"The Journey Back Home in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love: A Comparative Study"

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements of the Degree

Of Master of Arts in English Literature and Criticism

at Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan
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Dedication

There is nothing called a "self-made" person. Our actual selves are made of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us or spoken a word of encouragement has already entered into the process of the making-up of our achievements, our thoughts, and eventually our success.

I am most grateful to ALLAH, The Almighty for lightening my path towards success.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents for implanting in me the love of success and perseverance, to my promised and my brothers, especially Omar and Mohamed Amine for their friendship and encouragements, also to my beloved grandparents in Algeria. I am really grateful to them for giving me moral support and encouragement along my journey in quest of knowledge.

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Abstract (Arabic)
Abstract

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This comparative study aims to bring two North African feminist novels together namely, Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) from Algeria and *Ahdaf Soueif's The Map of Love* (1997) from Egypt under the scope of analogy. The two novels, although written in French and English respectively, share some similarities due to belonging to the same North African postcolonial environment, and they differ though on some occasions.

This thesis examines the theme of the North African characters’ journey from a colonial foreign culture back home via writing back to the mother country. It aims at exploring the representation of the mother figure as represented by the real mother and the mother country and the importance of the native culture to the construction of the self. Djebar and Soueif's challenge lies in identifying and mapping women's position in the process of self-expression via writing. Their novels attempt to reshape the nature of the relationship between the colonial and the native cultures of North Africa. This study utilizes two approaches: French feminism and postcolonial criticism.

The study embarks on examining the analogous shared attitudes of North African women writers' attempt at self-expression through writing about the comprehensive aspect of the mother to discover the Self, using French feminism's *écriture feminine*. Writing about modern Arab North African women stems from the two authors’ journey back to the mother country to map out the female self as connected with the ancestors
and the native oral traditions in an attempt to echo once again the voice of the mother land as a declaration of belonging to it.

Writing in the colonizer's languages, French and English, is another area which this comparative study tackles. The dialectic use of the colonizer's language mingled with some features of Arabic brings forth a third space of writing based on Homi Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*. Based on postcolonial criticism, this study also seeks to analyze the discursive variation of literary representation of the Self via the use of the Other's language. In fact, the study attempts to find a third space or (in Soueif's terms *Mezzaterra*) which brings the colonizer and the colonized together on a common linguistic ground through the dialectic use of the hybrid language.
Introduction

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
will be to arrive where we started,
And know the place for the first time

(T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding, line 26-29)

These are Eliot's words taken from his Little Gidding (1942) in which he describes the necessity to explore oneself indoors instead of outdoors. In fact, Eliot's words lead to the idea of always going back home in order to achieve a better understanding of the self. Eliot's idea may serve as a starting point which anticipates the nature of the present study.

The journey motif has occupied a prominent position in literature over centuries. It is also a recurring theme that has an acclaimed role in creative works since Greek mythology. The journey can be physical or mental. The traditional definition of journey, we generally know, revolves around going on a quest to achieve a certain tangible goal often seen as profit, knowledge, or wisdom (Steadman 5). Seemingly, the journey motif in literature is a catalyst towards self- accomplishment and above all the acquisition of a better understanding of life and self-construction. The journey is usually destined forth towards unknown places, however, things
may seem different and curious if the journey is destined back home. In fact, the journey abroad and then to the mother land functions as a source of nostalgia and quest for self-construction in the works of many diasporic writers, particularly postcolonial writers. Like any journey, the one undergone abroad and then back home leaves tangible traces on many literary postcolonial narratives depicting the mother land during colonization and afterwards.

As students of English, we are usually introduced to English literature produced by the native writers whose mother tongue is originally English. However, there are literary works in English by authors who descend from other races. This is roughly called literature in English rather than English literature, and the same case does apply to literature in French produced by non-native writers whose mother tongue is not actually French. One sort of postcolonial literature comes under the premise of writing in the colonizer's language, be it English or French leading readers to read a new type of literature quite different from the English or French literature as far as the themes treated and the use of language are concerned. Through the non-native language which is that of the colonizer, indigenous writers try to articulate their cultural values using their own idioms and expressions. This feature distinguishes the writings of indigenous authors from that of the postcolonial's whenever the
issues of culture are raised. Miriam Cooke suggests that non-native literature can best be approached as a psychic journey only in the context of the consciousness of the universe to be understood (15).

A comparative study of these kinds of literatures, especially those written in different languages, is likely to acquaint us with different literatures of the world. The ultimate task of comparative literature is to study texts across linguistic and cultural borders in an effort to bring people's cultures together (Jost 19). As students of literature, we are often familiar with ethnic literatures such as African American, Asian, and Hispanic literature. Nevertheless, it seems that students' knowledge of North African literature, especially those writings produced by Maghrebin authors has not been subject to sufficient analysis. Since the Great Maghreb and Egypt are part of the Arab world that is located in Africa, it is imperative for Arabs coming from Africa to discuss those narratives of Arab authors which are not actually written in Arabic due to some historical reasons. And here lies the task of the comparatist to bridge the gap between literatures as it regards literatures in different languages as part of World Literature (Weisstein 10).

Seemingly, the premise of producing literary works in the language of the colonizer makes these works seem to be split between a native cultural data voiced in non-native language and the necessities of the
globalization of our time. This is actually the case of North African postcolonial literature. In order to clarify this idea, this study aims to give an example of this literature produced by postcolonial female writers evoking their mother culture and using colonizers' languages. Two works are taken from Arab countries in North Africa: Algeria and Egypt, which were respectively colonized by France and Great Britain. History records the political side of the French colonization of Algeria as well as the English occupation of Egypt; however, postcolonial narratives reflect cultural and human facets of this historical reality. The works selected come from Western-educated Algerian and Egyptian feminist writers, who at the same time are Muslim intellectuals writing in Western languages that are not their native tongues, a case that is typical of almost all North African intellectuals.

When reading Assia Djebar's *L'amour, la Fantasia* (originally written in French then translated into English by Dorothy S. Blair in 1993 under the title *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985)) along with Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1997), one may notice that those narratives fall into two categories: first, the two works represent an attempt to reach self-representation through writing, questioning in this sense their position as women in their postcolonial society. Their works can be interpreted in the light of French feminism that suggests that women should assert their
presence through writing which is the only way leading them to discover their feminine Self (Cixous 226). These works assert the relationship between women and writing, this essential link that many feminists regard as the effective way to reach emancipation. Writing motivates women to take action and resurrect the ancestral female voices that were usually silenced by colonization (Djebar 120). Yet, this self needs to a reference which is embodied in the mother country since the realm of the mother figure is another area of concern in French feminism. Second, when drawing upon the use of language, both writers use the colonizer's language that echoes from time to time like the native Arabic language. They actually attempt to give an Arabic touch to French and English by inserting some oral Arabic words or translating a whole statement into French or English in a way that echoes Arabic.

This hybrid language, which is a mixture of two languages, creates a sort of third space (Bhabha 11) to assert the two authors' sense of loyalty and belonging to the mother tongue. I will try to show in this thesis how the two authors add an Arabic flavor to French and English by inserting Arabic sounds along with their local accents inventing in this respect a new territory. These two novels represent details of the socio-cultural dimension of the mother country that embodies native heritage that happened to be erased by the colonizing powers. It is also noticeable that