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Women of Algiers in their Apartment by Eugène Delacroix and the Shaping of the Contemporary Algerian Novelistic Text: Counter-Representation from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

نساء الجزائر في مخدعهن لأوجين ديلاكروا وتشكيل النص الروائي الجزائري المعاصر

التمثيل المضاد من المنظور النسوي ما بعد الكولونيالي

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Abstract:
Women of Algiers in Their Apartment, by the French painter Eugene Delacroix, is one such art reference that has led to the composition of two books, namely Prisoner of the Sun by Algerian novelist Hamid Abdelkader and Line of Sand by Algerian novelist Hajer Kouidri. Analyzing the concept of Orientalism in the postcolonial feminist framework, both of these books examine the stereotypical formation of the Algerian identity. They embark on a project of rectification that starts with giving back to history the long-denied voice. This self-narrative, based on other forms of representations, defiance, and cultural activities that it veils, speaks volumes about the narrator's point of view. It is here that the current study aims at looking into this issue.
Keywords: Algerian novel, Orientalism, painting, postcolonial feminism, counter-representation.

ملخص:
تمثل لوحة نساء الجزائر في مخدعهن للرسام الفرنسي أوجين ديلاكروا مرجعية فنية شكلت روايتي: أسير الشمس للروائي الجزائري حميد عبد القادر، وخط رمل للروائية الجزائرية هاجر قويدري، من زاوية رؤية نسوية ما بعد كولونيالية تحفر في التمثلات النمطية المخترعة عن الذات الجزائرية، في مسعى تصحيحي يبدأ من استعادة الصوت المغيب تاريخيا، سرد الذات الذي ينهض على بنية منالتمثلات البديلة، المقاومة، وما تواريه من ممارسات ثقافية تنم عن وجهة نظر ساردها، وهذا ما تحاول الورقة البحثية استعراضه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرواية الجزائرية، الاستشراق، الرسم، النسوية ما بعدالكولونيالية، التمثيل المضاد.

Introduction

The contemporary Algerian novel is founded upon diverse references that shape and frame it. Painting, in particular, has emerged as a significant artistic source from which Algerian novelists draw in constructing their textual worlds, characters, scenes, and colors, through which they articulate their visions and ideas. Narrativizing what pigments evoke reflects an interaction between forms and the cultural meanings that structure both the absent painting and the present text.

Women of Algiers in their Apartment functions as an intertext upon which Algerian narrative has been constructed, particularly in *Prisoner of the Sun* and *Line of Sand*. Despite differences in the narrative space occupied by the painting in each novel, its presence remains decisive. In

Prisoner of the Sun, the painting and its creator constitute the central textual framework, whereas in *Line of Sand*, the painting operates as a latent foundation underlying the narrative structure.

By examining two novels that engage in writing back through resistant cultural representations from a postcolonial feminist perspective, this paper seeks to uncover both the explicit and implicit critical cultural practices embedded within artistic narrative production.

Women of Algiers in their Apartment represents a historical artistic reference through which the structural architecture of *Prisoner of the Sun* is formed. Hamid Abdelkader reconstructs the colonial historical context that produced this type of art. Painting here becomes a material witness to that historical moment. The novelist thus narrativizes the cultural-historical background that generated the painting, framing the text both from outside and within its boundaries.

1. Outside the Novelistic Text: The Ideological Framing of Meaning

The title of the novel branches into two components, a main title and a subtitle, that are linguistically contradictory. The main title (*Prisoner of the Sun*) consists of a predicative construction (predicate + genitive), articulated through symbolic language and structured by deviation as a stylistic device. This deviation opens the title to multiple interpretations and produces its poetic resonance.

By contrast, the subtitle (*The Days of Eugène Delacroix in Algeria*) is expressed in direct language and structured into three components: a temporal element (*days*), a spatial element (*in Algeria*), and an event-based realistic component linked to a historical figure (*Eugène Delacroix*). This informative dimension, suggesting the reporting of a historical event, serves to restrict interpretive openness.

Thus, the titling emerges as a synthesis in which the imaginary and the real, the poetic and the historical, are interwoven. This duality is mirrored in the novel itself, which combines historical fact with fictional construction. The text does not simply historicize events nor narrate a biography, although the narrative is delivered in the third person, positioning the narrator outside the events and enabling movement across characters and access to their inner thoughts. This narrative stance seeks to revive what has been silenced, expose intentions, and reconstruct what was omitted from the painting's narratives by filling its gaps through an excavation of artistic and historical memory within an aesthetic narrative framework.

Yet this narrative distance does not necessarily ensure objectivity. Beneath the surface emerges the subtle voice of an Algerian man, the novelist himself, behind the narrator and textual thresholds. This voice directs a pre-emptive condemnation, employing narrative strategies to impose a singular vision. The dialogue between Delacroix and the journalist Pigalle exemplifies condemnation rather than mere accusation.

Prisoner of the Sun is thus an instance of historical imagination: "historical material shaped through narrative, having detached itself from its documentary and descriptive function, and acquiring a symbolic aesthetic function. Historical imagination does not refer to or affirm the truths of the past, nor does it promote them. Rather, it draws inspiration from them as

interpretive foundations for its events. It emerges from the dynamic interaction between narrative enriched by imagination and history supported by facts"[1].

As previously noted, the main title is constructed through a predicative-genitive relation. "Al-asīr (prisoner) refers to the captive; originally derived from restraint. Anyone confined by chains or imprisonment is an *asīr*. As stated in the Qurʾān: ((ويطعمون الطعام على حبه مسكينا ويتيما وأسيرا)) , *'And they give food, in spite of love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive'*"[2].

