreover, Blaut asserts that there exists a doctrine called the "myth of emptiness" wherein the colonizers concluded that certain lands were empty due to the native population's inability to conceive of territory, political sovereignty or economic property. (Blaut 25)

One then, might look at Blaut's model in relation to the notion of space representing signifier and knowledge of and about that space as the signified. If space is "empty" as in the myth of emptiness, it can be taken as a metaphor for being devoid of meaning. The colonizers then take it upon themselves to invest space with meaning (i.e. attaching to it a signified such as European knowledge). This is precisely the dynamics at work in Laye's narrative (although as mentioned earlier it tends to play itself out on a linguistic level). It is certain spaces in Laye's childhood, which represent the West (for example the French school), that are invested (or via the narrative will eventually become invested) with meaning, while the "other" spaces are, for Laye, almost devoid of it.

Again, the moment where ultimately space has achieved meaning for Laye occurs with his clutching of the map of France. This moment is paralleled and subverted in Edward Said's discussion of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Within the context of a discussion on cultural imperialism, Said points out that Fanny's initial ignorance is "signified by her inability to put the map of Europe together' (Said 102). Here exists a chasm between signifier (space) and signified (meaning) as the map represents a space that cannot be 'put together'. Hence as Said himself asserts, space is misused or misunderstood. This argument undermines Laye's ending where the map of France symbolizes meaning attained. For Said, space in general is problematic whether Western or "other".

In terms of Hassan Fathy's views, which afford a more constant construction of specific spaces and provides the framework for this discussion, it is a stable and confident relationship to the traditional space, free from alien elements, which fosters a progressive and flourishing art: "Let him not suppose that this tradition will hamper him. When the full power of the human imagination is backed by the weight of a living tradition, the resulting work of art is far greater than any that an artist can achieve when he has no tradition to work in or when he willfully abandons his tradition" (Fathy 25). Is that to say then, that as Laye's interaction with such spaces is a shifty one, then his art or his narrative is in fact either false or stagnant? On the contrary, Laye's narrative is, on a double level, a reaffirmation of Fathy's views. Although Laye's dealings with his defining traditional spaces is fraught with a pervading incomprehensibility, for most of the narrative there is no attempt to impose alien elements or definitions on these spatial structures. In fact, Laye consistently takes his misunderstandings for what they are, and treats tradition with a type of distanced respect. Consequently, it is precisely when the modern elements begin to invade the traditional structures that one can say art begins to stagnate. Specifically, when Laye starts to exchange his traditional spaces for modern ones (such as his mother's remodeling of his hut) the narrative begins to end. It is with the final and defining substitution of the modern for the traditional space symbolized by Laye's leaving Kouroussa for France with the map clutched emphatically in his hands that Laye's art literally ends.

Comparatively, in Assia Djebar's *A Sister to Sheherazade*, although analyzed within the same framework and context as *The Dark Child* yields quite different results. The narrator focuses on the social aspects of space, which in turn are significant in defining narrative structure. There is a distinct concern with the public versus the private space, which Isma, Hajila's narrator and co-wife, is intent on deconstructing. Yet it is not a linguistic or conceptual deconstruction and unlike Laye's narrative, meaning is not beyond comprehension. Meaning is not, in terms of spatial structures, delayed until some point beyond. Thus it is not *differance* that creates the text. Rather, it is precisely because each space embodies specific meanings that the narrative progresses. Public space is defined as being essentially male, while the private is female. It is then the constant attempt to redefine these spatial meanings that allows narrative progression.

Yet these constant attempts at reinvention or recreation of spatial boundaries are what Edward Said would label arbitrary and hence useless: "In other words, this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space which is "theirs" is a way of making [spatial] distinctions that *can* *be* entirely arbitrary" (Orientalism 54). In other words, Isma insists on narrating Hajila into the unfamiliar, other (male) space from what she perceives to be the familiar (female) space. The problem is, however, Hajila is familiar with neither the private (apartment) nor the public (street). Thus Isma's division becomes arbitrarily imposed.

Despite such intentional impositions however, the narrative itself, in light of Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor*, lends itself to various other dimensions. To begin with, Hajila inhabits a modern space alien to her and imposed upon her. Immediately, as Fathy asserts, art declines as Hajila is silenced. Her silence allows for someone else's narration, which is also an imposition. This imposed narrative then is geared towards a specific counter narrative (Isma's own narrated experiences) where definition of space and being in these spaces is restructured. Specifically, within these alien spaces (the modern apartment and the public space) Isma forces on Hajila a narrative of acquired ideas that are initially alien to her. A good example of this is at the end when she urges Hajila to give up her unborn child in exchange for freedom. This in itself is an acquired alien idea because "whereas many Western women may view multiple childbirth as both oppressive and restrictive (to their work, careers, economic well-being et-cetera) most African women find empowerment in their children and families" (Nfah-Abbenyi 24). Hence, Isma's relationship to her defining spaces (her exchange of the traditional for the modern) reflects acquired world views which echoes Blaut's model of Inside being Europe and Outside being Non Europe:

> ...*all* scholarship is diffusionist insofar as it axiomatically accepts the Inside-Outside model, the notion that the world as a whole has one permanent center from which culture-changing ideas tend to originate, and a vast periphery that changes as a result (mainly) of diffusion from that single center. (Blaut 13)

Isma narrates Hajila into spaces and identities invested with meaning originating from the "Inside" as Blaut terms it, and which she accepts as suitably "culture changing". These are, however, impositions that necessarily yield "false" or "unoriginal" processes. Ironically though, Isma's narration itself is a reaffirmation of Fathy's ideals despite the fact that it attempts to achieve the opposite. Hajila's inhabiting modern spaces injected within a traditional culture results in unfamiliarity and thus silence. This silence is the ultimate symbol (within this context) of a stagnated art due to alien spatial structures. Furthermore, the end of the narrative, which Isma views as a liberation of space and self, is in fact the opposite. The truth is, the reader is never allowed to hear Hajila. We do not know whether Isma's narrative bears any semblance to Hajila's reality or whether it is simply a reflection of her own desires and experiences. Fundamentally then, the dead baby at the end could symbolize, instead of freedom, the death of life and art (as both child and narrative end) in the face of imposed alien spaces, ideas and identities.

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