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https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.8060

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Wendy Grace Crook for the Master of Arts in French were presented April 30, 1997, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Wendy Grace Crook for the Master of Arts in French presented April 30, 1997.

Title: Images of Women in Abdelhak Serhane's *Le Soleil des obscurs*

Current trends in North African francophone literature include a movement towards the exploration of alienation and exile, most often in the form of novels written about Maghrebian immigrants in Europe. Yet this alienation exists within the North African context as well, and it is possible to feel alienated and exiled, as well as marginalized, within one's homeland. This question is explored by Moroccan francophone author Abdelhak Serhane in his novel, *Le Soleil des obscurs,* which is the focus of this study.

The purpose of the research is to examine the four principle female characters in the novel and relate them to the male protagonist. First, an overview of North African francophone literature is presented to provide framework for the novel. Then, a variety of current sociological and anthropological materials are reviewed to synthesize the background for an understanding of the novel's social context. In order to give substance to the themes of alienation and exile, two short stories are briefly

examined: Leïla Sebbar's *Les Carnets de Shérazade*, and Andrée Chedid's *La Soudanaise*.

The majority of the study focuses on *Le Soleil des obscurs*. The research is divided into two parts: the female protagonists and the male protagonist. Lalla Aïcha, Lalla Batoul, Aouicha, and Mina are the central female characters. Each is examined at length, and their respective roles and attributes are discussed in terms of Moroccan society and culture. All four women are oppressed to different degrees; Mina and Aouicha remain marginalized from the norm by their actions. Soltane, the male protagonist, gradually reveals alienation and failure when related to the women.

Serhane successfully portrays a society in which individuals are marginalized and oppressed by traditional mores and roles. Although pessimistic in subject, the novel itself brings hope, as Serhane unveils the conflict of marginality. He does not suggest any concrete solutions, yet the fact that he explores this conflict yields optimism, and his work can serve to awaken humanity to the problems associated with a society in which many of its rural members are alienated.

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN

ABDELHAK SERHANE'S

LE SOLEIL DES OBSCURS

by

WENDY GRACE CROOK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
FRENCH

Portland State University

1997

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Rita Rose Vistica and Dr. Claudine Fisher for their continued support and guidance throughout my time at Portland State. Both served as enthusiastic mentors and I am indebted to them for their encouragement and tutelage.

In addition, I am grateful to Dr. Eric Swenson and Dr. John Damis for serving on my thesis committee. I appreciate their comments and feedback immensely and hope that the experience was a pleasurable one.

The women of Msemrir, Ouarzazate, Morocco, deserve my gratitude as well. I learned so much from them and will never forget my time there. Their lives served as the inspiration for this work and will continue to serve as a reminder of the power and passion of women's lives.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family's role in the completion of this work. I thank Ramzi for his guidance concerning Morocco and the French and Arabic languages. I am indebted to my mother for her undying support and her critical editing. And ultimately, I would like to thank my father, and dedicate this work to him, as it was his support and ebullience for foreign travel and cultures which led me to begin my journey to Morocco in the first place.

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Introduction

Morocco was once described, reputedly by de Gaulle, as a cold country with a hot sun. Indeed, Morocco presents this and many other paradoxes. Rural Morocco is highly underdeveloped on all levels, while the urban areas of Morocco expose a facade of full development and lead Africa in terms of economics and standard of living. It is a Muslim society, yet has strong ties to the Occident and claims a powerful European influence due to half a century of French protectorate. The linguistic ambiguities and problems that exist as a nation struggles to live in two languages, Arabic and Berber, are also signs of the great dichotomy existing in modern Morocco, particularly as communication technology is increasingly available and used to bring people together. The coexistence of Arab/Berber cultures, as well as this western influence, has created a rapidly changing society in which personal roles and behavior are often unclear and are continually evolving. A shift from rural to urban life also affects the status of Moroccans. The status of rural Moroccan women is not an exception. Their position in society as well as the way they are viewed by men constantly changes and evolves. This evolution is not necessarily encouraged nor accepted by the patriarchal society that manifests itself as traditionally Muslim and rural, and therefore creates much confusion and conflict, both for the women and men of today's Morocco.

The focus of this research is *Le Soleil des obscurs*, by Moroccan francophone author Abdelhak Serhane. It is a study of paradox and confusion, and recounts the story of two young Berbers, Soltane and Mina, who are betrothed to one another in the traditional manner and who meet for the first time on their wedding night. It traces their lives from a time shortly before their engagement, to many years later and the birth of their first son (following the births of five daughters). The couple migrates from the South, or safe-haven, to the North, a major city, which is "regarded as invariably harmful" (Abdalaoui 20). It is the story of their relationships with their families, each other, and Moroccan society as a whole.

The major female characters in the work are Mina, the bride; Mina's mother, Lalla Aïcha; Soltane's mother, Lalla Batoul; and Aouicha, the first love of Soltane's father, who has become a prostitute. These four women represent various roles and social standing in rural Moroccan society, and their differences show the transition and transformation of women in Morocco. The mother and mother-in-law exist in a rural milieu in a very traditional sense; they are submissive, yet dominate the lives and destinies of their children. Aouicha represents a liberated woman living within the confines of a traditional, rural society; society shuns and marginalizes her as she does not conform to the traditional mores. Mina, in coming of age, struggles to free herself from the traditional roles imposed by her society's boundaries, and comes dangerously

close to overstepping the limits of what is acceptable in today's Moroccan society in her struggle to liberate herself.

Serhane's treatment of the women is such that the inherent conflict of this evolution in women's status is apparent. What are their roles? What are the expectations placed upon them in terms of wife, mother, mother-in-law, daughter, mistress? Where do they belong? As they seek to create their own lives, can they "fit" in Moroccan society? The status of these four women is metaphorical for the status of all Moroccan women and the uncertainty reflected in their respective roles is shared not only by the women themselves, but by Moroccan men who are coping with these changes. There is much confusion as to the gender roles of both Serhane's female and male characters which is symbolic of the current confusion experienced by rural Moroccans.

In examining Serhane's treatment of women and their evolving status, one must first understand the context in which Serhane is writing. A literary overview of North African francophone writing will be presented in order to situate Serhane's works, followed by an examination of the roles of rural Moroccan women in socio-anthropological terms in order to better understand the sociological context of the novel. This will be presented in the form of an overview of current sociological and anthropological works, giving the reader a general context in which the novel may be situated. Next, a brief exploration of exile and alienation in two short stories by North

African women writers, Leïla Sebbar and Andrée Chedid, will be made. And finally, *Le Soleil des obscurs* will be placed within this social and literary context and a discussion of the four female characters as well as the male protagonist will follow. The women will be classified as: traditional women in a traditional milieu, more specifically Lalla Aïcha and Lalla Batoul; liberated women in a traditional milieu as exemplified by Aouicha; and lastly, rural women struggling to make sense out of the confusion of roles that exists in rural Moroccan society today, represented by Mina. Finally, this analysis will be situated in the context of male understanding and acceptance of these emerging roles, represented by Soltane, focusing on the potential conflict between men and women and the evidence of their deteriorating relationships. The conclusion will show that *Le Soleil des obscurs* is symbolic for the current enigmatic status, marginalization, and paradox found in the lives of rural Moroccan women today.

Chapter I

Overview of North African Francophone Literature

Abdelhak Serhane is one of the most engaging members of the new generation of North African francophone writers. His works treat the current status of Moroccan society, particularly that of youth and women, and his style is a fusion of folk myths and cultural references along with the current realities, often brutal and pessimistic. Born in 1950 in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco, Serhane was educated there and then attended Ibn Tofaïl University in Kenitra. He prepared his doctoral thesis on the sexuality of young rural Moroccans. He is currently a professor of psychology at the Ibn Tofaïl University in Kenitra. Serhane's typical themes include corruption, social injustice, the abjection of the South of Morocco (the most underdeveloped and rural part of the nation), and the human condition in contemporary Morocco. Serhane is one of the first Moroccan novelists to write specifically about Berbers, and has made a "serious attempt to transcribe the reality of the Berber people" in several of his works (Kaye and Zoubir 58). He is also one of the few North African francophone writers to continue to write in his own country; many have immigrated to France in order to be able to write more freely. Serhane published his first novel, *Messaouda*, in 1983. Although considered to be auto-biographical in the popular tradition of North African writers, it is the story of a mythical character, *Messaouda*, who represents desire as

well as solitude; it is strikingly similar to Ben Jelloun's *Harrouda* and Chraïbi's *Le Passé simple*. Recounted by a son, it is the story of a father taken in by the legendary Messaouda; the narrator soon learns the corruption and mediocrity of his father and is disillusioned, a metaphor for the current disillusionment of young Moroccans today. It was censured for several years in Morocco, but finally became available to the Moroccan public in 1996. In 1986, he published a sequel to *Messaouda*, *Les Enfants des rues étroites*, a tale recounting a young man in a small Berber community who grows up in the small rural area of Azrou, leaves home and his best friend, and returns to find that nothing has changed, at least in terms of appearance. It is a social satire and dramatizes the upheaval of traditional values and customs. *L'Ivre poème*, a collection of poems, was published in 1989. *La Nuit du secret* and *Chant d'ortie* followed in 1992 and 1993. Finally, *Les Prolétaires de la haine* appeared in 1995 and, most recently, *L'Amour circoncis* was published in 1996. It is not a novel, but rather an essay on the sexuality of the Moroccan people, a rather honest account of the realities confronting Moroccans today in terms of sexual behavior and roles within the constraints of society; the facts are told and thus break the silence held by most today regarding the taboo subject of sexuality and freedom in a repressive society. Serhane's most widely-known work, *Le Soleil des obscurs*, the focus of this study, was published in 1992 and won the *Prix français du monde arabe* in 1993. In order to understand the

context under which Serhane writes, it is necessary to examine the history of North African francophone literature.

Themes of paradox and conflict in the personal lives of individuals have been treated by writers for many centuries, as has the position of women in society. And, although the North African novel in French is a relatively new literary genre, North African francophone authors have also addressed these themes. A paradox itself, "la littérature maghrébine de langue française est à la fois refusée par son public naturel, parce que se servant d'une langue qui est celle de l'Autre, et valorisée, peut-être grâce au regard de l'Autre justement" (Bonn 1985, 7). The North African novel in French came into being with the French occupation of the Maghreb, either under the pretext of a protectorate or colonization, when France first occupied Algeria in 1830. Along with French occupation came a movement towards French in education. At the same time, many yearned to learn French in order to defend their legal rights against their colonizers (Bouzar 51). Some North Africans, particularly those with roots in high society, grew up only speaking and writing French, their native Arabic or Berber dialects thus lost. Girls, who had previously been excluded from traditional Koranic school systems, were welcomed into the French school, and thus grew up speaking, reading, and writing a language which was not their own. A new culture was born, and North Africans began to write in French. It is interesting to note that French was not always chosen by authors as their preferred language; rather, they felt it was the

most prudent choice to enable their works to be read. Yet, "by writing in the language of what, until thirty years ago, was the occupying power in the land of their birth, francophone North African authors have had to grapple with complex problems of identity and allegiance" (Hargreaves 1991, 3). According to Tahar Ben Jelloun, North Africans choose to write in French in order to "be somewhat bold and also to be relevant, because, when one writes in Arabic, one is slightly intimidated by the language of the Koran" (qtd. in Spear 34). In addition, because North African society has an oral-based tradition, writing in their native language was, and continues to be, foreign to the writers (Kaye and Zoubir 29).

In terms of literary criticism on the North African novel in French, there are two schools of thought. The first takes into consideration the origin of the writer and his subject, and promotes a sociological/anthropological reading of the content of a text. Such critics include Jean Déjeux and Abdelkébir Khatibi. Khatibi, in particular, addresses many of the critical issues, such as the problems involved in expressing oneself in the language of exile and alienation, or, French (McNeece 12). A more contemporary genre of literary criticism also exists in the "literary" reading, which disregards cultural aspects of the work and does not examine works in terms of the genre of North African francophone literature. Charles Bonn and Jacqueline Arnaud incorporate this theory into their respective analyses (Gontard 1992, 33-37). Perhaps a thorough analysis of North African literature should take into account both readings,

for to ignore the cultural origins and "baggage" of these writers would be to negate the very thing the writers are struggling with: identity. At the same time, one cannot abandon the literary aspects of a text, and consideration should be given to the form and words of these works.

The first North African francophone writers, writing in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, chose to express themselves chiefly in literary reviews, writing essays that addressed primarily political subjects (Déjeux 1978, 20). This militant genre was not particularly popular among Maghrebians, due largely to the fact that many North Africans did not yet speak French.

The twenties brought "a genuine cultural renaissance", and this next generation of writers are true novelists (Bouzar 51). This movement began in the twenties and included Tahar Essafi, Mahmoud Aslan of Tunisia, Caïd Ben Cherif, Abdelkader Hadj-Hamou, Slimane Ben Ibrahime, and Aïssa Zehar of Algeria. Perhaps the best known writer of this era is Ali Belhadj, who used the pseudonym Mohammed Sifi; he authored *Souvenirs d'enfance d'un blédard,* which won the *Grand prix littéraire d'Algérie* in 1941 (Déjeux 1978, 20). According to Déjeux, these novels were often naturalist in tendency, and also quite moralistic, yet they contained elements of exoticism, particularly to Western readers, as well as allusions to North African folklore and tradition. In addition, it was clear that the writers felt apprehensive

towards the West, fearing a complete loss of culture and religion through writing in the language of the "Other" (Bouzar 51).

Later, as the francophone populations in these countries (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) grew, so did the numbers of authors writing in French. Literary circles and clubs teemed with activity and excitement. Conferences on francophone North African writing took place and, consequently, the genre began to gain exposure. Algerians took to the forefront, producing the largest number of works. Morocco followed a close second, while Tunisia was a distant third, with few writers of any consequence.

Jean Déjeux and others claim that the true North African novel in French was born between 1945 and 1950 (Déjeux 1978, 11; Bonn 10). The genre gained momentum in the fifties and sixties, on the eve of independence, which occurred for Algeria in 1962, and Morocco and Tunisia in 1956. This newfound freedom, after a century of occupation, allowed North Africans to fully explore the occupation, colonization, and particularly the relationship of colonizer and colonized.

Until the sixties, according to Déjeux, the most prevalent literary themes were highly dependent on folklore and daily life (1978, 35). There was a tendency towards the expression of all that was traditional, and accounts of the past and the role of religion in daily life were prevalent. This period was followed by a time during which resistance and colonialization were the major literary current. Revolt was a

particularly popular subject, either in the context of nationalism or family ties. The period of independence served as particular impetus for writers, and literary production, particularly in Algeria, was fruitful (Bouzar 51). Yet today, the situation is changing.

> "Thirty years after independence, there are more and more francophone Maghrebian authors who have never experienced direct colonial rule. If they live in the Maghreb, they are less subject to the complexes and identity problems associated with the colonized; however, those who emigrated from the Maghreb to France continue to live with these identity problems in a very complex manner" (Déjeux 1992, 7).

Current trends are more varied and include aspects from the earlier period including accounts of folklore, exoticism, and daily life as well as themes of revolution, conflict, combat, and resistance. In addition, the relatively new phenomenon of the immigrant North African in France provides many writers with a new direction. Today, North African writers cover a range of universal themes, but colonization, and conflict remain among the most popular. "Immigration and its psycho-social ramifications constitute a recurrent theme in contemporary Maghrebian fiction written in French" (Mehta 79). Guy Daninos, in his examination of current trends in Algerian francophone literature, considers the theme of alienation to be the primary focus of today's writers (Daninos 10). The problem of identity remains at the forefront

thematically for many: are the authors "French, Francophone, Maghrebian, or Beur" (Hargreaves 1996, 33)? Personal as well as cultural and social identities pose a problem for many of the writers, and multi-ethnicity, lack of roots, and exile are inveterate themes employed by many contemporary North African writers. In order to highlight their commonalties, such as the positive aspects of family, culture, and relation, as well as the negative aspects, such as lack of roots, exile, and war, found in most North African francophone literature, following is a brief discussion of several of the great writers of this genre.

Tunisians:

Albert Memmi

Albert Memmi, a Tunisian Jew, is particularly well known for his works on oppression (Accad 627), having "evoked the role of the colonized writer" (Abdalaoui 9). Memmi was born of a Berber mother and a Tunisian Arabic father, yet, first and foremost, writes in French of being a Jew in a predominantly Muslim society. His works include *La Statue de sel*, which won the Carthage, Fénélon, and Simba prizes, *Le Scorpion*, and *Le Pharaon*, as well as several essays which focus on colonialism and life as a Jew. He draws on colonization, war, and decolonization for his material; exile, loss of "home", and rejection, stylistically translating individual experience into universal understanding (Memmi 216-17).

Salah Garmadi

Salah Garmadi is one of the premier Tunisian poets. Born in Tunis in 1933, Garmadi published several works, including *Avec ou sans* and *Nos ancêtres les Bédouins*. Because he was a linguist and a scientist, writing was an expression of liberation for Garmadi (Memmi 154). He used both Arabic and French in his works, often intermingled, to express his multi-ethnicity.

Mustapha Tlili

Along these multi-ethnic lines, Mustapha Tlili represents a departure from traditional North African francophone literature in that, not only does he mix Maghrebian and French themes, he also intersperses American culture. Tlili lived in the United States for thirteen years, thus uses this experience as a base for his writing. He dramatizes the conflict of different ethnic groups (Black Americans and Puerto Rican Americans) in New York, paralleling this conflict with conflicts between other ethnic groups, including Jews and Muslims. His works include *La Rage aux tripes* and *Le Bruit dort*.

Algerians:

Mouloud Feraoun

One writer of particular importance is Mouloud Feraoun, an Algerian novelist who was originally from the Kayblie mountains. His ties to Kayblie were strong, and his works reflected this, in that they dealt with life there. Feraoun, born in 1913, began his literary career in 1939, with *Le Fils du pauvre*, although this book was not published until 1950. This work represents "réflexions sur la condition humaine en Kabylie" and employs many references spiritual values (ENSA 31-32). *Le Fils du pauvre* typified the "Maghrebian writer's search for a new identity, one that would express the colonial experience and reaffirm the traditions of a pre-colonial cultural heritage. The novel quickly became a cry of anguish and resentment" (Mortimer 85). Feraoun's works were all mainly "ethnographic", and with them, he played the role of documenter of his society as well as advocate for the Kayblie society (Déjeux 1978 117-18). Feraoun was assassinated by the *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (OAS) in 1962, presumably for his pro-Kabylie stance (Memmi 143).

Mohamed Dib

Mohamed Dib is another noteworthy Algerian writer. Not only is he a novelist, he is a poet and dramatist. He wrote at approximately the same time as Feraoun and their works contained similar elements in that they both recounted tales of

daily life. Both "are part of the corpus that reflects growing Maghrebian alienation in the area marked by the end of World War II and the beginning of the Algerian independence struggle in 1954" (Mortimer 85). Yet Dib added another aspect to his works: pessimism. Dib wrote of the proletariat as well as suffering and evil (ESNA 55-56), and was considered a surrealist (Memmi 111). He wrote of the "permanence of the earth and of woman" and sung the praises of working rural villagers in Algeria (Bouzar 53). Part of the "engaged" literary movement, Dib moved towards realism in his later works. At the same time, his works, such as *Qui se souvient de la mer* (1962) became more inner-focused, and he dealt with his personal problems and the issue of personal identity and exile rather than the broad subject of his country (Memmi 111).

Rachid Mimouni

Among the new wave of writers are Algerian Rachid Mimouni, author of *L'Honneur de la tribu* and *Le Printemps n'en sera que plus beau.* In his works, he queries the new Algeria, and what has become of his homeland. He "explores the disillusionment of independence" in *L'Honneur de la tribu* through the story of a tribe who has lost all semblance of honor and heritage, and who will never regain it. He is known for the sense of violence that is conveyed through his writing. A member of the "new" generation of writers, Mimouni explores the post-colonial "wreckage" of

Algeria in a "vigorous" manner, challenging the reader to accept the new reality and future of Algeria (Memmi 237).

Kateb Yacine

Also part of the aforementioned "corpus", Kateb Yacine, is at the forefront of North African francophone literature. Yacine has been called the "most eloquent spokesman of the Algerianness" (Kaye and Zoubir 113). His fame began in 1956 with the publication of the milestone novel, *Nedjma*, the story of a woman who is the object of the love of four men. It is "le chante d'une façon symbolique du passé, du présent, et de l'avenir imminent de l'Algérie" (ENSA 59). "It arrived at just the right time to express the Algerians' quest for identity and their struggle for liberty" (Bouzar 52). *Nedjma* represented "une nouveauté dans le courant romanesque algérien: luxuriance du vocabulaire, mélange des genres, utilisation du mythe, plongé dans les profondeurs de l'inconscient mutilé" (Memmi 175). The biographical aspects of *Nedjma* were such that the themes were universal and Yacine was hailed for this revolutionary work (Bonn 1985, 50). Yacine was highly popular with young audiences, yet took risks in his stance against the rigidity of Islam (ENSA 63). In the seventies, Yacine relinquished the French language in his novels, and started using the Algerian Arabic dialect in his works; what makes this even more revolutionary is that they have also been translated into Berber dialects, which was almost unheard of previously.

Assia Djebar

Although Yacine was not the first North African male writer to use central female characters, it has not been a common practice (Abu-Haidar 69). More recently, female protagonists have been included by male writers, but it is the women writers who more often choose to treat this subject. Assia Djebar, an Algerian woman born in 1936, also writes about sexual oppression, patriarchy, and women's roles in traditional North African society. Although she was not the first female Algerian writer to gain notoriety, she is among the most well known. Politically engaged, Djebar contributed to a number of militant publications sponsored by the *Front de Libération National* (F.L.N.) (Memmi 120). Her first novel, *La Soif*, criticized high Algerian society which had become westernized during the colonization. Her following works focused much more closely on women, and the relationship between women and war, women and men, women and tradition, and women and modernity (Memmi 121). Djebar's novels "recount the condition of the woman who has been sequestered and deprived of voice" (Bouzar 54). Her style is psychological, and her frank discussion of the roles and images of women in Algeria are her trademark, as is her depiction of women and their traditionally allocated space, to which she rebels. She is "ressentie par de nombreuses jeunes algériennes comme le porte-drapeau de leur émancipation" and wrote of women's status in Algeria as early as 1956 (Bonn 1974, 134). Djebar, living a

bicultural existence, also concentrates on the relationship she has with the French language, and views it as a liberating factor (Mortimer 151).

Yamina Mechakra

Yamina Mechakra is among Algerian writers who discuss colonialization and oppression. Mechakra, one of the growing numbers of women in the Maghrebian literary world, is a poet who "integrates the laws of feminism and decolinization" to convey her ideas, and uses the vehicle of a woman's body to promote these themes (Caws et al. 169). Her great work, *La Grotte éclatée*, is a realistic portrait of the relationship between women and war (Bonn 1985, 149). Set during the Algerian war of independence, "the novel presents the reader with a galaxy of moving portraits of men, some wounded, who drift in and out of the cave...*La Grotte éclatée* is a moving account of the suffering endured during the war of independence by both men and women" (Abu-Haidar 77-78). Bonn claims that *La Grotte éclatée* was inspired by Yacine's *Nedjma*, and that Mechakra takes the theme of women further, giving them a true voice; this "real" feminine voice is authentic, in that it comes from a woman, and represents the liberation of femininity in Algerian francophone literature (Bonn 1985, 181).

Leïla Sebbar

Leïla Sebbar, also Algerian in terms of origin but multi-ethnic in reality, "chooses to write about marginalized immigrants and in so doing to lessen her personal sense of exile" (Mortimer 177). Sebbar's protagonists are always female, and are often in flight (Mortimer 178). Because her father was Algerian and her mother French, she is in a unique position between the separate worlds of "French" and "Maghrebian", and does not tie herself to either group, although she is monolingual, having grown up speaking only French (Mortimer 177). As she is caught in between, having grown up in an Arab-speaking country speaking only French, it represents exile for her, and she attempts to portray this exile in her works (Marx-Scouras 45). In *Les Carnets de Shérazade*, Sebbar writes of a young woman's struggle with her identity. Caught between two cultures, she belongs to neither, and the idea of "double appartenance", which is common in other North African francophone novels, is negated (Laronde 202).

Moroccans:

Driss Chraïbi

Driss Chraïbi, born in 1926 in El Jadida, is one of the premier Moroccan writers of his time, although his pessimistic and engaged viewpoints are controversial (ENSA 92). He is aggressive in his criticism of society and religion and this is evident

in his works. He is an exception in the North African francophone literary school in that he addresses patriarchy and its effects on society (Mortimer 135). *Le Passé simple*, published in 1954, is a staunch look at father-son relationships. It is the account of a son revolting against "la loi paternelle et les traditions", thus religion and authority (Memmi 103). The protagonist, a destructive young man bearing the same name as the author (Driss), experiences the deaths of those who are close to him; he is in self-imposed exile, as is Chraïbi himself (Ibnlfassi 60). Because of this novel, Chraïbi was labeled a "traitor to the national cause" and highly criticized by Moroccans who "demanded an unblemished image of Moroccan society" (Abdalaoui 11). In *Les Boucs*, published in 1955, Chraïbi boldly criticizes the mistreatment of North African immigrants in France, a group of which he has played a part since moving there in 1945. This novel is part of the contemporary literature treating those who are "systematically marginalized, dispossessed and devitalized by the constraining politics of the host country" (Mehta 79). Chraïbi, more recently, has returned to his homeland, and writes about the rural Morocco which holds his roots, managing to synthesize the values of "une culture dépouillée, spirituelle, celle de la tribu, de la mémoire" in his works (Memmi 104).

Mohammed Khair-Eddine

Conflict and revolt are the primary themes documented by Mohammed Khair-Eddine in his works. A poet and novelist, Khair-Eddine was born in 1941 in Tafraout, Morocco. He is Berber and remains closely linked to his ethnicity, despite the fact that he lived in Casablanca and Paris; his works often take him back to his roots, in a sort of "pilgrimage" to his beginnings in works such as *Agadir* and *Moi l'aigre* (Déjeux 1978, 411). More recently, he published a volume of poetry, *Memorial*, which touches on the disorder of the universe in a particularly violent manner (Gontard 1993, 75-76). He is considered part of the new wave of Moroccan authors, and writes with a revolutionary spirit of politics, religion and society (Déjeux 1978, 409).

Tahar Ben Jelloun

More recently, several Maghrebian authors have experienced unparalleled success in the Occident and, although the French occupation ended in the late fifties and early sixties, many authors continue to write in French. Perhaps the most prolific North African writer is Tahar Ben Jelloun. Ben Jelloun was born in Fes, Morocco, in 1944. His first novel, *Harrouda*, was published in 1973. It is a violent work, and is considered to be an autobiography.

> "Harrouda, the title character in the novel, informs the entire text: she initiates into sexuality and into the imaginary...A witness to tearing and mutilation, both

> of the nation and of the narrator's mother, Harrouda interrogates history and places herself at the head of a revolution" (Abdalaoui 15).

With this, he experienced much success and continued publishing, writing about the immigrant experience in France (*La Réclusion Solitaire*, 1973 and *Hospitalité française*, 1984) as well as women's issues. His most reclaimed novel, *La Nuit sacrée* (1987), is a continuation of a story started previously in *L'Enfant de sable* (1985). For this work, he won the prix Goncourt. He tells of a girl child who was born to a man with numerous daughters. Because male children are the symbol of wealth and goodness in Islam, it is shameful to have fathered only female children. The father desperately wants a male child, and did not have one; thus, the last child was destined to be raised as a boy. *La Nuit sacrée* continues the theme, elaborating on the internal struggle of a woman in a man's world. His works are rich with tradition and folklore, and reflect the mystical aspects of life which still exist in modern Morocco, yet at the same time, show strong elements of revolt and criticism for the society in which the novels take place.

Singularly, each of these writers deals with his or her own issues, be it in the form of an auto-biography or a fictional tale. Each writes of his or her own experiences, and their works differ because of the variety of life experience that each writer has. Some, such as Tahar Ben Jelloun, Albert Memmi, and Assia Djebar, live and write in France due to various reasons; these include economic factors, political

persecution, or by choice, electing the freedom of writing without censorship and governmental constraints. They share common themes, including exile, lack of roots, colonialism, and societal oppression as well as tradition and religion, yet taken out of the context of North Africa, their writings are more ambiguous. This leads to a conflict between the Orient and the Occident, which is present in many of the works. Others, such as Serhane, choose to remain in their country of birth, writing despite the seeming constraints, perhaps remaining truer to the North African cause and way of life. The viewpoint portrayed by Serhane and others is that of loyalty, and championing the current social conditions of North Africans within their own context, rather than seeking to portray their lives outside of the Maghreb. By remaining in his country of origin, Serhane is able to write accurately of conditions there, and the actual circumstances of the lives of Moroccans. At the same time, the reader finds similarity in the themes of all North African writers, for even those who choose to remain in their countries of origin write of colonialism, racism, lack of roots, and exile, although the exile portrayed is that of one in one's own land. What becomes apparent in the entire canon of Maghrebian francophone literature is that it expresses dissatisfaction with the current situation of the people, due to many outside factors, that creates difficult lives for Maghrebians both at home and abroad. Taken together, the reader finds many similarities in terms of content and theme. The authors express an acute awareness of good versus evil, of paradox, and of social problems in almost all of their

works. The negative points examined in many of the works include exile, lack of roots, and loss of hope, while many of the novels also express a positive attitude, dealing with a return to tradition, family, and the strong role of family in society.

Chapter Two

Socio-anthropological profile of rural Moroccan women

"La femme rurale, un espace corps, un champ, une terre valorisée, une productrice et reproductrice se trouve à la croisée du physique, de l'économique, du social et du symbolique" (Belarbi 1995b, 10). Rural women[1] represent so much for Morocco, yet have long been ignored by many institutions, and the omission or poor treatment of women is not openly discussed. They are symbolic of the "cultural discontinuity between town and countryside" (Maher 1978, 101). They suffer in terms of health, education, economics, and social status. According to Fatima Mernissi, education and economics are two key areas in which women are struggling today (Mernissi 3). Health-wise, they often lack access to health care, and the care they do receive is substandard. In addition, barriers such as lack of transportation and money to pay for services affect women's health directly. They are also heavily influenced by traditional means of care and, although this is not always dangerous, it is often ineffective and can have repercussions on their health and the health of their children. In terms of education, rural females are also at a great disadvantage. Many rural areas do not have public schools and it is too difficult, too far, or too expensive to consider

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[1] In this chapter, no distinction is made between Arab and Berber women in the rural milieu because ethnicity has little bearing on the overall status of these women in terms of health, education, economics, and society.

attending school elsewhere. The stigma surrounding rural women who attend school away from home is often too great. Vocational education, in the form of *neddis*[2], exists in some areas, but it is not free. Women face the issue of lost work time in exchange for schooling, and family members are not always supportive of their girls and women attending classes. Yet education continues to be an extremely important factor in effecting change in society, and without it, rural women will continue to be subjugated (Mikhail 14). Economically speaking, rural women have little or no earning capacity. Their home work loads are too great to consider working elsewhere, and their lack of education and skills makes them unmarketable except for menial, low paying tasks. Factory and production work is largely unavailable in rural areas and for those women who need to work, there are few opportunities. Lastly, in terms of social status, rural women are equally at a disadvantage. Their traditional roles of daughter, mother, and daughter-in-law are restrictive and there is no evolution of these roles to include increased education or self-betterment. Women are confined in these roles and are expected to play them out. Girls, also, have expectations placed upon them, particularly in terms of virginity. If they do dare to differ from the roles, they become marginalized. Marginalized women in the *bled*[3] include divorced women, unwed

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2 *Neddis* are vocational training schools for girls that exist within *L'entre aide nationale*. They provide courses in subjects ranging from embroidery and rug making to cooking and child care at nominal cost. Literacy training is sometimes offered, as is a preschool. For further details, see"Educational Status" in Chapter 2.

3 Countryside.

mothers, and prostitutes; these women, through varying circumstances, are not living the traditional roles, and are paying for this by even lower status in terms of health care, education, economics, and societal standing. They are generally excluded from society as well as institutions, and are barely surviving, let alone contributing to society in a productive manner.

By exploring rural women's status in terms of their health, education, economic status and social roles, one can conclude that they are not involved in the current evolution that is taking place in rural Morocco. By ignoring the valuable resource of rural women as participants in the economy as well as educators of children and future generations, rural women themselves are not only being denied services in terms of health, education, economics, and social status, they are unable to participate in modern Morocco. Inevitably, this exclusion from the active society leads to omission in terms of the advancement process as a whole, thus leading to delayed change and a continued slow pace of development.

Health Status

Women in rural Morocco have often been neglected in terms of heath care. According to Dr. Abou-Wakil of the Moroccan Ministry of Public Health, "les femmes et les enfants vivant en zone rurale ainsi que les mères non instruites sont particulièrement désavantagées au niveau de leur santé et de l'utilisation des services

de santé" (qtd. in Temsamani 27). The lack of access to care, as well as the inferior quality of care they may receive in public facilities, leads to a lack of healthfulness that is prevalent among many rural women. Specifically, reproductive health trends as well as reproductive practices indicate that women are not receiving health education that is vital to their survival. Traditional beliefs act further as a barrier, and some practices are notably dangerous.

Rural areas tend not to be fully covered by the health care system, which, in Morocco, falls most often under the guise of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH). Because of limited governmental funding, the MOPH is often unable to cover all areas of Morocco, and remote regions with difficult access are frequently the last frontiers of health care. If facilities exist in these rural areas, they are often quite basic, consisting of no more than a cement shelter with several beds, lacking electricity and running water. The facilities are understaffed, or staffed only by itinerant nurses, usually male, who are responsible for the health care of entire regions, ranging in population from 500 to 5,000 inhabitants. The personnel is often undertrained and, because supplies and facilities are lacking, the care is not adequate.[4] Common complaints regarding the health personnel are that they are not particularly friendly nor honest, and pay attention

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4 Based on author's observations during two years of service as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer in the small rural community of Msemrir, Ouarzazate. The author worked at a public health facility in the field of maternal and child health.

only to wealthy clients.[5] In 1993, a study evaluating the quality of care in family planning services found that only half of the women interviewed believed health providers to be "responsive" to them during visits to a health facility (Brown et al. 161).

On top of the low level of available care, access is also a problem. Often, women live very far from the facilities, and transportation is not always readily available. Susan Schaefer Davis found that traveling even a short distance was a barrier for women seeking care (1988, 71). When women are sick or injured and in need of immediate care, emergency transport is not an option, as most rural areas do not have access to an ambulance. When an ambulance is available, it is often the responsibility of the patient and her family to pay for the time, fuel, and driver, at a cost ranging from 200 - 500 dirhams.[6] These fees further decrease accessibility, as they are out of reach financially for most families. Further complications arise when the patient is a woman, as it is often the men in a family who make the critical decisions. If the man is away from the home, no decision will be made and it can be too late, particularly in the case of a high risk birth or a serious injury.[7]

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[5] See 4.

[6] $1 US = 8.5 DH.

[7] See 4.

Yet another complication in the health care status of women arises with cultural and religious beliefs. Because most of the health care providers at the rural level are men, many women will not seek care from them. The phenomenon of *hashouma*[8] is a strong factor, and women fear that their reputations will be soiled if a man who is not their husband sees them in varying stages of undress. Men also play a role in this issue, sometimes refusing to seek care for their wives if the provider is male. Even when the provider is a female, women are reluctant to seek care from a stranger (Davis 1988, 64).

These factors plus others result in many health problems for women, most notably in the area of reproductive health. In rural Morocco, women have an average of 5.5 living children (ENPS 5). This does not include pregnancies that have ended in miscarriage, still births, or children who have died. Although this represents a sharp decrease from 1980, at which time women had an average of seven children, it continues to pose heath risks to women (ENPS 5). Cultural and socio-economic factors contribute to these problems greatly (Ghémirès 50). The lack of access to health care, including appropriate methods of family planning, and the misinformation regarding health care that is disseminated among women in the rural areas contribute to these problems. Early marriage, which often results in pregnancy at a very young age, is a great problem in the *bled*. Nearly fifty percent of Moroccan women marry

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[8] Personal shame.

before reaching the age of nineteen. (ENPS 6). Adolescent pregnancy is very difficult on a woman in terms of her health, and can lead to high risk births. According to Dr. Souad Hamdani, a pediatrician at the Children's Hospital in Rabat, adolescent pregnancy "engendre des problèmes socio-économiques, psychologiques et retentit sur la santé du bébé et de la maman posant un véritable problème de santé publique" (61). She also cites several factors leading to early pregnancy: illiteracy, lack of formal education, and unemployment (Hamdani 62). Young mothers are less likely to seek prenatal care as well; this lack of prenatal care, along with a low socio-sanitary level and a woman's status as a primipare[9], lead to complications such as infection, hemorrhage, need for cesarean and even death (Hamdani 66). The children also suffer from premature births, low birth weights, or sickness at birth (Hamdani 67). Dr. Hamdani suggests that these reproductive problems can be solved by providing education and employment outside of the home for women (Hamdani 67).

It is not only young women who are reluctant to seek prenatal care. Eighty-two percent of rural women sought no care before birth and only thirteen percent of rural women delivered in a health facility (ENPS chartbook 12). As mentioned above, this can be dangerous as high risk births are not identified. When high risk births occur, infant mortality is a great hazard. In rural Morocco, sixty five infants per one thousand births die before their first birthday (ENPS chartbook 34). Maternal deaths also occur

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9 Having never previously given birth.

during pregnancy. The maternal mortality rate for rural Morocco is 362 deaths per 100,000 births. This figure include deaths "caused directly by pregnancy, those caused by the delivery and those occurring during the two months following the delivery" (ENPS 17).

Family planning acceptance rates among rural Moroccan women are low. Although 87 percent of rural woman have some knowledge of family planning, only 32 percent are currently using any method. In the rural areas, 29 percent of women are using modern methods of family planning, including sterilization, condoms, the birth control Pill, or the IUD (Intra-Uterine Device) (Ghémirès 51). Three percent of rural women use a traditional method, including abstinence, a form of the rhythm method, or herbal treatments, among others (ENPS 8). Low acceptance rates among rural women could be due to a belief that family planning methods are harmful. For instance, women believe that the IUD can become dislodged from a one's uterus and travel to her heart, causing cardiac arrest. Women believe that birth control Pills cause sterility. Women are also not seeking to use birth control until they have had one or more children.[10] In addition, women are reluctant to use birth control because they believe that, if a woman uses contraception, it will be supposed by others that she is engaging in sexual activities other than for purposes of procreation (Hamdani 64-65).

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[10] Based on the author's observations while participating in a Ministry of Public Health *KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices)* survey regarding community health practices in rural areas, 1995-1996.

Family planning methods, however, are not outlawed by Islam; on the contrary, coitus interruptus, or *azl*, is condoned in the Koran (Sahawneh 51). The United Nations issued a statement on behalf of six governments of Muslim States on December 10, 1966 affirming the right of couples to limit their births (Sahawneh 51). Yet there is a persistent belief in the will of Allah, and women are hesitant to attempt to regulate and plan births, as they are a naturally occurring phenomenon. These beliefs, not necessarily tied to tradition, result in a reluctance to seek appropriate care.

Economics also plays a great role in a woman's decision to seek care. In theory, health care is free. In practice, the ingrained system of *bakshish*[11] has become the norm.[12] Women seeking care for themselves or their children, whether it is a small problem requiring a few aspirin or a difficult birth requiring much assistance and medication, are often asked to pay for the service, be it in cash or through gifts in kind. As will be discussed later, rural women have little or no income, and this demand places a great stress on them, even though it is often a small sum (usually ranging from 10-100 dirhams).[13] Additionally, over prescribing is a problem. Because rural facilities lack even basic means of pinpointing a diagnosis, providers are obligated to prescribe for a variety of problems with the hopes that one treatment will cure the

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[11] Bribery.

[12] See 4.

[13] $1 US = 8.5 DH.

problem. Women cannot afford to purchase many treatments, so they end up purchasing nothing. In turn, they do not recover. This leads to a belief that the health care is ineffective, and causes a lack of confidence in the health system. In studying factors influencing health care choices in rural Morocco, Susan Schaefer Davis found that "both economic and sociological factors made access to modern medicine difficult for the people...they usually tried the traditional cures, ('Muslim medicine') first" (1988, 59).

Traditional healers are prevalent in rural Morocco, and they are often consulted by women as an alternative to modern health care due to economic and cultural factors. Yet at what cost? Although the care provided by these healers is not always dangerous, it can have serious ramifications to the health of women and their children. The most prevalent type of traditional practitioner is the *kabla*, or traditional birth attendant (TBA). It is usually an older village woman who fulfills this role, and often she is responsible for birthing all babies in her *douar*[14]. In 1992, 72 percent of all births in Morocco took place at home; *kablas* assisted at 48 percent of all births (ENPS 11). In comparison, doctors and nurses or trained midwives assisted at a cumulative 31 percent of births (ENPS 11). TBAs are responsible for a majority of births yet, until very recently, they received no formal training in birthing techniques. The MOPH instituted a training program for TBAs in 1995 and thus far, several

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[14] Neighborhood or community within a village.

hundred TBAs have been trained.[15] Fortunately, most births are uncomplicated and pose few health risks to women and their children under normal circumstances. However, the high risk cases threaten both the health of the mother and her child, and TBAs cannot properly deal with unexpected risks. Low rates of prenatal care and risk screening do not identify women who are at risk, and these births can have negative outcomes, both for the child and the mother, with the results often including maternal mortality. Women continue to give birth at home because of the aforementioned economic and cultural factors, as well as the lack of access and quality of care they receive at MOPH facilities.

Other traditional healers include *lekeway*, or fire healers. These are community members, generally men, who use a hot iron to burn strategic spots on the patient's body. It is widely believed that health problems are caused by *jinn*, or evil genies, and that they must be chased from a person's body in order for the person to feel better. Women consult fire healers for a variety of health problems, including infection, arthritis, and malnutrition.[16] Children with distended bellies, suffering from Kwoshikor's disease[17] are often brought to the healers home to be burned (Frost et al.

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15 Based on observations of author while working at the Moroccan Ministry of Public Health in the Maternal Child Health Division in Rabat from June 1995 to August 1996.

16 See 4.

17 Malnutrition caused by protein deficiency which results in swollen limbs and abdomen.

43). Not only does the technique result in second and third degree burns, it often exacerbates the existing condition because children experience symptoms of infection, such as high fever, fatigue, even shock, and do not feel well enough to eat after the burning.

In addition to *lekeway* and *kablas*, there are a variety of other healers ranging from women who practice folk medicine in their homes, to individuals practicing magic, to others who have gained fame through rather unique methods (Davis 1988, 63). For example, in Toundoute, Ouarzazate, there is a widely known woman who claims to cure blindness and other eye diseases by cleaning the eyes with a gazelle horn. On a similar note, a woman in Alnif, Errachidia, is well known because she "cures" eyes with her tongue.[18] Davis explains that these traditional healers "go beyond physical treatment and add a supernatural aspect" (1988, 63). Often, village women seek help for health problems by visiting their local *f'qih*, or religious leader.[19] He will write a specific verse of the Koran on a small piece of paper that is usually placed in a leather or cloth pouch and then worn around the neck as an amulet. Sometimes, specific instructions are given to the person to expedite the healing process. These instructions might include a visit to a local *zawiyat*[20], additional

18 See 4.

19 In addition to being a religious leader in a community, *f'qihs* often practice traditional medicine and use religion as a healing force. They are highly respected in their communities.

20 Saint's tomb.

prayer, a change in diet, or the use of home remedies such as drinking an elixir made of various herbs (Davis 1988, 63).

Women, however, can rely upon themselves, as "most women practice folk medicine, in which they know herbal treatments for minor family illnesses" (Davis 1988, 63). The use of herbs as medicine is extremely common in the *bled*. After births, women place henna on the child's umbilical cord. Henna is also used on cuts and wounds. A mixture of *thyme* and milk is common for colds and aches and pains.[21] Another common home remedy includes *tigshent*, or pushing up on the fontanel of a dehydrated child to cure him (Frost et al. 27). Various plants are used in conjunction with various maladies, often at the direction of a traditional healer, but sometimes without advice.

The use of these traditional methods contributes to the low health status of *bled* women. They are barriers to healthfulness, as they often are of no value and sometimes even cause harm. Yet the fact that modern care is often far, expensive, or of poor quality, pushes women to continue to follow this path as well, and until the MOPH provides more and better care, the health status of rural Moroccan women will remain low. In addition to these improvements, rural women need a better

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21 See 4.

understanding of their bodies, their health, and good health practices. By providing women with education, important progress can be made (Obermeyer 361).

Educational Status

Studies show that with increased education, the health status of women and children rises. "The level of education of the mother is one of the factors with the greatest influence on mortality among children in Morocco. Looking at infant mortality, for example, the probability of death among children of mothers with no education is 68 per 1000 births, more than three times that among children of mothers with a secondary or higher education (21 per 1000)" (ENPS chartbook 35). Yet rural Moroccans have little access to education. According to the 1992 ENPS study, nearly two thirds of all women of reproductive age[22] have never attended school, while 51 percent of men aged twenty to seventy have attended school. Among rural children aged seven to ten, 30 percent of girls and 55 percent of boys attend school. Only 15 percent of rural girls aged eleven to fifteen attend school, compared with 36 percent of boys (ENPS chartbook 6). Eighty-seven percent of rural Moroccan women cannot read or write (Belarbi 1995, 9). The World Bank estimated in 1984 that, by the time Moroccan children reached the age of eighteen, girls had only attended an average of five years of schooling, while boys had attended school for an average of 7.7 years

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22 Reproductive age generally includes women aged fifteen to forty-nine.

(18). According to Temsamani, there are many factors which affect the low rate of attendance at school; these include the lack of physical access to schools, insufficient infrastructure, inadaptation of materials to the region and needs of rural populations, lack of means to permit students to continue in vocational education after primary school, the increase in school fees, the necessity for girls to work at home, illiteracy of parents, and the status of rural women in general (37-38). In many areas, schools just don't exist, or if they do, they cover only the first six years of education. Cultural bias concerning the education of women and girls is also a factor. Finally, for those women who have had some education, the ramifications of continuing on to higher education--or even junior high, are a real concern.

Morocco has a fairly extensive public school system, and many rural areas have primary schools. Yet not all families live near the schools, making access difficult. In a recent survey of rural families, 22.4 percent stated that access was the chief barrier in terms of education of girls (Ghémirès 56). There are no school buses, and other means of transportation are scarce, making it very hard for all youngsters to attend school. Inclement weather can also be a problem. Nomadic families, although relatively few in number today, are at a great disadvantage, as they do not usually live near villages, nor do they reside in the same place for long periods of time.

There is also the question of economics. Primary schools are free, but text books, clothing, and shoes are not. If a family has a limited budget for schooling, it is

almost sure that a male child will be sent to school before a female child. Girls are responsible for a large portion of family work. This includes caring for younger siblings and household animals, meal preparation, gathering firewood, collecting water, and working in fields. When girls go to school, not only are the parents losing the work value of their daughter, but they are forced to pay for the expenses associated with her education. A common understanding that the girl will not continue with her education after primary school makes it seem unnecessary to parents that she begin. The future of the girl child is not taken into consideration, since she will never be expected to contribute financially to the family, particularly if she marries.[23]

Girls who do attend primary school often do not continue on to junior high and high school, simply due to the location of these facilities. It is rare to find secondary education facilities at a village level, therefore, girls are forced to either commute (not usually possible in light of poor public transport reaching these remote areas) or board at the school, an unlikely possibility due to cultural ramifications. Girls who board at schools are few and far between, mostly due to community beliefs and the way society views girls who live away from home. Girls who board are viewed as potential and probable victims of males, and the family honor is at stake.

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23 See 4.

One option for rural girls is the *neddi*[24]. *Neddis* are state-sponsored schools for girls and women and exist in larger rural communities under the direction of *L'entre aide nationale*. There are paid instructors (often women) who teach artisanal skills such as embroidery, sewing, weaving, rug making, and crochet, as well as cooking, nutrition, child care, and literacy. For a nominal fee, girls and women can attend the school and learn these skills. Pre-school is also available at some facilities. Yet women are not fully utilizing them because of the fee involved as well as lost time. Until 1993, there was a program of food provision, sponsored by UNICEF, in all Moroccan *neddis*. Girls and women attended health education sessions and, in return, received flour and oil.[25] This encouraged women to learn about health but also provided them with some compensation for their time.

Girls who are educated but come from a rural area are caught in a serious dilemma, because they no longer fit the mold of a typical rural woman. Often they are unwilling, or physically unable, to work after having spent years in a town or city. They are perhaps more educated than their fathers, which leads to insecurity on the part of the father. Some educated women are forced to return to the village to marry,

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24 There is no equivalent of *neddi* in English. It translates as *foyer féminin* in French.

25 Based on information provided orally by Charles Benjamin, Executive Director, Near East Foundation, Morocco, a Non-Governmental Organization specializing in appropriate technology and health and hygiene education.

and end up marrying husbands who have less education than they do.[26] These girls grow into women who have experienced another life yet are required to live a rural existence. Typically, the age at which a girl marries correlates to the amount of schooling she has had; the more studies she has undertaken, the greater her age at marriage (Barkallil and Naciri 34). This later marriage age, although improving potential health status and economic issues, can cause concern for families, as unmarried girls are viewed as liabilities for their families.

Economic Status

"The most important economic activities of the Moroccan woman occur within her household...few participate in the marketplace" (Davis 1983, 65). It is hoped that, with increased education, the economic status of rural women will improve. Yet the living conditions in Morocco are not conducive to improvement. People, particularly those living in the *bled*, still lack basic services that are needed to improve the quality of life. As of 1992, only 16 percent of rural Moroccan households had electricity; 18 percent had access to safe drinking water; and 18 percent had access to toilet facilities (ENPS chartbook 8). Living with these conditions, it is understood that daily life is difficult, and that, to survive, there is much work to be done.

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[26] See 4.

"La société marocaine dite traditionnelle est une société féodale, agraire, visant l'autosuffisance. Par le term 'traditionnel', nous voulons désigner la société rurale fondée à l'origine sur l'exploitation de la terre, à forte dominante conservatrice" (Serhane 1995, 37). Currently, women do much of the hard work, mostly manual labor, and receive no financial compensation. A rural woman, according to Naïma Chikhaoui, "se définit comme femme qui travaille. Le travail constitue l'élément principal dans la pièce d'identité de la femme rurale" (1995, 61). Women are responsible for child care, meal preparation, gathering of firewood, collection of water, house cleaning, laundry, and field work as well as caring for animals and gathering fodder (Ghémirès 60). In addition, women are solely responsible for food production and preservation, including preparing dairy products, dried fruits, and preserved meats, and grinding wheat to make flour (Belarbi 1995a, 91). Because most families live in an extended family situation, with multiple families under one roof, there is a division of labor, and women employ the idea of *nouba*, or turn taking, with the tasks. But this work is physically and mentally exhausting, regardless of the turn drawn.[27]

It is estimated that between forty percent and sixty percent of the rural work force is comprised of women; yet because they are uneducated and unskilled, and are occupied almost solely by their unpaid work as wives and mothers, *bled* women rarely work for pay (Belarbi 1995, 9; Hajjarabi 14). Only 26 percent of Moroccan women

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[27] See 4.

are actively participating in the economy as workers (Benabdenbi 56). According to one study, only 43 percent of women in rural areas work; of these women, 84 percent are working in agriculture, which is often unpaid and solely for her family's benefit, and 14 percent are involved in artisanal activities (Benradi-Khachani 1994, 14). When women work outside the home, it is out of necessity and financial need (Davis 1978, 417). Women make rugs, baskets, blankets, and woolen capes, among other things. These items are marketable, but are so time consuming that it is not possible to produce enough to turn a profit. Often, the items are kept for personal use, adding yet another task to a woman's workload. These activities are rarely targeted for inclusion in formal development programs (Chikhaoui 1995, 70).

Women who are employed by others in this industry are often exploited, and more and more girls, even as young as five years old, are being employed as well. National laws regulating this work go disregarded, and conditions are sometimes deplorable, including long hours (Benradi-Khachani estimates between sixty and seventy-two hours per week), exposure to poor hygiene practices, poor lighting, and no circulation (Benradi-Khachani 1994, 16-17). In addition, wages are extremely low.

Women who work for wages often experience a lower status in terms of community reception, particularly if their work necessitates working outside of the home (Davis 1983, 71). "The ideal woman is a virtuous wife and a good mother and remains in her home and out of the public eye" (Davis 1978, 429). Two of the few

ways a rural woman can earn money are by taking in wash or baking bread. Yet the number of families willing to pay a woman to do these tasks is limited, usually, to the outsiders who live in the village and work for the schools, health centers, agricultural extension offices etc. Another way she can earn money is by selling small amounts of produce, milk, eggs, or chickens. This sort of micro-enterprise, although popular in other countries, has yet to succeed in Morocco and has not been sponsored on a large scale basis. A fourth way is to play music at parties, such as naming celebrations, weddings, or henna parties; but for this activity to remain respectable, the parties must be female-only in nature (Davis 1983, 80).

Rural women, because they do not work for pay, have no economic power. They have no money of their own and cannot access health or education without the support, both emotional and material, of their families and the community. However, their families and communities are often a repressive force in their lives, and women cannot reach their full potential.

Social and Familial Status

The fundamental unit of social and economic organization in Morocco is the family (Ghémirès 13). It is "l'institution centrale de la société marocaine. Elle détenait plusieurs monopoles: instance suprême de socialisation et de formation, entreprise employante, assurance maladie, assurance retraite..." (Bennani-Chraïbi

163). In rural Morocco, families consist of either one couple and their children (44 percent), or a complex extended family (45 percent) which may include grandparents, parents, children, aunts, and uncles etc. (Ghémirès 17). The standing of women in these units remains low, as the society can be termed patriarchal. Women's roles, as defined by Islam, are equal, yet in practice, female roles of wife, mother, and daughter show that women are not on an equal plane with men in the way they are treated by their families and society.

Theoretically, "Islam defines woman's status as daughter, wife and mother and gives her personal and social rights, thus insuring her active participation in society" (Mikhail 15). Yet these "rights" are not always practiced, and women become subjugated by tradition and lack of power. For instance, inheritance is regulated by the Koran. A woman receives only half of what her brother will receive in the event of a father's death. This is often defended with the argument that married women do not have to contribute to family expenses because, under Islamic law, men are responsible for providing for wives and children (Mikhail 19-21). Serhane believes that inheritance laws keep women in a position of inferiority (1995, 82). When women marry, they sign a *nikah*[28], or contract, and certain standards, ranging from the amount of the bride price to the conditions of work and divorce and supplementary marriages, may be set. "The marriage contract gives the couple certain rights over one another"

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[28] This contract only applies to marriage and acts as a marriage certificate for the couple.

(Mohsen 40). In Morocco, women do maintain the right to divorce their husbands, but only under five specific cases: that of lack of financial maintenance, incurable (medically speaking) addictions, abuse (which must be substantiated by twelve witnesses), a husband's absence lasting over one year, and threat of repudiation by the husband (Dulat 1996b, 12). These options are not easy, in any case, and for rural women, become nearly impossible, largely because women are not aware of their rights and/or they cannot document their cases (Benradi-Khachani 1995, 141).

In Morocco, specifically, the roles of both husbands and wives are clearly defined by the *Code du Statut Personnel,* a legal document which includes the responsibilities of men and women in marriage. To summarize, women must be faithful, obey their husbands, raise the children and breastfeed them, take care of the household, and give deference to the husband, his parents, and any of his relatives (Belarbi 1992, 74). Although the husband has responsibilities, such as providing for his wife financially, there is great inequality in the relationship. Already, the wife is placed at an inferior level in a household, although she may remain superior to other females in that home.

A woman's status within her community and her family is determined by several criteria. First and foremost is her "relationship to the head of the household", followed by "marital status" and "seniority" (Maher 1974 121-122). Wives have more status than sisters, daughters, or sisters-in-law, yet can be superseded by mothers,

depending on whose home one is in. Married women, particularly those with children, are more respected than single women. Finally, in households, women who have been present the longest rank over others, thus explaining the low status and respect accorded girls and daughters-in-law.

Women as wives and mothers fulfill a role which is dictated by society. Young women, in particular, are victims of discrimination, often carrying the heaviest burden in terms of work and earning the least respect. During adolescence, young women "do all the work of the household; the mother serves only as manager and supervisor" (Davis 1983, 26). Unmarried daughters are viewed as liabilities, perhaps because of the fact that their virginity is at risk and could be taken at any time, thus posing a threat to family honor; they are kept in a "cocon paternel surprotecteur" (Benarafa and Sijelmassi 79).

Daughters-in-law, who generally live with the in-laws after marriage, are low status, as are unmarried women, particularly those who are past their "prime" marriage age, considered to be in the early twenties. "Old maids" are viewed as an extra mouth to feed and, because most girls marry early, it is doubtful that these women will marry, thus negating the possibility of receiving the *sdak*, or bride price that is paid to a woman. Because fathers often control the choice of husbands for their daughters,

> "la femme devient alors cet objet que l'on vend et que l'on achète au gré des circonstances. Le montant de la dot constitue un pécule qui doit revenir à

> l'épouse. On le considère comme une assurance en cas de divorce; c'est ce qui explique l'exaltation des familles pour les sommes extravagantes." (Serhane 1995, 82).

The objectification of women is a serious issue, and it appears that they are often bought or sold, figuratively speaking, for the good of the family or community.

The role of young women in families is ambiguous. According to Benarafa and Sijelmassi, young women's lives in relation to their families appear to be without strain. Yet they further conclude that this is but an appearance. The young women remain silent and do everything in their power to avoid conflict. Young women are just that: women, and women do not hold the same place in the family as men (Benarafa and Sijelmassi 72). "Ce qui semble être la difficulté majeure de cette jeunesse féminine c'est de n'être ni entendue ni reconnue" (Benarafa and Sijelmassi 86). As a woman, she does not have the right to voice an opinion, is accountable for a large part of housework, and must submit to social structures over which she has no direct control.

Young women's roles in families are reflected in their roles in society. The status she experiences at home is only further magnified and has an aspect which is "aggressive et hostile" in addition (Benarafa and Sijelmassi 83). Society judges its members, and women seem to be judged more harshly then men. Girls and young

women must conform to societal standards and scandal, in any form, must be avoided at all costs in order to gain the respect of the community.

> "Pour garder cette estime, il lui suffit d'ailleurs de rester 'sage', de ne pas prononcer le mot de liberté qui 'hérisse' la susceptibilité familiale et sociale. Au mot liberté, les parents substituent le mot confiance 'nous te faisons confiance, ma fille'. Cette confiance peut-être une forme d'encouragement pour la jeune fille qui est confortée dans la relation affective avec ses parents...Mais la plupart du temps, 'la confiance' des parents s'abat sur l'adolescente comme une lourde responsabilité qui la paralyse" (Benarafa and Sijelmassi 85).

Thus, young women are often cloistered, and are subject to strict limitations on their movements and activities.

Because of these stringent societal constraints, pre-marital virginity is all important in the lives of unmarried rural women. It is essential that a woman show herself to be a virgin, even if she isn't, on her wedding night. "La virginité incarne, à elle seule, la symbolique de l'honneur, de la bonne éducation, des bonnes moeurs, en un mot, de la respectabilité de la demoiselle...Ainsi doit-elle tout faire pour préserver son corps du regard et du toucher du 'diable' masculin" (Dulat 1996a, 32). Family honor and dignity is represented by virginity (Benarafa and Sijelmassi 86). If a girl is not a virgin on her wedding night, she can be immediately divorced and then risks

rejection by the community and, more importantly, her family. "La femme, lieu de définition de l'identité du groupe, de ses valeurs intrinsèques, constitue un agent privilégié de perturbation de l'ordre public" (Bennani-Chraïbi 98). It is a central issue, not necessarily representing the actual virginity status of a young woman, but rather the social status of an entire population. "La question de la sexualité hors mariage est le haut lieu de la confrontation des systèmes de valeurs, de la négociation des frontières mobiles entre l'individu et le groupe, du creusement des dissonances entre pratiques et normes" (Bennani-Chraïbi 113). Bennani-Chraïbi further suggests that religion does not play an important role in a woman's decision to remain a virgin until marriage; rather, it is overwhelming social pressure (117). Families will even go so far as to have the virginity "certified" by a physician (Naamane-Guessous 170). The certificate serves as insurance should the girl's virginity be questioned (Dwyer 63). A recourse for non-virgins would be to substitute animal blood on the wedding night, or to insert scilla bulbs[29] into the vagina to cause bleeding (Naamane-Guessous 201). "Hymeneorraphy", or the reconstruction of the hymen membrane, is available in larger towns and cities (Chikhaoui 1994, 96).

Daughters-in-law are also in a very precarious social and familial position. They are considered low status within a familial unit and are controlled by the ever-present mother-in-law. They are viewed as newcomers who compete for loyalty and

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[29] *"Le bulbe de scille"* - a flowering bulb related to the hyacinth.

affection with their mothers-in-law, and are competing for the resources of the family; in addition, they are expected to take over much of the housework, and are openly criticized heavily (Davis 1983, 37). If a woman has recently married and has not yet given birth, she is still 'on-trial', as far as the family and community are concerned. By birthing children, particularly male children, a woman can earn status within the community (Davis 1983, 37).

Marginalized Women

Finally, there is a class of rural women who are shunned and marginalized by the community. Divorced women, prostitutes, and unwed mothers all fall into this category. "La société marocaine ne fait pas de place aux femmes sans homme, leur existence même est source de scandale" (Naamane-Guessous 137). Thirteen percent of rural households are headed by women. "Such a situation may have negative consequences for the stability and well-being of the family, since females are disproportionately represented among the poor, the illiterate and the unemployed" (ENPS chartbook 5). Divorced women, whatever the circumstances, are viewed by the family and community as having failed. Upon a divorce, the woman must move out of her husband's home. She risks losing everything and has no financial support after the divorce (Naamane-Guessous 142). It is common that she retains custody of the children until they reach adolescence. Often she returns home and proves to be an

additional financial burden to her family. She must live off of the charity of family members in order to survive. Occasionally, she is rejected from her family and must find another means of supporting herself. Bennani-Chraïbi suggests that divorced women are also not likely to remarry, as they are poorly viewed by men, and they are handicapped by their sexual experience (116). If divorced women do remarry, they receive a lower bride price, do not have a large wedding celebration, and are only likely to remarry a widower or divorced man (Davis 1983, 29). In light of the difficult economic conditions described above and the likelihood that she is illiterate and unskilled, there are very few opportunities that present themselves for these women. "La rupture du lien conjugal place donc les femmes dans une position d'infériorité à tous les niveaux" (Naamane-Guessous 145). The social implications of divorce are present as well. Because a divorced woman is no longer a virgin, she is viewed as susceptible to debauchery; in addition, others believe her to have "failed" in her marriage (Naamane-Guessous 145). A minority do turn to prostitution as a means to support themselves because it is accessible; it is also very degrading (Davis 1983, 71).

Prostitution is, "in theory abhorred by the society" (Davis 1983, 71). Prostitutes generally do not live in their home communities, for the rejection would be far too great. Instead, they move to other areas, less rural in nature, and work in brothels. Prostitution seems tolerated, and, although it is illegal, is widespread.

Women "live alone or in groups, having in common the characteristic that they have left or been repudiated by their kin, and have thus forfeited lineage and male tutelage" (Maher 1978, 111). Several major problems arise. Because of their poor reputations, they are often refused service by the social sector. Public health facilities are not obligated to provide family planning methods to these women, as it is a MOPH guideline that birth control is for married women.[30] They are not involved in community activities, and are forced to form their own communities, interacting only with other women who share their situation. Prostitution is "sévèrement condamnée par la morale sociale" (Serhane 1995, 178). If they become pregnant, they are completely shunned by the community. Because out of wedlock pregnancy is illegal, these women can be put in prison, even during their pregnancies. Their children are most often born at home and women do not seek the care they need. Because the children are born without fathers, they cannot get birth certificates. Without birth certificates, the children are not eligible for vaccinations at public facilities, nor can they attend public school.

Chikhates, or public singers, also fall into the category of marginal women. They are "free" women, in a respect, as they have no ties, no roots, and no males involved in their lives (Maher 1978, 111). Davis suggests that *chikhates* are also prostitutes (1983, 76). In addition to singing, *chikhates* play instruments and dance.

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30 See 15.

They are most typically from rural areas yet travel in their work, generally far away from their families (Davis 1983, 76). There is no artistic recognition given to these women, although they play a large role in the folkloric history of Morocco, and they are paid low wages for performing, mostly for men. They work not for the pleasure of performing, but for economic reasons. Often, they play at weddings or parties, or they may perform at public events such as inaugurations, national holidays or official visits, yet remain without status (Sbaï 164). Sbaï refers to them as the eternally forgotten, as they, and other marginalized women, are forgotten in the process of development, decision making, and sometimes in the lives of their own families (159, 164-165).

Yet it is not only the *chikhates* in modern Morocco who remain forgotten and marginalized. All rural Moroccan women are among the neglected and ignored, particularly in terms of health, education, economic, and social status. They are living a life of inequality in relation to men as well as compared to their urban sisters. As illustrated, rural women's health is lacking in both access and quality; if women are not healthy, their children are not healthy, and communities are not able to achieve their potential. In terms of education, it is evident that there is much progress to be made to insure that rural women receive a much-needed opportunity to access an education that not only covers the basics of literacy, but also allows rural women to compete in the marketplace for employment if they so choose, and to be better equipped to care for themselves and their families. According to Khadija Abdellaoui,

women play a necessary and important role in the economy, yet are under utilized in terms of development, while living and working in poor conditions; thus they are not participating optimally in the economic and social development process that is occurring in Morocco (qtd. in Temsamani 26). In terms of social status, rural women are subjugated and the expectations and roles placed upon them by society do not permit them to succeed and grow. Due to these factors,

> "la femme est ainsi maintenue dans un état de dépendance économique, sociale et morale...Ainsi reste-t-elle tributaire de l'homme qui use et abuse d'arguments sacrés ou religieux non seulement pour justifier un tel état de choses, mais pour le faire admettre comme naturel par la femme elle-même" (Serhane 1995, 83).

Moroccan society, similar to that of other North African countries, is a society in which there is a complex structure; the patriarchal nature of the society, with its underlying matriarchal layer, leads to lack of power and marginalization for many. This creates many victims, not only female, and we will explore this phenomenon via Maghrebian literature. In order to understand better the varying conditions of women in Maghrebian society, we will first examine two tales of women, written by women writers Leïla Sebbar and Andrée Chedid, which are portrayals of the exile and alienation in women's lives. Secondly, we will turn to the literary scene of women as presented by Serhane in *Le Soleil des obscurs*.

Chapter Three

Part One: Portrayal of Women by Two Female Writers

We have seen that the status of women is low in Morocco in terms of health, education, economics, and social standing; but what of the portrayal of North African women in literature? Is it reflective of their actual standing? Many North African francophone authors have portrayed women in their works, yet only recently have they come to the forefront of Maghrebian literature. In examining two short stories by two women authors, several undercurrents are found which are common to Serhane as well as to most recent North African francophone works: alienation and exile (Daninos 10). Living far away from one's home, or not actually having a real home, results in writers feeling a huge sense of emptiness responsible for the mixed and uncertain emotions they choose to express. "Immigration and its psycho-social ramifications constitute a recurrent theme in contemporary Maghrebian fiction written in French"(Mehta 79). On one hand, the writer is happy to be away from his home, particularly in the cases of those who flee war or political problems, or in the cases of others, most often women, who leave countries where women's status is marginal or where their roles and freedoms are limited. On the other hand, the writer suffers from a melancholy loss of his roots: he is not at home, customs are different, and others may not treat him with respect. This melange of feelings and ambiguity produces a sense of paradox in their

works, and their characters are often alienated, which is a direct reflection of the writer.

Exile is particularly obvious in Andrée Chedid's short story, *La Soudanaise* as well as in *Carnets de Shérazade* by Leïla Sebbar. *La Soudanaise* tells the story of an old Sudanese woman living in Cairo, and is told by a young Egyptian woman. The two women represent opposition between old and young, traditional and modern, rural and urban. Sebbar presents the same paradoxes in her story of a young French woman of Algerian origin. The young woman is trapped in a world which is not hers, but at the same time, she does not have a world to which she belongs. In analyzing the two texts, themes of alienation and exile are portrayed in terms of paradox, with clear cut oppositions paving the way.

Throughout *La Soudanaise*, the reader understands that there is a separation between the immigrant woman[31] and the others. She is found apart from others, "là-haut, sur la terrasse" (Chedid 1996, 277). She is always found in "haut-perchés d'où elle pouvait contempler, à distance, ces multitudes..." (Chedid 1996, 277). She is far from and above others, thus giving her an elevated status figuratively. Because she is never named by the narrator, she has an anonymous status: this woman could be any foreigner anywhere. Later, the reader is given the impression that she is there only temporarily, "avant de survoler le grouillement de la ville" (Chedid 1996, 277), yet

[31] Hereafter referred to as 'the *Soudanaise*' in this text.

another reference to the fact that she is above others, not only figuratively, but literally. She is larger than life and is described as having somber and generous flesh. It is assumed that she is relatively old, because she dies several years after the beginning of the story. She is black, thus not an Arab and therefore different from the majority of the inhabitants of Cairo. She speaks "sa langue d'origine" and does not speak much Arabic, which makes contact with people other than her family nearly impossible (Chedid 1996, 279). A prime example of Chedid's female characters, she is "endowed with a sense of proximity and distance, rootedness and rootlessness" (Knapp 8).

The woman, also anonymous, who is assumed to be the narrator, is in direct contrast with the *Soudanaise*. She is Egyptian, but lives, "en grande partie, à l'étranger" (Chedid 1996, 279). Physically, she is not described, but the reader can discern that she is Arab, not black, and younger than the *Soudanaise* thus different from her in many respects. The narrator is always found below the *Soudanaise*, usually at the level of the street. She continually looks at the *Soudanaise* above her on the balcony, creating a sense of distance between the two women. The narrator tries to reduce the distance, but the distance seems to exist throughout the story. The narrator is also different from the *Soudanaise* in that she lives daily life with others and is not separated from humanity. The largest difference which separates the women is illustrated by the concept of choice. Although the narrator lives in a foreign land, she does so by choice. In contrast, the *Soudanaise* lives in Cairo by virtue of

circumstances, her husband's work, over which she has no control. Her culture and upbringing do not allow her to complain, and she is embedded "dans une trame uniforme" (Chedid 1996, 278).

These fundamental differences help the reader to examine the theme of alienation. The *Soudanaise* is portrayed as "amputée de toute animation, se déroulerait jusqu'au bout dans cet espace tronqué, maintenu entre ciel et bitume" (Chedid 1996, 278). She is completely cut off from the outside world. In contrast, the narrator participates in the active outside world; she lives and finds joy within it. The *Soudanaise*, deprived of her homeland as well as the exterior, is forced to create her own culture at home. She lives in a three room apartment and tries to render it more "homey". "Ces pièces surnageaient au dessus d'une débâcle de poules et de cageots, d'herbes poussant dans les marmites, de chèvre, de valises éventrées, de bouteilles et de boîtes vides...." (Chedid 1996, 279). She creates a false nature there, which resembles a rural setting in order to make herself more comfortable in her new culture, which is urban and belongs to the Other. It is her personal shelter.

The culminating point of the text occurs when the narrator takes the *Soudanaise* outside for a walk with the goal of creating a closeness between the two women; it is a total failure. They leave together, and the young woman protects the older woman in an inversion of the natural roles of mother and daughter. Little by little, the *Soudanaise* accustoms herself to the city; she is on the brink of trying her

proverbial wings when a psychologically castrating event occurs: her veil is ripped off and "suspendu à l'arrière d'un énorme autobus rouge" (Chedid 1996, 282). Not only is the veil pulled away literally, but her soul is unveiled and the *Soudanaise* is alone in the middle of the street, psychologically naked. Her honor is marked, as she has shown her hair to the public, thus humiliating herself; her sense of modesty has been fully compromised. Her first, and last, attempt to be liberated and to liberate herself, has failed, and she returns to her shelter knowing that she cannot exist outside of her own world. She is completely alienated from the world in which she lives. The narrator, in contrast to the *Soudanaise*, functions equally well in this situation as in others, whether in her own country or abroad.

Les Carnets de Shérazade presents the same intellectual dilemma as *La Soudanaise*, but in a completely different context. It is the story of a young French women of Algerian origin and her struggle against society and herself. Shérazade, the protagonist, participates in "l'enjeu identitaire" by searching for her own identity (Laronde 198). She does not belong to either of the two cultures, that of Algeria or that of France; this "double appartenance" is negated entirely (Laronde 202). She finds herself in a sort of purgatory between Algerian and France, and she is flooded with feelings of alienation and exile. She is in opposition with a traditional Algerian mother (Farid's mother) who continues to live as if in Algeria, and with the demands of life in France.

Shérazade is the protagonist in the text. From the beginning of her story, she is portrayed between the two worlds: the world of France and the French people, and the Arab world of Algeria. She speaks French and Arabic. Sebbar, in portraying the story, employs spoken French and often utilizes slang, specifically the dialect spoken by young Maghrebians, or "Beurs". Shérazade has a French boyfriend, yet her friends are all Maghrebians. She grew up in an "H.L.M"[32], a common milieu for immigrants in France (Hargreaves 15). Her name is a reference to *A Thousand and One Nights*, one of the great works in the Arabic tradition, which recounts the tale of a young woman trying to save her life by telling stories to a prince.

From the beginning of the text, Shérazade is contrasted with her boyfriend, Gilles, who is a truck driver. He is the prototype of the French working class. He is simple-minded and does not understand her. She plays a cassette of *Carte de séjour*[33], ironic in that the group's name references something precious to immigrants. The lyrics are in Arabic and French, of the genre "rockarabe, rockmétrique" and Gilles understands nothing (Sebbar 284). In contrast, Shérazade adores the group and is attracted to the music, which is a mixture of Oriental and Occidental elements.

Upon arriving in Lyon, Shérazade escapes to find the housing project of Farid, a friend from Paris. Her goal is to find Farid's mother in order to give her his news.

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32 A housing project.

33 The French equivalent of a green card.

She is accosted by a young man who does not initially recognize that she is Arab, like him, a man who finds himself between the two worlds as well; he hurls insults at her to convey his rage, thinking that she is the Other. Finally, he recognizes her as an Arab, explaining that he doesn't even recognize his own anymore, having lost touch with the real Algerian world (Sebbar 287). Their world is divided into two parts, and the proverbial battle lines are drawn. Shérazade has a difficult time being accepted in her own milieu, appearing "too" French, but at the same time, the French world does not accept her either. She finally achieves acceptance among the Arabs because she speaks Arabic, her only passport in the world of the H.L.M., the Arab world in France.

She succeeds in finding Farid's mother, which puts her in opposition with yet another character in the story. Our Shérazade, like the Shérazade *of A Thousand and One Nights*, is also a storyteller; she, too, does it to save herself, and to save her Arab honor. She attempts to sympathize with the woman by giving her good news of her son, yet the news proves to be lies. She tries to spare Farid's mother, a traditional Algerian mother, of the grief caused by knowing one's son is in prison. Yet her attempt fails, as does her essay to make contact with the traditional world.

Farid's mother, of Algerian origin like Shérazade, is her complete opposite. Despite living in France, she has kept her traditional status and roles: she cleans, cooks, and takes care of her numerous children. She comes from a generation who is not at all culturally integrated in France. Although her children speak French more

comfortably than Arabic, she retains her own upbringing and traditions. She is also caught between the two worlds, however: she is traditional, yet her children are not. Her son, Farid, is in prison, a victim, perhaps, of circumstances brought about by living in a country which rejects him. Yet she survives because she has found her place. She does not try to become integrated into French society, rather, like the *Soudanaise*, she remains cloistered, apart from the society in which she lives.

Shérazade's failure to create her own life somewhere is particularly obvious when she visits the museum, where she sees such works as *Les Femmes d'Alger* by Delacroix. Women in these works represent Arab women as seen by the Occident. "On les aimait" for their sense of exoticism (Sebbar 288); yet they aren't appreciated anymore. They are the symbolic reflection of Shérazade herself, as seen by French society. The exoticism of the women of the past no longer exists, and they are poorly viewed in France.

Shérazade is always on the edge, marginalized. She washes, respecting "sans le savoir, les gestes rituels pour la toilette des ablutions, les gestes du grand-père d'Algérie, lorsqu'elle vivait chez lui pendant les vacances" (Sebbar 288). It is unfortunate that she doesn't know or understand the meaning of Algeria or its religion. At the concert, she is further placed between the two worlds, arriving with her boyfriend and socializing with Maghrebian friends who speak "des langues étranges" (Sebbar 289). Sebbar shows the reader a segment of society which is completely

transformed from its origin, but which has not become French in the traditional sense. Adolescents wear "chéchia, turban, battle-dress, jean, smoking, boléro, saroual, débardeur à mailles, borsalion, ceinture cloutée, lunettes noires, mains de Fatma..." (Sebbar 290). This variety represents the efforts of these young people to create their own world and culture, somewhere between their country of origin and France. This section of society,

> "determined not to end up like their mothers, and wanting to emulate their French peers, they escape out of the stifling but safe cocoons of their homes into an alien, uncaring world, where they drift aimlessly. Those who cannot escape become resigned to the fate decreed for them by their parents." (Abu-Haidar 75).

They, along with Shérazade, are building another culture. Shérazade, in sympathizing with Gilles, puts herself in a position of compromise and the others insult them, hurling such epithets as "harki", "vendu", and "pourri" (Sebbar 291). By keeping ties with the "Frangaoui", Shérazade does not allow herself to be fully accepted by the Beur culture, nor, by keeping in contact with them, will she ever become a part of French society (Sebbar 291). By refusing the choice, she will never be a part of either culture. Not only is Shérazade alienated, she is completely without roots She is part of a group Winifred Woodhull defines as a group "who have run up against the limits of their identity--Maghrebians who cannot be Maghrebians" (Woodhull 107); this is

because French society does not accept them but, at the same time, they do not know how to be Maghrebian, and have lost touch with their origin.

The major difference between Shérazade and the *Soudanaise*, although each is alienated and exiled, is that Shérazade plays an active role in her own alienation. She has the choice between Algeria and France, but does not decide, thus choosing to remain trapped between the two, in the margin of a new Maghrebian culture which is developing today in France and in the margin of traditional France. In contrast, the *Soudanaise* does not have the choice or the tools necessary to become Egyptian; she does not speak Arabic, she is too traditional, and she follows her customs religiously, for example, the veil. She accepts her situation with grace and is resigned to her life. Shérazade speaks French like a native and knows how to live in France; she is even mistaken for a French woman. But she, as a rebel, does not integrate herself; she is destined to exile from the two cultures.

Both protagonists remain at the frontier, between their cultures of origin and their cultures of habitation. They are trapped between the two cultures and, in comparison with other characters in the stories, they are marginalized. Not only are they in opposition with these others, they are in opposition with themselves. This is where concept of exile is introduced. Sebbar and Chedid successfully show the difficulties of the immigrant, particularly women, and also the problems associated with alienation. In portraying marginalized immigrants, Sebbar even manages to

reduce her personal sense of exile resulting from her mixed French-Algerian heritage (Mortimer 178). Chedid, with another goal, "dépasse les frontières géographiques", and her work assumes "une marque universelle" (Knapp 9); this achieved, she feels liberated.(Chedid 1993, 43). The two short stories are cathartic declarations for the two writers, and the works are reflections of themselves. The lack of roots is troubling in both cases, and the women who are in opposition with the Other and with themselves live tragic existences, both in fiction and in reality.

These women, exiled and alienated, are like the women portrayed *in Le Soleil des obscurs*. The chief difference is that Serhane's women are alienated and exiled within their own country, within their own communities. Each woman is struggling to find her own identity and roots and is living her own tragic identity. Although the representation of the women is not an image of Serhane himself, as it is with Chedid and Sebbar, it is a reflection of Moroccan women today, and of the society's struggle with identity.

Part Two: Discussion of four female characters in Serhane

Abdelhak Serhane, in *Le Soleil des obscurs*, portrays rural Moroccan society. Rural society, as a subject, is not new to the North African francophone literary canon. Writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun and Mouloud Feraoun have written about rural life, and many other novels have been situated in rural North Africa. Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine has written a considerable number of works dealing with the rural, south of Morocco, and usually describes Berber life there (Mezgueldi 1995, 144). Thus, rural Morocco as a setting, or even subject, is not a rarity. Nor is the representation of women in the North African francophone novel a novelty. A portrait of women with a strong presence, regardless of "age or social background" has always been a part of the literature (Abu-Haidar 79). But women who have occupied a place in the Maghrebian novel usually do so as accessories. The characters are rarely developed into "real" protagonists from a psychological standpoint. (Benzakour-Chami 1994, 28). Yet women play a strong part in sexual themes, and the subject of sexual oppression and conflict between men and women is more recent and particularly prominent in current works.

> "The laws, customs, and traditions governing the lives of couples are so restrictive that it is not surprising to find writers reluctant to deal openly with the theme of sexual oppression. Most have been able to do so only by

> emigrating to France, while the few others who have written thus in the midst of their culture have done so only at the expense of censure. But all of them are pioneers in what may be expected to be a growing trend toward social and sexual realism" (Accad 617).

Abdelhak Serhane is one such writer. Serhane, who writes in Morocco, treats the theme of sexual oppression and its effects on the men and women of rural communities. *Le Soleil des obscurs*, similar in theme to Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* and *L'Insolation*, as well as Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée* and *Harrouda*, is a prime example. The novel recounts the trials of Mina and Soltane, two young rural Moroccans, and traces their coming-of-age in traditional society.

Le Soleil des obscurs accurately represents rural Moroccan society, and the social conditions and constraints described above are vividly reflected in Serhane's portrayal. Although the narrator does not divulge the location or name of the village, it becomes apparent through description that it is a rural southern community, probably Berber, and most likely situated in the Middle or High Atlas Mountains. The fact that the novel is situated in the south, which represents land, soil, and roots, suggests a sense of security, a safe-haven against the corruption of urban evils (Abdalaoui 20). The community survives on agriculture and livestock. The society is one of subsistence, and the community must struggle to survive in light of the long

drought it is experiencing. In addition to the drought, there have been other natural catastrophes.

> "Nous traversâmes des épreuves en chaîne. Les inondations succèdérent aux invasions des criquets; les criquets, aux tremblements de terre; les tremblements, aux invasions humaines et à la sécheresse. La sécheresse de la nature d'abord. Celle des coeurs ensuite." (11).[34]

The setting is accurately represented (as the majority of the story takes place in this small, rural village), and so are his portrayals of the characters. In examining the characters closely, it is apparent that they are representative of typical rural Moroccan women. Lalla Batoul and Lalla Aïcha, mothers of the bride and groom, represent all that is traditional. Aouicha, the prostitute and first love of Soltane's father, represents a liberated yet marginalized woman in traditional society. And finally, Mina, as a member of a new generation, struggles to come to grips with the changes taking place in the society, and represents the confused status of many young woman who are trying to change within the context of a traditional society. She, in addition to Soltane, is the protagonist of the novel, in the sense that her character is somewhat developed psychologically. Mina is representative of young women in this new North African literature, as the archetype of a "figure tourmentée, liée de conflits et de violences";

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[34] *Le Soleil des obscurs* will be referred to only by page number. Full reference information can be found in the bibliography.

her life "manque les cris de joie et les rires éclatants qui sont le propre de corps de jeunes" (Benzakour-Chami 1994, 39).

Lalla Aïcha and Lalla Batoul are typecast as traditional rural women. Their actions, their relationships with families and community, and their mindsets are consistent with that of traditional Moroccan women, and they act in accordance with the roles as wives and mothers dictated by society. They grew up in an era when women did not participate in decision making and are subservient to men. Serhane, in portraying the women, "reconduit le couple traditionnel régi par la loi musulmane" (Benzakour-Chami 1992, 138). As in other North African francophone novels, the traditional couple is "la représentation la plus typique et la plus régulière", and *Le Soleil des obscurs* is no exception (Benzakour-Chami 1992, 139). Both Lalla Batoul and Lalla Aïcha are living in traditional marriages, and encourage their children to continue to live the same way. Their myopic lives are reflected in the lives of many rural Moroccan women today. They cannot see beyond constraints of society and family because, as they participate in these roles, they have no access to education and know no other way.

Lalla Batoul, Mother of Soltane

Lalla Batoul, mother of Soltane, represents traditional Morocco and the traditional, rural woman. As in other North African francophone novels, such as Ben

Jelloun's *Harrouda* and Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*, as well as Serhane's own *Messaouda*, the mother of the protagonist illustrates "la condition de la femme traditionnelle en milieu maghrébin, totalement soumise au mari et soustraite à la vie" (Memmes 108). She is uneducated and relies on superstition and folklore for her information. In her family life, she fulfills the role of wife and mother as society dictates, and her role in society is also "perfect", in terms of conformism. Her traditional marriage is one in which we find "une inégalité flagrante entre les deux conjoints, inégalité qui s'exerce aux dépens de la femme" (Benzakour-Chami 1992, 138). In contrast to her husband, her childhood is described briefly. One can only imagine that she followed the rules of society and did not dare to challenge constraints. She was married by arrangement at a young age, before she experienced her first menstrual cycle, and had seven children, the last of which was a boy, Soltane. Lalla Batoul, as a symbol, represents three criteria outlined by Evelyn Accad in order to clarify the theme of sexual oppression. Her story within the novel deals with the "notion of honor, the notion of arranged marriage, and the notion of procreation" (Accad 618). Her first six children were girls and represent family dishonor. As in Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée*, the theme of multiple female births and queried honor is an underlying question throughout the novel (Gontard 1993, 152). The virility of Lalla Batoul's husband, Larbi, was debated, and the image of the family was tarnished.

> "Le père était durement éprouvé dans son statut de mâle, et sa virilité fut même contestée par ses ennemis. Ces naissances successives avaient terni l'image de la famille et l'épouse pleurait son sort de génetrice de femelles. Chaque nouvelle grossesse était un calvaire pour elle...Six grossesses vécues dans l'angoisse. Les dernières dans l'épouvante. Chaque nouvelle naissance était une petite mort pour l'épouse, une petite mort pour l'époux, si bien que la mort avait fini par habiter le couple et installé le silence et le mépris dans le ménage" (23).

Serhane expresses here the traditional belief held today by many Moroccans, and expresses it with bitterness, at the same time blaming both the husband and the wife, as well as society, for their negative feelings towards female children. Her husband suspected she was "atteinte de malédiction" and that he had been abandoned by Allah and the angels (23). Because of the dishonor she has brought upon her family, Lalla Batoul feels an extreme sense of guilt and responsibility. Larbi views female children as a travesty, believing that

> "la naissance d'une fille était du gaspillage, une pure perte. Les filles qui ne sont pas mariées ne nous serviront pas à grand-chose. Elles ne peuvent qu'attendre. Une calamité, la fille. Il faut la nourrir, l'éduquer, l'élever pour d'autres et constamment la surveiller" (53).

In this passage, the use of synonyms for loss and the off-handedness in which Larbi describes the birth of his own daughters belies the extent to which female children are marginalized, capable only of consuming valuable family resources and presenting a potential threat to the family honor until the time when they may be "unloaded" onto another family. Lalla Batoul prays non-stop and invokes Allah's help in having a male child. Her strong sense of traditional beliefs does not allow her to accept that she cannot control the gender of her children. "Puis, une nuit qu'elle dormait sur la terrasse, le saint Moulay Brahim lui apparut en rêve et lui dit: "Dieu est avec toi, femme! ton fils arrivera sous peu. J'attends ta visite et tes offrandes! Ne perds pas confiance!" (24). Inspired by her nocturnal visitor, she visits the local *f'qih*, who confirms her dream; immediately, she and her husband debark for the tomb of Moulay Brahim to make an offering. Saint Moulay Brahim is known throughout Morocco for having the power to heal and grant the wishes, such as increased fertility and money, of his followers. Lalla Batoul is a strong believer in traditional medicine and, although she is a practicing Muslim, she employs rituals outside this religion to insure the birth of a boy child. Again, Lalla Batoul seeks respite using traditional medicine when her son falls ill just before his marriage. She burns herbs and incense in hopes of sending the bad spirits away, and again calls on the *f'qih*, who repeats several verses of the Koran, seeking Allah's intervention.

In raising her family, Lalla Batoul conforms to the rigidity of the community. She is responsible for serving her husband and insuring that the household is properly run. When she and her husband have marital relations, she is but a vessel for his pleasure, and the act lacks passion.

> "Le lit remuait tragiquement. Dehors, les chiens s'étaient tus. Une rafale de vent rabattit le volet avec force et le brisa en deux. Si Larbi ahanait à présent sur le corps morcelé de son épouse. Il avait donné congé à la prière pour souffler bruyamment par le nez...Si Larbi se cramponna à la barre latérale du lit et s'immobilisa un moment au-dessus du corps de sa femme avant de se laisser choir comme un cèdre abbatu par l'ouragan" (74).

In describing their sexual encounters, Serhane employs dry and violent language, likening Lalla Batoul to "une tarantule en agonie" at one point (73). The sexual act is described without passion and emotion, without a trace of love and desire and the brutality of the language indicates that the act is purely to relieve a physical need.

Lalla Batoul's main role is as mother. She, alone, is responsible for the care of the children, and although this presents a domain in which she may exercise some power, it is little and it also entails discipline and responsibility for children's inappropriate actions or behavior (Dwyer 113). When the time comes for her first-born to marry, she follows strict social convention. Although she is the instigator of the search for a proper wife for her son, it is her husband who has the final say in the

matter. He believes that the marriage is a good idea, as he and Lalla Batoul are growing old. She obeys him throughout, thus conforming to Moroccan tradition. As a wife and mother, she has little status in the society, yet the possibility of having a daughter-in-law would significantly increase her power in her household as well as in the community.

Her actions in seeking a suitable girl for her son are quite typical for rural Morocco. It is important that she have a voice in the process as, "from the women's point of view, a marriage changes not only the relationships of the dependent involved but the composition--and perhaps the internal order and hierarchy--of the women's social world" (Rosen 571). She is concerned with finding a girl from a "good" family, and has pre-selected Mina, daughter of Lalla Aïcha and Sidi Bouali. The qualities of Mina's family are important in the selection process: she comes from a conservative, correct family and her father is well-respected; Mina, herself, rarely sets foot outside her home, traditionally a positive sign for it is less likely that she will have been violated by another (29). Rather than ask Mina's family directly, Lalla Batoul , in traditional fashion, employs the services of a local matchmaker, Lalla Zineb, to act as a go-between for the two families.

"J'ai dépêché Lalla Zineb auprès de ta future belle-mère pour qu'elle me prépare le terrain. Tu sais que ma fierté ne souffrirait pas un refus de sa part.

> D'ailleurs, c'est bien le boulot de Lalla Zineb: servir d'intermédiaire entre la famille du prétendant et celle de la future mariée" (66).

Lalla Batoul, once again concerned with family honor, seeks the services of the matchmaker, and expresses to Soltane that this is her responsibility, not only to protect herself from shame, but that it is dictated by community custom. Lalla Zineb represents an ally of both Lalla Batoul and Lalla Aïcha, yet it is in her own best interest that the two families be joined, for she receives payment for the service.

Once she becomes personally involved in the "bargaining" process for the marriage, Lalla Batoul becomes completely controlled by social convention. She visits Lalla Aïcha and borrows gold jewelry, a status symbol and representative of wealth, to wear in order to impress Lalla Aïcha and her family. She engages in social formulas which are equal to honor; she brings two sugar cones to the home in order to show her respect for the host. These scenes are acted out, not genuinely, but in a manner to create a good impression, for impressions are all important in this society.

> "Chaque geste était accompagné de formules de politesse et de bienvenue. Chaque parole était consignée par chacune d'elles soigneusement évaluée pour un éventuel jugement des familles. Les deux femmes diraient tout à leurs époux. Instigatrices de ce projet, elles feraient de chaque geste et de chaque parole des arguments positifs pour le rapprochement des deux familles" (94).

The narrator's detailed description of the scene is common to many Moroccan households, where appearances reign supreme and women judge others' honor on the basis of hospitality and presentation. Although the men have the final say in the decision to join two families by marriage, the women are the key players. Obligated by tradition and custom, "les deux femmes jouaient leur rôle à la perfection. Celui que la société leur avait inculqué et sans lequel elles seraient malheureuses" (98). The roles of the women are understood by them and are acted out in a superior fashion; the narrator's tone suggests that this social formula is even enjoyed by the women, further intimating that women take pride and pleasure in their social roles in general.

Finally, at the marriage, Lalla Batoul, her family's honor the sole motivation, acts accordingly. When her son is unable to consummate the marriage with Mina, she intervenes, suggesting that Mina is not a virgin. She is anxious that all blame be placed upon the girl, meaning her family, so that her skills as a wife and mother will not be questioned.

> "Lalla Aïcha et Lalla Batoul se croisèrent devant la porte de la chambre nuptiale. Elles échangèrent un regard criminel où l'une et l'autre avaient mis le plus acerbe de leur rancune. Affolée et malheureuse, chacune espérait, au fond d'elle-même, que l'autre endosserait la responsabilité du discrédit" (170).

Again, appearance is the all-important factor for this rural woman, and she cannot see beyond tradition to resolve the problem.

After the consummation of the marriage, Lalla Batoul has her finest moment. In order to show her wealth to the community, the marriage celebration lasts several days.

> "Elle avait insisté pour que la cérémonie fût grandiose. Elle ne cessait de répéter: 'Tu es l'unique fils que Dieu m'a offert. Il faut que tout le monde parle de ton mariage. Je veux une réception où les vivants disent aux morts: Levez-vous et venez voir! Il faut épater les gens, crever les yeux aux jaloux et aux envieux! J'inviterai tout le village pour tuer chacun de son propre venin. Je ferai ce que personne n'a encore fait jusqu'à présent!'" (179).

She sells her carpets and jewelry in order to finance the affair and insure that the entire village is aware of her wealth. In this passage, not only is Lalla Batoul showing that she is a strong believer in Allah's will, for it was Allah who gave her a son, she is showing that she feels a need to be superior to other women in the community. She is elevated to status of mother-in-law, and now has another helping hand in the household. In addition, she becomes quite "assertive and outgoing--as women her age are apt to be, when they become mothers-in-law after their long apprenticeship as daughters-in-law" (Davis 1977, 202). Lalla Batoul, as typical a mother-in-law, is dominant, "jealously guarding her role as manager of the household and common kitchen" and imposing "her control over the internal workings of the household in many ways" (Rosen 563-564).

There is a degree of jealousy between Lalla Batoul and Mina in the household Lalla Batoul is envious of the attention given Mina by her son, showing signs of the oedipal complex from the mother's angle; consequently, she mistreats Mina. When Soltane returns from the city with gifts for the family, he is careful to insure that the gifts he brings for his mother and wife are the same, and he hides any additional items he gives to Mina, in fear of his mother's wrath.

> "Pour sa mère et sa femme, il avait apporté un foulard de la même couleur et une robe longue pour chacune...Quand il s'isola avec Mina après le repas du soir, il tira de sa poche une petite bouteille de parfum et une tablette de chocolat. 'Tiens! dit-il à sa femme en s'approchant d'elle. Ça, c'est pour toi. Je n'ai pas voulu t'en faire cadeau devant ma mère pour qu'elle ne soit pas jalouse et commence à te détester. Je sais ce que c'est; et je n'aimerais pas qu'elle te prenne en grippe. Elle ne doit rien savoir, sinon elle nous fera regretter le jour de notre naissance!'" (197).

Through this passage, we see that Soltane and Mina are both conscious of the role of daughter-in-law that she is playing, and Soltane shows fear at his mother's actions in her new-found role as mother-in-law.

Lalla Batoul continues to remain in control of her son, even after he returns from over two years working in the city. When he suspects that the child his wife is carrying is not his, he abuses her. Lalla Batoul reproaches him, but not so much for

abusing Mina, as for the reflection it gives upon her: incapable to adequately supervise the young woman. Once again, her honor is at stake, and she blames city life for the corruption of her son. Lalla Batoul explains the pregnancy with a popular Moroccan folk tale. In order to explain an immoral pregnancy, women claim that the fetus sleeps in its mother's womb until it is ready to come out, thereby justifying pregnancies which occurred when a husband was away or when a woman is between marriages. Lalla Batoul claims that Mina was pregnant with twins, but that one child slept in the womb; it is "l'enfant endormi" (212). This is yet another attempt on her part to save her family's honor as well as her own reputation, for it is she who is ultimately responsible for Mina within the community in her son's absence, and if Mina were to become pregnant during this time, Lalla Batoul would be to blame.

Lalla Batoul, throughout the novel, has been a prototype of a Moroccan wife and mother. Attempting to control her children's lives, surely in retaliation from being controlled herself by society and her husband, she has no real life of her own. She lives vicariously, through the men in her life, and never experiences personal freedom. Her status as an uneducated woman, constantly invoking Allah's aid and crediting him for events in her life, is typical, since she is a woman without power.

Lalla Aïcha, Mother of Mina

Lalla Aïcha, like Lalla Batoul, is a rural woman whose life has been dictated by societal mores and tradition. She married Sidi Bouali when she was young, before the onset of puberty, and is resigned to living the conventional life of a *bled* woman. Her husband, Sidi Bouali, is the head of the household and makes all final decisions. She, too, represents the theme of sexual oppression, as she is concerned with issues of honor, arranged marriage, and procreation (Accad 618).

Lalla Aïcha first appears in the novel when she is paid a visit by the local matchmaker, Lalla Zineb. The reader can see that she is a "good" wife, because her house is beautifully in order and Lalla Zineb is received with the utmost hospitality, as well as a good mother, because she has carefully supervised her daughter, Mina, and kept her from any harm or dishonor.

> "Honor has various highly valued codes in the Maghreb but is quite specific when it is linked to the sexual life of its people. A family's honor depends on its girls' virginity. To preserve the honor of one's female relatives means, above all, to protect them from premarital sexual intercourse" (Accad 618).

Her motherly duties, aside from insuring her daughter's virginity, include securing a suitable young man for her, and she participates in Lalla Zineb's "mission" with vigor.

In addition to hosting Lalla Zineb, Lalla Aïcha also receives Lalla Batoul as tradition dictates, "répétant toutes les formules de bienvenue" (90). Following custom,

as expected by society, is the prime objective of Lalla Aïcha, for her hospitality reflects on her family's honor. The two women engage in a "cérémonie des salamalecs[35] et des formules de courtoisie" for a period of time, and the social formulas are all important when each has her honor at stake (93).

> "La mère de Soltane fut reçue dignement. Lalla Aïcha l'embrassa avec passion sur les joues et sur le front en lui répétant toutes les formules de bienvenue qu'elle connassait: 'M'hraba b'lalla![36] Bienvenue à toi! Ta présence nous honore et illumine les lieux! M'hraba![37] Ce jour est un grand jour; le plus beau de ma vie! Mon oeil droit clignait ce matin. J'ai dit à ma fille qu'une personne très chère allait nous rendre visite!'" (90-91).

Lalla Batoul's visit represents more than a mere social call; she is there to evaluate Lalla Aïcha's worth and social standing, as well as her behavior in order to judge Lalla Aïcha's daughter, Mina. Savvy to the ploy, Lalla Aïcha responds accordingly, first with her formulas, then with her hospitality, insuring that her home, as well as her daughter, are in perfect condition. In accordance with rural society, she knows that she must follow certain social formulas in order for the proposal to become a reality; the

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[35] Abbreviation for "salaam oualekoum", or "peace be with you" in Arabic, representing the traditional formula of greetings common in Morocco.

[36] "Welcome to the lady" in Moroccan Arabic.

[37] "Welcome" in Moroccan Arabic.

narrator's description, although perhaps slightly exaggerated, represents the gushing and flattering that must take place in order for a deal to be struck.

The two women continue to play their respective roles, and even though they hardly know one another, they act as if they have been friends for an eternity.

> "Elles savaient toutes les deux qu'elles étaient en train de tenir un rôle. Un jeu en dehors duquel rien n'existerait pour elles. Avaient-elles fait autre chose leur vie durant? Enfants, elles avaient appris à jouer aux femmes. Et, femmes, elles avaient joué aux épouses, puis aux mères. Chaque moment de leur existence les appelait à un rôle différent, passant souvent de l'enfance à l'âge adulte, de la gaieté à l'irritation, de la mère à l'épouse ou de la surprise à l'inquiétude" (115).

Once again, the role is what we see, not Aïcha as a person or as a woman; the reader is exposed to the masks and façades of the women; it is understood that appearances become the most important value.

Throughout the negotiations, the reader senses that Lalla Aïcha continues to play her roles: that of duty bound wife, respectable hostess, and capable mother. She "educates" Mina about sex, marriage, and duty, giving Mina "de longs sermons sur la docilité de l'épouse, son effacement, son abnégation" (122). She sums up her own experiences as a wife for her daughter in a pessimistic yet realistic mini-sermon:

> "Quelqu'un viendra un jour demander ta main en mariage; celui qui t'est destiné. Son nom est inscrit sur ton front depuis le jour où je t'ai conçue. Tu dois respecter l'homme qui deviendra ton époux. Tu dois tout faire pour lui plaire et le satisfaire. Il sera ton maître après Dieu et ton père. Jamais tu ne lèveras les yeux sur lui, ni ne parleras en sa présence. Tu seras discrète et soumise, lui obéiras en tout et pour tout. Il a tous les droits sur toi. S'il t'ordonne de te jeter dans le puits, tu dois lui obéir! c'est ton mari" (122).

Here it is evident that Lalla Aïcha places Allah and men before herself, and wants to cultivate the same sentiment in Mina, encouraging her to be subservient. She perpetuates these beliefs, for "les femmes ont toujours été les farouches gardiennes des traditions" (123). Not only is she accepting destiny and her conditions as second class and substandard, she is encouraging future generations to do the same, as if she does not realize that she deserves more.

The wedding night proves to be disquieting for Lalla Aïcha. Believing that "le sexe est tabou. Le sexe est sale. Le sexe est à taire...", she has in no way prepared Mina mentally for the event, eternalizing ignorance and violence (123). She is accused of hiding a horrible secret regarding Mina's virginity from her husband. As Mina's virginity is her mother's responsibility, it is her fault if Mina is not pure. In addition, she attempted to verify Mina's virginity several days before the wedding, and if Mina does not bleed, the blame will rest with her. In threatening to kill her, Sidi Bouali is

defending his honor and the honor of his family. Because he is ultimately in charge, the community would ridicule him for having an unpure daughter and a wily wife.

After the marriage, Lalla Aïcha continues in her archetypal role of advice-giving mother. She counsels Mina to obey her husband; "tu dois l'écouter et faire ce qu'il te demande. S'il dit que tu ne dois pas sortir seule, eh bien tu ne sortira pas seule!" (203). She beats Mina, "pour l'habituer à la répression et pour l'amener à accepter sa condition d'être inférieur, serviable et corvéable à merci" (214). Lalla Aïcha, a traditional woman in every sense, cannot fathom that one might try to escape unpleasant conditions. She has accepted her life for what it is, never questioning her happiness. Her life has been in perfect subservience to her husband and society, and she tries to perpetuate the oppression in Mina.

Yet, her last appearance in the novel is somewhat gratifying, as she rebels against her husband. After the birth of Soltane and Mina's final child, a boy, Lalla Aïcha and Sidi Bouali go to the city to visit the children. They are present when Mina accuses Soltane of having a baby by another woman. Lalla Aïcha becomes hysterical and is reproached by Sidi Bouali; she then attacks him verbally, airing grievances from all their long years of marriage. In a cathartic monologue, she accuses him of raping her, of locking her up, and of oppressing her.

> "Lalla Aïcha vit rouge. Personne ne pouvait plus la contrôler. Elle était hors d'elle et tremblait de la tête aux pieds. Elle cracha plusiers fois par terre,

releva les manches de son habit et s'avança sur son mari en lui disant dans un étranglement de rage: 'Sir asidi! Va! Qu'est-ce que tu attends pour me répudier? C'est ton rêve depuis toujours; la répudiation! Chaque fois que quelque chose ne va pas, tu menaces de me répudier. J'ai longtemps patienté. J'ai toujours tu mon mépris et ma répulsion. Mais je n'en peux plus. Va te faire foutre avec ta répudiation! Moi, je t'ai toujours répudié parce que je ne t'ai jamais aimé ou pris en considération. J'ai vécu avec toi malgré moi. J'étais une enfant et tu avais l'âge de mon père quand tu m'as épousée, quand tu as assassiné mon enfance et mes rêves de jeune fille. J'ai vécu à l'ombre de ta vieillesse et je ne suis pas près d'oublier ton horrible fierté quand tu as commis ton crime sur moi la nuit de tes noces. Tu as violé mon corps et volé ma liberté...Enfermée à double tour, drapée et voilée toute ma vie, ignorée et sequestrée...c'est une vie, ça? La répudiation est le plus beau cadeau que tu puisses me faire après tant d'années sous la domination de tes vieux os. Les chattes et les souris vivent mieux que nous!'" (251).

Lalla Aïcha, taking inspiration from Mina's own empowerment, finally rebels and attempts to break free of her traditional upbringing and status. She is a victim and finally declares her status and oppression; because she is without power, she retaliates the only way she can: through words. The language of her powerful declaration is

such that the reader can understand her anger and rage at being thus oppressed for her entire lifetime, living in the middle of a society which considers her marginal.

Aouicha, the Prostitute

The village house of prostitution is situated between the mosque and the *hammam*[38], two pillars of most Moroccan villages. In Serhane's description, it is obvious that the narrator views the brothel through the eyes of Soltane's father, who sees it as a place of liberty and desire, far away from the social constraints of daily life.

> "Une petite maison clandestine, située à mi-chemin entre la mosquée et le bain turc, abritait tous les désirs et toutes les fantaisies. Une maison bâtie en pisé pour mieux étouffer les râles et garder les secrets. Les murs fissurés étaient témoins des ébats amoureux des gens du village. Le tabou et la honte prenaient congé pour un délire capricieux. Après un verre de thé à la menthe, les femmes chantaient, les hommes tapaient dans leurs mains. Un jeu de séduction amenait les couples à se former. Les matelas fatigués recevaient des corps excités par le chant et le désir. On se déshabillait à peine. Juste ce qu'il fallait. Les femmes se lavaient dans un pot de chambre. Les murs ébréchés résorbaient bruits et paroles. Les rires fusaient par intermittence et le plaisir s'inscrivait dans l'émotion d'une respiration irréguliere" (33).

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[38] Turkish bath.

To Moroccan society, the brothel represents the forbidden; figuratively speaking, it is outside of society, even though it is found within its boundaries. Serhane enhances the desire and the secretive aspect of the brothel, yet at the same time the reader is aware of the shame and taboo their activities connote, particularly in a traditional, rural society.

The prostitutes who work there represent the paradox of society. As seen in Chapter Two, prostitutes are scorned women who exist outside societal norms. They are marginalized and remain unaccepted by society. They are representative of the ills of society, and symbolize evil. Yet men frequent them. Their silence in defense of these women is viewed as a weakness by the women they ignore, but at the same time, it is strength, in that it keeps the men in control of the situation, and maintains their power over the women in a society where group opinion and social norms reign. Aouicha, the favorite prostitute of Soltane's father, Larbi, falls into this category. She is beautiful and admired by all the men in the village, a "petite brune aux seins durs et aux yeux de gazelle" (33). Yet she is different than the other women working there, in that she shows passion and desire, at least for Larbi. The others live only on "sperme" and "sous" (35). Love scenes between Aouicha and Soltane's father are also different: they involve "tendresse", "désir", "plaisir", "délicatesse", "douceur" and "joie" (34) and are in direct contrast with other love scenes between Soltane and Mina, and Larbi and Lalla Batoul, which are described in mechanical and banal terms. Yet at the same

time, when Larbi reminisces about her, he reflects on the evil spirits that invaded him and caused him to love her. He believes he was the victim of "un sort", and that her "passion diabolique" (60) is the result "de sorcellerie et de démons" (55). By refusing to take responsibility for his actions, Larbi is choosing the easy path, blaming all evil on women. His criticism of her is false, solely given for the sake of the community, and this point is evident to the reader, who tends to look sympathetically upon Aouicha and disdain her treatment by Larbi. Consequently, Aouicha is linked to magic and sorcery. Others in the village use her, in an attempt to rid Larbi of his obsession. "Une putain est toujours une putain (60). Even though she is in love, as is Larbi, there are no second chances. She is "méprisée par les femmes, bafouée par les hommes" (60). Yet her link to magic gives her a certain power, in that others fear her; thus, she is marginalized from society due to her profession, yet at the same time, is freed from some societal constraints because of her lifestyle.

Aouicha's life began like that of many other prostitutes. Orphaned at the age of six, she was sent to work as a maid in the home of a local businessman. She cleaned house and made bread, and lived in complete poverty. She slept in the kitchen and ate leftovers. Poorly treated by the family, she was beaten and abused, and once, her arm was broken by the mistress of the house. When she was ten years old, she was raped by the master of the house. Humiliated and hurt, yet lacking money and power, she had no where to turn. He continued to rape her for months to come, when she

finally became pregnant. Upon learning of the pregnancy, the mistress of the house beat her and threw her out. Aouicha was alone. Finally, she was taken in by a local woman, who arranged for a local *kabla* to abort the fetus. However, the woman who provided shelter and security was a madam, and Aouicha's life as a prostitute began. Beginning at age eleven, she worked as a prostitute for the madam, yet kept no money for herself. Prostitutes have a bad reputation in the village. Young men share stories of violence and of prostitutes who

> "se défendaient contre la violence des mâles en leur enfonçant des bougies dans le derrière ou en les sodomisant avec des godemichés en bois. Les victimes suppliaient ou payaient pour acheter le silence des femmes" (83).

The women, in defending themselves physically and often violently, show that they have power; in blackmailing them, the prostitutes also buy power. Villagers abhor them because they fear the women and their power. Thus, in the eyes of society, men are the victims of these prostitutes, either spiritually, as the prostitutes are believed to have cast spells on them, or physically, in terms of the violence shown here. When Aouicha met Larbi at the age of fifteen and fell in love, she felt she would finally be able to escape the oppression brought by a life of service to others. But Larbi's parents discovered the relationship and tried everything in their power to quell it; Aouicha's social status was unacceptable to the community and would have brought shame on the household had they married. His mother consulted *f'qihs* and prayed to

saints. She forced him to wear a medicinal amulet to guard him against Aouicha's sorcery. The entire village knew of his relationship with Aouicha, and manifested against it. Larbi was forced to marry Lalla Batoul on short notice, and he never forgot his first love.

Nor did Aouicha forget his betrayal. Her mental stability declined as she mooned over her lost love, and the work took its toll on her body and spirit. Finally, as the madam lost patience, Aouicha was thrown into the street.

> "Elle fut pourchassée par la ribambelle, traquée par les femmes, et maigrit à vue d'oeil. Elle se désintéressa de son aspect extérieur, si bien que les gens avaient commencé à la traiter en mendiante. On lui donnait une miche de pain ou les restes d'un plat de couscous. Non pour lui faire l'aumône, mais pour l'humilier, pour qu'elle prît conscience du péché d'orgueil qu'elle avait commis" (71).

She was seen as a thief, taking Larbi's honor away from him as well as his family. Aouicha eventually disappears "dans le silence et l'anonymat"; "c'était un miséricorde du ciel", for the community no longer had to confront the realities of sin, prostitution, and passion (77). It is ironic, however, that in leaving her life as a prostitute, Aouicha falls even lower on the scale of social status, becoming a street woman and beggar, and losing all power she had as a prostitute.

Yet Aouicha hadn't really disappeared, merely taken a respite in order to determine her *mektoub*[39] and the meaning of her existence. She no longer wanted to let herself be used by men, and by the community (77). The concept of *mektoub* is a great issue for all of the women. Because Islam is a religion based on the will of Allah, individuals feel they are not responsible for their actions, and are merely following a path which has been pre-ordained. This leads to the powerlessness we see in each of the women, although Aouicha is able to overcome this to return and exact her revenge.

Aouicha reappears shortly after the marriage of Soltane and Mina and, in the tradition of Ben Jellouns's *Harrouda*, and Serhane's own *Messaouda*, becomes an ogress. She becomes strikingly similar to these two literary figures, and is transformed into what is known in Algerian francophone literature as "la femme sauvage", meaning she represents that "which is by turns fertile and sterile, nourishing and devouring, domesticated and untamed, economically productive and ruinous" (Woodhull 57). Like Harrouda, she represents "non seulement toutes les forces obscures, souterraines et irrationnelles...mais également une idée de l'énergie populaire opposée à toute tentative de domination et d'asservissement" (Memmes 112). Her return to the village is taken as a "symbole subversif" (Gontard 1993, 152).

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39 "What is written by God" in Moroccan Arabic; her destiny.

She takes Mina under her wing, first in the role of confidante, and later in the role of madam, in order to exact her revenge on Larbi and his family.

Aouicha, in order to gain Mina's trust, first talks with her and becomes her friend. She is caring, but only superficially so. She then initiates a lesbian relationship with Mina, in order to deepen the bond, but also to impose silence, for Mina cannot disclose this fact to her mother, husband, or family-in-law. Aouicha has crossed the line of tradition at this point, and has further overstepped the boundaries of society. Already marginalized due to the fact that she is a prostitute, she has ignored all social convention and moves, psychologically, into a realm where she is in control, not only of herself, but of others, including men.

She prostitutes Mina, under the guise of helping her, and seeks her final revenge on the family. She is successful, and her prostitution of Mina results in a pregnancy with a child of a client. Her wrath has come down upon the house of Larbi, and their lives will never be the same. She has lost Mina's trust, yet this does not hurt her. She is no longer capable of human emotion, having been so terribly hurt by her tragic circumstances.

Aouicha is not traditional in any sense. From the time she was born, she was cast out and marginalized by her mother and society. Accepting at first, she rebels, and makes a conscious choice to abandon society and its rules. Her strength is intimidating to those around her, and she succeeds in intimidating the community,

both sexually and socially. Her actions of power, as a woman, are not tolerated, and she is, through her choice to invoke her power and strength, ostracized.

Mina, the Young Bride

Le Soleil des obscurs is a coming-of-age experience for Mina as well as her future husband, Soltane. Daisy Dwyer describes the periods of a Moroccan woman's life in terms of her progression from girl to woman as "the golden age of virginity", "the crisis of defloration", "marriage", "pregnancy", and "old age" (Dwyer 61-77). As the novel progresses, Mina passes through all of these stages with the exception of old age. At the onset, Mina has barely reached adolescence yet is preparing for marriage, a fact consistent with many rural Moroccan women even today. Her progression from subservient daughter, to nervous and humiliated bride, to subservient wife, to childbearer with some power, to betrayed woman heading for divorce, represents, in fact, the empowerment of all Moroccan women today.

The first appearance of Mina arrives at the same time as that of her mother, with Lalla Zineb's visit. She is the portrait of a perfect daughter, serving tea and cookies. At thirteen, she is "belle comme la lune" avec "des yeux de biche et une chevelure noire" (69). Because she has "good" parents, Mina has never been to school and only sets foot outside the house to go to the *hammam* or *marabout* with her mother. As is customary and in order to maintain the family's honor, "all precautions

are taken to preserve virginity, which is intrinsically valuable, to be given only to its proper owner, the husband" (Accad 618). Mina comes from "une famille de honte et de respect!" (106). "Elle ne savait pas à quoi ressemblait une fleur ou une étoile. Condamnée à vivre entre les murs, elle était enterrée vivante dans la maison paternelle" (141). The fact that Mina has lived her entire life inside of a home represents an important theme: that of territory. Traditionally, the territory of women has been the home, while men are allowed to exist everywhere. Thus, "la maison reste le domaine exclusif des femmes" (Mezgueldi 1990, 41). The home, with the exception of the hammam, is the only place most women ever see until they have achieved a social status that will enable them to move freely without reproach. Mina, as a young girl and virgin, has no freedom. She is constantly watched and is physically oppressed by the lack of freedom of movement.

Mina, before the wedding, suffers as much as Soltane. "Elle tremblait de honte et de peur" (121). She knows nothing about men, having rarely left her family home. She understands that marriage is her duty, as her mother has given many sermons to that effect. "Mina comprit qu'elle n'avait que des devoirs dans la vie. Devoir d'obéissance, de procréation, de soumission....la dépendance et la sujétion" (122). She has learned many things from her mother, all fear-inspiring and negative. But, as a young woman, she accepts them, realizing that she has no power. She negates her sense of self, having learned from her mother that "elle n'était rien; une pauvre chose

à la merci de l'humeur de son maître. Elle n'existait pas, n'avait le droit de réfléchir ni à son corps ou à son sexe"; she learned "la soumission inconditionnelle aux désirs du mâle" (127). Because she is oppressed, she never questions or resists her parent's plan for her.

> "The notion of arranged marriages is a direct result of the notion of honor. The fear of parents that their daughters may be deflowered before marriage, thereby dishonoring the family and making it impossible to marry them off, compels the parents to arrange for them a marriage when they are very young. This not only frees the parents of the terrible responsibility of having to protect the girls' virginity but of having to be in charge of them economically for the rest of their lives. Social pressure makes it very clear to women that marriage is the only desirable position in life" (Accad 620).

She is resigned to her arranged marriage, out of respect for tradition and societal custom, for she knows that it is an institution she cannot change.

Mina is in a predicament quite common in Morocco, particularly among under-educated girls and women. "La notion de pureté associée à la jeune fille relève de traditions sociales séculaires. La virginité est naturellement synonyme de pureté et d'innocence" (Benzakour-Chami 1994, 28). Mina represents innocence, and in this, she knows nothing of her body. Mina imagines her future husband in negative terms as her socialization would dictate. For her, he is "borgne", "laid", "misogyne",

"teigneux," "petit au sens de la bassesse humaine et du mépris" (124). But, for Mina, it is without importance, for, as a young woman, she has no power over any aspect of her life. "Elle devait se taire et attendre son destin, persuadée que la vie de couple était un combat quotidien" (124).

Yet at this point, there are sparks of independence in Mina, "un début de révolte et d'insubordination" (125). She realizes that, if given a choice, she would renounce the marriage, and stay single, if necessary, in order to maintain her personal dignity. She would sacrifice the social status accorded married women in exchange for inner peace. Yet, because she has no power, she is obligated to accept "ce mariage comme sa mère avait accepté le sien avant elle" (125). Mina, the adolescent single female, is controlled by society and tradition.

As her wedding night approaches, Mina is expected to remain honorable, and her status as a virgin remains all-important throughout the village. Soltane's peers brief him on the wedding night procedures. "Le sang...c'est le sang de l'honneur. Les filles honorables saignent. Celles qui n'ont pas d'honneur sont comme un cours d'eau tari" (82). The whole village has its eyes on Mina, waiting for the moment of violence that will determine whether or not she is honorable.

The climax of the novel occurs during the night of the wedding, when Soltane and Mina are locked together in a room in order to consummate their marriage. Wedding night scenes and the related violence have become a leitmotiv in Maghrebian

literature in French, and have been included in many works. Serhane's scene is much like a scene in Boudjedra's *Le Vainqueur de coupe*, only perhaps less violent, as Boujedra's bride commits suicide due to the insensitivity and violence of her husband (Abu-Haidar 76). Another of Boudjedra's works, *La Répudiation*, also served as a model, as the issues of blood, sacrifice of childhood, and the obsession with the taking of virginity are present in both works (Gontard 1993, 153). Symbolic of the violence in her existence as an oppressed woman, she is terrified and humiliated. She is, at first, calmed by Soltane's apparent caring, yet when the event does not take place, her worst nightmares come true. She believes that she lost her virginity, thus her honor, when she menstruated for the first time. Her lack of education regarding her own body causes her much consternation. Soltane's family blames her, charging that she is not a virgin. At this point, the entire community speculates on Mina's virginity. It is a publicly humiliating event, yet one that many Moroccan brides undergo. Such a personal matter becomes public information, and as a woman, Mina is objectified. Her identity and being becomes virginal blood; she has no other value, nor identity. And yet it is not even her husband who will deflower her, but a professional, who has been sent in by the families to, in essence, rape her. Mina's potential trust of men, of her husband, is gone at this point, and psychologically, she is marginalized, realizing that she has never had, nor will she have, power over her own life, body, or destiny. "Mina n'était plus une fillette. Elle était une femme désormais, et on attendait déjà ses

enfants" (174). In losing her virginity, Mina becomes a woman. No longer is her role as a young girl in question; her role has changed, as must her behavior and the duties she is to fulfill as wife, daughter-in-law, and future mother.

Mina arrives as daughter-in-law in a home where the father-in-law believes that "l'épouse doit garder la tête basse devant son mari" (59). She obeys her husband, realizing that "le vrai devoir d'une femme est de faire ce que veut son époux" (203). She rarely leaves the home, having moved from the confinement of her family home to that of her husband. Expecting newfound freedom in marriage, she has none, because, "as a wife, a woman is subjected to substantial confinement within the house" and is "largely dominated by her mother-in-law" (Rosen 563). Mina does have an opportunity to visit her family, and also to go to the *hammam*, but these occasions are few and far between. When she becomes friends with Aouicha, she contemplates telling Soltane of her new friendship, but does not, believing that he will not understand, and afraid that he will forbid her, as is his right, to see Aouicha. She despises Soltane, and feels betrayed by his lack of attention. She cannot trust him, because he let her down on the wedding night.

Mina becomes pregnant almost immediately after the wedding, giving birth to a girl. Because procreation is the "prime function of marriage", Mina has fulfilled a duty, but at the same time, has failed, because her child is female (Accad 624). Because she feels shamed, she rebels, and sneaks to see Aouicha whenever possible.

She trusts this woman, and believes that Aouicha can help her to cure herself of the demons that inhabit her. Yet her relationship with Aouicha turns strikingly similar to that of her relationship with Soltane. It is based on sex, and although Mina does not at first realize it, she is also being sexually exploited by Aouicha.

At the same time, when Soltane offers to take her to live in the city, she feels liberated. "Elle serait enfin libre; c'est-à-dire qu'elle deviendrait une vraie mère et une maîtresse de maison accomplie" (219). She is crossing the barrier of traditional, subservient young woman mentally, in hopes of becoming something else. She looks forward to increased power and freedom away from the patriarchal entrenchment.

She is pleased by life in the city, and is thrilled at the thought of having two whole rooms to herself. She has found "la liberté que les forces du mal lui avaient confisquée depuis sa naissance" (234). Her life continues and she has more children, totaling five girls. She is reliving the nightmare of Lalla Batoul and many other prominent mothers in North African literature: being ostracized by her husband and family, and she believes that she has been cursed. She, too, feels that the birth of female children is negative, and the entire household is veiled under a sentiment of negativity. Psychologically, she is crushed; "génétrice de femelles, elle n'avait plus dans la bouche que des mots pour dire l'absence et le désespoir, la tête chargée de pensées violentes" (237). Mina has reached a breaking point, feeling nothing but emptiness. She, as did Lalla Batoul, turns to a *f'qih*, and performs many rituals, from

"l'épreuve de sept" which involved carrying out various rituals with a theme of seven, to drinking water containing pieces of an amulet written out by a Jewish magician (237-238). She is accused of enjoying sex too much by her husband, as it is a folk belief that women who enjoy sex are punished by birthing female children. Her relationship with Soltane has so deteriorated that they rarely spend time together.

Finally, she gives birth to a boy, and is ecstatic, having found "sa place dans le coeur de son mari"; in addition, the fear of repudiation is not longer a reality (239). Her exhilaration, however, is short lived, as Soltane returns home with an orphaned infant on the day of the *seboh*.[40] At this point, Mina finally rebels; internally, she feels powerful because she finally has a male child. She accuses Soltane of being unfaithful, of having sought a relationship elsewhere because of her failure to give birth to a male child. She declares that she was a good wife, saying, "J'ai été patiente et résignée. J'ai été honnête et n'ai jamais rien exigé de toi. J'ai supporté et partagé ta misère sans dire un mot" (246). She attacks Soltane physically, managing to wound him. Thus, at the end of the novel, Mina starts to free herself, both physically and emotionally. She has managed to garner enough power socially that she feels in control of the situation, and has been transformed from subservient young girl to

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[40] Ceremony celebrating the child's birth during which a name is given to the infant; the ceremony usually takes place seven days after the birth, allowing time for the mother to sufficiently recover to enjoy the festivities.

powerful young woman who has at least some degree of control over her life; her power here is through her words, and the strength of her accusations empower her.

Mina is a victim, as are many young Moroccan women, of lost childhood. She did not have time to grow up, nor to "faire des rêves fous" that are so important during childhood (126). Mina's journey into the constraints of marriage, although similar to Soltane's, are more serious and oppressive, as she is a woman.

> "Si les deux conjoints doivent se plier aux exigences de la famille, voire de la tribu, et se trouvent en quelque sorte tous deux piégés par l'institution du mariage, la femme incarne le véritable bouc émissaire dans cette relation puisqu'elle ne peut recouvrer sa liberté aussi facilement que l'époux" (Benzakour-Chami 1992, 139).

She has lived according to her family's wishes and the customs of the community. Yet, in the end, she manages to escape and finally, is able to exert some control over her own life in that she will no longer have to answer to Soltane. Whatever the truth may be, society will respect her and will view Soltane as an adulterous traitor. In finally birthing a male child, she has completed her wifely duty and he will be considered at fault.

In the majority of North African francophone literature, "la femme apparaît strictement cantonnée dans les fonctions qui lui sont attribuées: comme épouse (satisfaire les besoins sexuels et culinaires du mari) et mère (assurer la descendance de

ce dernier en donnant naissance à des enfants, de préférence mâles)" (Memmes 114). Lalla Batoul and Lalla Aïcha conform rigidly to these standards, and Serhane's portrayal is archetypal to the rest of the Moroccan canon. Yet what of Aouicha? In the beginning, she is typecast in two typical roles, as oppressed prostitute, and then as ogress, living constantly in the realm of the marginal. Mina represents a new genre of protagonist in this literature: that of an oppressed, young, rural woman/wife/mother who gives hope that she will survive her social circumstances, and perhaps even rise above, having broken the boundaries that exist for traditional women.

Chapter Four: Soltane

If Mina is a victim of forced marriage and societal mores, clearly, her husband, Soltane, suffers as well. Yet, in current North African francophone literature, the personal suffering of men is too little discussed in terms of social constraints and sense of duty. However it is important to examine the impact social obligation and roles have on men as well as women (Benzakour-Chami 1992, 139). Soltane, as protagonist of *Le Soleil des obscurs*, suffers on many levels: economic, political, social and personal. From the first words of the novel, Soltane is the spokesperson for his people, and all of Morocco. Although there is an omniscient narrator, who is represented in first-person plural, Soltane's fate and suffering become an allegory for all of Morocco in his understanding, or misunderstanding, of women, their roles, and their lives.

As Dwyer has discussed the progression from girl to woman, she outlines the stages of boyhood to manhood. These events, or periods, include circumcision, sexual awakening, and the first steps towards wisdom (Dwyer 87-108). When the reader is introduced to Soltane, it is long after his circumcision, which, in Morocco usually takes place any time from birth until the age of three, at a point where he is beginning to discover his sexual self. After much progression, Soltane perhaps takes his first steps towards wisdom at the end of the novel.

Soltane is a confused and frustrated male. Yet he represents the "normes de sa communauté, attaché surtout à cette terre oubliée par la pluie et abandonnée par la justice du ciel" (17). At the onset, he is a scared and flustered boy on the verge of adolescence, chiefly in Dwyer's "period of sexual awakening" (94). He is highly concerned with sex, and although he has absolutely no sexual experience, is internally obsessed with it. At fifteen years old, he is admired by his village and respected by his family for having lived a moral life and done all that was required of him. Soltane "ne ressemblait pas aux adolescents du village. Il fréquentait peu les cafés et on le voyait rarement en compagnie des enfants de sa rue" (15). He tends the family sheep and is considered to be "une mine d'or" and "une bonne graine" by the village women (27). Agriculture is his life, "la terre était sa raison d'être" (14). He has been educated by his father in order to fulfill his destiny "de mâle avec honneur et dignité" (26). In order to continue to honor his family, his mother suggests he marry. Soltane is the youngest of seven children and is the only male child, which further necessitates his marriage, in order to carry on the family name. This is the point at which a series of internal conflicts begin for Soltane. Although it is not at all what he wants, he is a good son and follows the wishes and orders of his parents). He knows he is "ni prêt, ni préparé pour la besogne", but accepts the command because his tradition so dictates, and his sense of societal duty is overwhelming (28). Up until this point, Soltane is no different

from his female counterparts, and Mina in particular, in that he obeys his parents and society, fulfilling his sense of duty.

Soltane is associated with an olive tree throughout the novel. The olive tree has a voice which communicates with him. This tree represents an interior voice, and conveys ideas and thoughts that Soltane does not himself dare to think. This tree is also "a symbol of security for the oppressed. It is a confidant, a sure haven and a strong support for a world that is yet to be born; it signifies rootedness and nature--what has remained pure" (Abdalaoui 19). Oppressed women used the tree as a sacred refuge, coming there to leave offerings as well as to pray for help in securing some favor, usually involving jealousy and betrayal. At the same time, the tree is said to be the "refuge à la reine Aïcha Kandischa" (18), a mythical Moroccan personage who is feared throughout the land as a witch who terrifies children and indoctrinates men and boys sexually, quite along the lines of Aouicha. Serhane is not the first Moroccan author to employ a tree as a symbolic device. Ben Jelloun, in *Moha le fou, Moha le sage* utilizes a tree under similar circumstances; it listens to Moha when he has no other confidante (Abdalaoui 19).

Soltane's first conflict becomes the ethical problem of betraying his mother, "celle qui l'avait porté neuf mois dans son sein, avait souffert le martyre pour le mettre au monde, l'avait allaité deux ans et avait veillé toute sa vie sur sa santé et son

éducation" as well as his father (28). One cannot betray one's parents, and Soltane is no exception. He listens to her proposal, eyes lowered, and accepts.

> "Les paroles de la mère tombaient avec la régularité des grains d'un chapelet. Chaque syllabe creusait un vide dans la mémoire de l'enfant. Les yeux toujours baissés, Soltane écoutait le sermon de sa mère sans laisser apparaître la moindre confusion, la moindre contrariété sur son visage. Les paroles blanches traversaient sa peau comme mille scalpels. Les mots l'enchaînaient au sein maternel. Ils ressemblaient à ceux du destin; ils ne souffraient pas la contradiction" (29).

Although he has accepted her proposal, he feels extremely guilty, and therein lies his betrayal. At this point, his self-respect is dwindling and, just as he is coming of age, he is reminded that he will never be free. Soltane views his father's actions as part of his role as a patriarch: "il avait le droit de parler, de décider, d'agir" (33). Soltane, in fulfilling his filial responsibilities, has a "devoir d'écouter, de se taire et de soumettre à la volonté de ses aînés" (33).

His mother presents him with the idea of marrying Mina. Although he is unwilling, he has no choice but to accept, because the future of the family honor rests upon his shoulders. Constantly, he thinks of "la femme et à ses mystères" (100). Caught in an oedipal complex, Soltane thinks of the only woman's body he has ever seen: that of his mother. He is confused at the idea of marriage, and terrified at the

thought of his wedding night. This proves to be foreshadowing, as his wedding night ends in disaster. Soltane is "piégé par le délire d'une société prise en otage par sa propre légende et victime de ses contradictions séculaires" (85). For Soltane, marriage and his sexual duties represent fear and terror.

Soltane fears women, which causes him to hate them. He has learned to detest "le corps féminin car nous avions appris de la bouche de nos pères l'extrême menace qu'il représentait. Nous ne devions apprécier que le visage défait de nos mères. Toutes les autres femmes sortaient de l'enfer" (99). His hatred is caused by a lack of knowledge. Soltane, although obsessed with sex, has no practical experience and fears it. His compatriots do not help the situation, telling stories of female organs damaging male genitalia and similar stories.

As is Moroccan tradition, the consummation of the marriage takes place at the wedding party. Villagers wait for the wedding night with impatience, for it is a night which brings two things which interest them greatly, "la cérémonie et le sang" (47). Although consumed with guilt for having though of betraying his mother, Soltane's next betrayal is that of Mina. Soltane and Mina are thrust into a room together and expected to consummate the marriage. Both are terrified, and this is Soltane's first experience with a woman. He tries to be sensitive, fails, and then attempts to reach his goal through violence. This act is his transformation from sensitive boy to uncaring man. The expectations of society and his family are so heavy that he must leave

behind his true emotions and complete the act. Yet even this transformation does not allow him to succeed. He cannot penetrate Mina. Outside the conjugal room, his friends and family speculate as to why the couple has remained together for so long. Hours pass. Soltane's family worries that he is not "man enough" to do his duty, and, as in Mina's case, the community speculates on the cause of failure. Finally, as a psychological castration, Soltane's father sends in a professional "défloreur" to finish the job (170). Soltane, in the eyes of his family and the entire community, has failed; he is not man enough to indoctrinate his wife sexually. At this point, his view of women changes: he is bitter, afraid, and angry, for he does not know how he will regain his honor and that of his family.

Soltane, in marrying so early and taking on familial responsibilities, has lost his childhood. "Soltane avait grandi trop vite" (222). The lack of childhood leaves him bitter, but his sense of duty to his family and community is too great to overcome. "Soltane n'avait pas eu le temps de jouer son enfance, ni de faire le tri de ses souvenirs" (126). He is caught in the same predicament as Mina: that of lost childhood and an overwhelming sense of responsibility to the community. The expectations placed on young men in Morocco, from the deflowering of young virgins to taking care of parents and family, have broken him, much like Mina was broken.

Soltane comes of age throughout the text. He and Mina continue to live with his family, as is Moroccan custom, until it becomes apparent that the drought will lead

them all to starvation. He decides to seek employment in the big city, working as a ticket taker on a bus. He is attempting to maintain the family honor and lead them to survival, a difficult task in light of the fact that much of their land, used for their subsistence farming, was sold to pay for his marriage. He attempts to rescue them from poverty and disaster, but his respectable attempt eventually backfires, leaving him with nothing.

He continues his journey as a boy-to-man, losing all sensitivity and behaving towards Mina as his own father behaves towards his mother. He forces her to have sex with him, and controls her behavior and movements, regulating her life in every aspect.

> "'Je suis obligé de m'absenter pour quelque temps, lui avait-il dit au cours de leur dernière nuit. Je ne veux pas que tu traînes dans les rues. Je ne veux pas non plus que tu te lies d'amitié avec des femmes; elles sont toutes des putes. Tu as tout ce qu'il te faut ici. Ma mère et mes soeurs te tiendront compagnie et s'occuperont de toi. Tu n'iras pas render visite à tes parents. Si ta mère veut te voir, elle viendra ici. Je passerai chez elle pour le lui dire. Tu as bien compris? Pas de nouvelles connaissances; Il n'y a que de mauvaises femmes de nos jours. Tu iras une fois par mois au hammam, de préférence en compagnie de ma mère ou de l'une de mes soeurs. A part le bain, tu ne sortiras pas d'ici!'" (202-203).

He controls the money, and she has no economic independence, giving her small sums of money when he returns to the village.. "Soltane tira deux billets de sa poche et la plaça dans la main de sa femme: 'Tu peux en avoir besoin. C'est pour tes dépenses personnelles'" (198). Feeling exiled by his life in the city, Soltane transfers his aggressions to Mina, and dominates her existence, forcing her into exile as well.

Like his father, Soltane is disappointed when Mina gives birth to their first child and it is a girl. "Sa femme avait accouché d'une petite fille qui, d'après les dires de sa mère, avait ses yeux et le contour de son visage. Une fille, et non un garçon comme il l'espérait. La vie l'avait toujours contrarié. Il le savait. Une première fille, ce n'était pas grave. L'angoisse était née avec cette première naissance" (210). He waits over two years before visiting home after the birth of this child because his disappointment is so great. As he finds Mina pregnant again, he beats her, insults her, and threatens to repudiate her. Yet, still controlled by his mother, he accepts that the child has merely been sleeping in the womb until Soltane arrives for the birth. Soltane, in his ignorance, accepts this explanation.

Soltane would like to return to the city, with his wife and parents. Yet his father does not want this. Mina is anxious to leave. He is uncertain about what to do, realizing that "son devoir lui imposait de se sacrifier pour eux, les seuls garants de la réussite et du Paradis" (219). Finally, convinced that his parents want to stay in the village, he departs, taking Mina with him, in an attempt to show that he is finally a real

man. But life in the city is hard. He is a taxi driver, and has taken to making his living "dans la magouille et le vol des gens" (235). His descent continues, and although he believes he is actually improving his life, he is not. "Il était devenu un loup parmi les autres" (235). Soltane has taken on the negative characteristics of the city, and his moral transformation from positive, duty bound son to angry and destructive husband is complete.

He continues to ostracize Mina each time she gives birth, because all the children are female. After the fifth birth, he threatens her with repudiation if she does not give him a boy. As this is Mina's lowest point in the novel, it is Soltane's. Not only has he become dishonest in business, he has become an ogre to his family. He has finally broken and become his father. He oppresses Mina and spends little time with his children, by choice.

In the end, while trying to save an orphaned child, Soltane regains some status as a moral character. Yet, ironically, this is the proverbial last straw for Mina, who believes it is Soltane's child by another woman. She is empowered, and injures Soltane, both physically and emotionally. He, in the incarnation of the words the olive tree has spoken since the beginning, has failed, and his life has been, indeed, "âpre" (19). He will return to his village a broken man, but perhaps wiser. "Le malaise entre l'homme et la femme est une réalité monstreuse. Une réalité qui prend possession des êtres et de la société. C'est un conflit, le plus dangereux qui soit, dans une société en

transition" (Boraki 159). Both Mina and Soltane share in the same destiny of failure, symbolic of the failure of all men and women in oppressed societies. They are marginalized, and are fated to defeat. Because their lives are in transition, and because Mina's role as wife and mother is changing with her new found aggressiveness and self-empowerment, the conflict between Soltane and Mina, man and woman, is too much to overcome.

Soltane's story is common in a close-knit society such as Moroccan villagers. He sacrifices his own needs and desires, as he has all along, for the good of the group. Yet in ignoring his personal needs and wants, he is left with nothing. Not understanding his life, and the life his parents have chosen for him, Soltane conforms to social convention, only to be betrayed. At the same time, he transfers his own feelings of oppression on to Mina, in turn dominating her as he himself feels dominated by his family and society. The similarity of Soltane and Mina's respective journeys to failure are analogous for the journeys of Moroccan men and women in transition. They are preordained to suffer and their lives are aborted by social constraints and expectations. His lack of understanding of others, as well as himself, leads to his downfall, and one wonders if Soltane will ever be able to achieve a functional life again.

According to Marc Gontard, a new current in Maghrebian francophone literature is "le Moi étrange", and Soltane, in his marginalization, is a perfect example;

"marginalisé par le jeu des mécanismes sociaux qui tendent à son exclusion, le Moi prend conscience de son aliénation, de sa désorientation, de sa difficulté d'être" (Gontard 1993, 201). His psychological journey takes Soltane from being a member of society, fairly content yet suffering drought, to trapped young man in a forced marriage, to a total victim of society, disengaged from himself and others, living as a fool. At the same time, he victimizes others, particularly his wife, and treats her with disdain and hatred, due largely to his own feelings of dissatisfaction and incompetence. He is repudiated, and in turn exiles her to the same personal hell he is living. He realizes the difficulties he has endured, and gives up on life, estranged from himself and his community. Although he remains among them, it is as an outsider, completely marginalized from society. His struggles with the paradox of East and West, rural and city life, and with his roles as son, husband, and father, have completely estranged him. Whereas Mina and the female characters manage to free themselves and seek liberty and power as women, Soltane has completely failed, and his estrangement with himself and his community is symbolic of the results of his life in an oppressed society. Yet, in his role as a fool, is he also not a seer, as are other fools in literature? Soltane is the character who awakens the reader to the conflict of values, and by alerting others to the question of marginalization, he can help to bring about change.

Conclusion

The voices of women in Morocco are not heard. Because of their low stature in society, their concerns are not explored. Until women are invited to participate fully in decisions regarding their own lives, until they are given a voice, they will remain oppressed. They are excluded or treated as non-entities in terms of health, education, economics, and many social considerations. To include them, one must involve them and encourage them to speak. The risks involved in excluding women from society and development are indeed grave, as it is women who transmit culture and education to future generations; without their voices, the amelioration of society as a whole is endangered (Ghémirès 54). It is not only the women themselves who suffer from this flagrant disregard; the development of the children of rural Morocco as well as the future of the country and its culture are at stake.

Yet what does the future hold? Are there changes at hand? What of the women who are, either consciously or unconsciously moving towards a new future? Inger Rezig, in discussing Algerian women, finds that they are in transition (192). This change is bringing about a conflict of values and is confusing to the men and women it affects, particularly those of rural origin. Rezig classifieds the evolution in three phases: traditional women, transitional women, and modern women (199).

Traditional women are those who refuse "to exist as an individual personality, refuse to make decisions, refuse to consider and think about things. She wholly depends on the decisions of the group of which she is a part" (Rezig 199). Thus, these are women whose status depends on that of their families and communities, and who play a role dictated by mores and traditional culture. In *Le Soleil des obscurs*, these women are represented by Lalla Aïcha and Lalla Batoul. Yet even Lalla Aïcha and Lalla Batoul are moving towards a new social structure, having finally questioned their roles as wives and mothers. Through words, they are able to begin to claim their own lives, and establish a sense of self.

Transitional women are those who are hesitant and insecure; they are "vulnerable, facing the pressure of the group, and afraid of disagreeing with the majority" (Rezig 199). A woman in transition is breaking the mold, defying tradition, and yet is not fully comfortable with her status. Aouicha, the prostitute, and Mina, the bride, are both in this transitional phase, although each is there under very different circumstances. Aouicha's tragic circumstances led her to this transition, as did Mina's. Both will make important decisions for themselves and grasp a small amount of personal freedom. They have found identities for themselves, yet are struggling to establish roots and a sense of belonging.

Neither Aouicha nor Mina fits Rezig's characterization as a "modern woman", because both remain under-educated. They have found their voices, although

somewhat tragically, but will remain on the outer edges of societal acceptance. Their communities do not accept them as modern women and this evolution, brought about by changing roles, leads to confusion, both for the women and their entourage. They are symbolic of the changes taking place socially and culturally today in Morocco.

Soltane, too, searching for identity and roots like Aouicha and Mina, is a victim of social change which is taking place. His role as son, husband, and father is in transition, and because his responsibilities are not clear, he fails. In seeking to establish himself and his own roots, he has fallen outside of the traditional norms, and is equally marginalized. Soltane, unlike Mina, has no hope, and his fate conveys a feeling of pessimism. Serhane's title, *Le Soleil des obscurs*, means "l'obscurcissement de l'être" (Gontard 1993, 151). Soltane and the four women protagonists are undermined as individuals, and their identities and personalities are obscured, rather than successfully reinforced by, society.

The marginalization process obscures not only the victims, but the character of society as a whole, for it is attempting to abort change. In so doing, valuable individuals are sacrificed for the sake of conformism. Sebbar's and Chedid's female protagonists, as well as Serhane's personages, are all marginalized by society as well as by themselves. The alienation experienced creates turmoil in their respective societies, and as a result, they are not alone in their suffering. According to Gontard,

> "Cette expérience de la marge s'inscrit dans une aventure textuelle qui déstabilise les formes traditionnelles pour constuire d'autres scénographies et explorer d'autres voies plus aptes à exprimer le manque, l'obscurcissement du réel et la mise en péril du sujet (1993, 201).

All three stories exemplify the sentiment of identity obscured.

Serhane's bleak portrayal of this rural tragedy, although making use of folk myths and exaggerated events, clearly portrays the current conflict via the lives of rural Moroccans; by depicting the turmoil in the lives of his characters, he has illustrated the changes occurring in the social structure in rural Morocco today. In exploring this cultural and societal disharmony, Serhane has made a first step at finding a solution to the problem of marginalization. His female characters, Lalla Batoul, Lalla Aïcha, Aouicha, and Mina, represent all Moroccan women who are marginalized as they struggle for their own identities and a sense of roots. They illustrate the exodus of rural to urban, the education and alphabetization of women, and numerous changes taking place within the traditional social structures, all of which points towards new freedoms for all Moroccans. Yet with this potential freedom comes anxiety. Serhane's novel represents not only the confusion and marginalization of men and women with regards to their respective roles and identity, but offers a pessimistic parable of the Morocco of the future in which individuals resist current changes. His portrayal is not entirely negative, however. Through his women characters, Serhane is able to convey

a sense of optimism for the future. As we approach the twenty-first century, women are coming to terms with the domination of their gender, and have begun to struggle against it, giving hope for a new life. It is not ironic that Abdelhak, Serhane's first name, means "servant of the truth" in Arabic (Lamnaouar 209), for he has achieved a portrayal of rural Morocco that accurately questions the status of rural women, societal oppression, and exile in one's own country, while at the same time proposes a hopeful future if people can take action to circumvent their own alienation.

Not only does *Le Soleil des obscurs* signal an awakening for the Moroccan people in terms of their social status and conditions, it is a calling to humankind as the end of the twentieth century approaches. As individuals become closer through immigration, travel, and communications technology, civilization is moving towards heterogeneity. The Occident and the Orient are being brought together and there is a fusion of cultures, values, and ideas. As this process occurs, cultural and societal clashes transpire on many levels: between men and women, between immigrants and non-immigrants, and between individuals with different beliefs. These encounters act as growing pains for a world which is struggling to accept diversity. Serhane, while not presenting concrete solutions, has raised the questions of marginality, alienation, and exile, and in so doing, has raised awareness, thus helping to move humanity one small step closer to a global harmony within the context of this diversity.

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