When the term *prisoner* is paired with *sun*, it shifts from a material meaning into an emotional and psychological domain marked by fascination and astonishment,fascination with North Africa (Algeria). Within the novel, Hamid Abdelkader portrays the inner transformations experienced by Delacroix, who leaves the darkness of Paris for the light and warmth of Algeria. He becomes "a prisoner of this radiant sun, which made him feel that life in Paris held no value, and that art without sunlight and its reflection upon the soul would remain pale, dim, and lifeless"[3].

At the same time, the novelist's choice of the term *prisoner* is deliberate. It operates as a form of counter-representation by reversing a central motif associated with Women of Algiers in their Apartment, namely, captivity. In the painting, the Algerian woman is depicted as confined within the harem, a representation that does not reflect reality but rather the projection of the French male imagination. In response, the novelist symbolically transfers captivity onto Delacroix himself, yet this is a different kind of captivity, rooted in a mental structure saturated with preconceived representations of North Africa.

Delacroix is not imprisoned by Algerian reality, Its beauty, light, or women, but rather by the chains of the French collective unconscious and its constructed images of the Orient. This is, fundamentally, an ideological captivity.

The novelist consciously constructs his intellectual perspective through aesthetic and rhetorical formations, particularly through color, operating at the level of paratext. These thresholds engage the reader in a dynamic interplay of revelation and concealment. In his treatment of color, Hamid Abdelkader strips the sun of its natural yellow light and reimagines it, through a colonial artistic lens, in dark red. This suggests that the French painter's fascination with sunlight was, in reality, the gaze of a visual subject captivated by the Algerian female body, signifying desire and sensuality, and concealing underlying colonial ambitions.

The cover of *Prisoner of the Sun* combines an artistic composition: at its base appears Women of Algiers in their Apartment, above which extends an interplay of gradated colors, yellow, earthy tones, and dark red. The presence and arrangement of these colors reflect a postcolonial perspective through which the painting is reread via a historical-imaginative

[1] Ibrāhīm, ʿAbd Allāh. (2011). *al-Takhayyul al-tārīkhī, al-sard, wa-al-imbrāṭūriyya, wa-al-tajribah al-istiʿmāriyya* [Historical imagination, narrative, empire, and the colonial experience]. Beirut, Lebanon: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, p. 5.

[2] Ibn Manẓūr. (1999). *Lisān al-ʿArab* [The tongue of the Arabs] (Vol. 1). Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, p. 104.

[3] ʿAbd al-Qādir, Ḥamīd. (2022). *Asīr al-shams (Ayyām Ūjīn Dūlākrwā fī al-Jazāʾir)* [Prisoner of the sun (The days of Eugène Delacroix in Algeria)]. Algeria: Dār Mīm li-al-Nashr, p. 36.

narrative aimed at uncovering hidden intentions within the colonial context. This reading challenges earlier interpretations, such as that of Zeinat Bitar, who argues: "Some visited the East officially or on diplomatic missions, like Delacroix; however, he did not support colonial policy. Rather, his paintings and critical writings on the East were imbued with admiration and respect for Islamic and Arab moral and aesthetic values"[4].

Through the blending of earthy, dust-like tones, suggestive of historical neglect and silencing, the novel symbolically enacts the removal of layers that have long obscured the painting. It becomes an excavation of historical and artistic narratives that concealed its meanings and intentions, as well as a probing of European memory and its role in constructing distorted images of Algerian women through an Orientalist imagination serving colonial interests.

Hamid Abdelkader introduces a quotation by Eugène Delacroix as a paratextual threshold that prepares the reader for the ideological horizon of the text:

"على الفنان ألا يصور ما يراه خارجه فحسب، وإنما ما يراه من داخله أيضا، فإذا لم ير شيئا من داخله، فالأجدر به أن يكف عن تصوير ما يراه خارجه، و إلا كانت لوحاته أشبه بتلك الستائر التي لا يتوقع أن يرى خلفها إلا أجسام المرضى أو جثث الموتى"

"The artist must not depict only what he sees externally, but also what he perceives within himself. If he sees nothing within, he should refrain from representing what lies outside; otherwise, his paintings resemble curtains behind which one expects to find only the bodies of the sick or the dead."[5]

This statement may be read from two perspectives: a Romantic conception of art grounded in inner vision, and a deeper ideological implication. The inner vision invoked here is not autonomous, as Delacroix's imagination remains shaped by the French collective imaginary, saturated with entrenched representations of a fictional Orient. Thus, the phrase "what he sees within himself" reveals a latent colonial perspective, since this inner domain is structured by stereotypical images.

Accordingly, the "otherness" of the East becomes an image of a desired Romantic world, fulfilling an internal longing for the marvelous, to the extent that "the strangeness of the East becomes an image of the desired Romantic world toward which their inner inclination for the marvelous aspires"[6]. This is because the emergence of Romanticism was not isolated from the broader context in which Orientalism flourished and circulated its representations.

This ideologically implicated inner vision seeks to depict "an exotic and wondrous place that appeals to the imagination and activates what the European memory stores about distant North Africa, a place awaiting cultivation, fulfillment, and the happiness of the sorrowful women who appear before him now as beautiful figures"[7].

[4] Bīṭār, Zaynāt. (1992). *al-Istishrāq fī al-fann al-rūmānsī al-faransī* [Orientalism in French Romantic art]. Kuwait: ʿĀlam al-Maʿrifa, al-Majlis al-Waṭanī li-al-Thaqāfa wa-al-Funūn wa-al-Ādāb, p. 15.
[5] ʿAbd al-Qādir, Ḥamīd. (2022). *Asīr al-shams* [Prisoner of the sun], preface (Kalimat Ūjīn Dūlākrwā).
[6] Bīṭār, Zaynāt. (1992). *al-Istishrāq fī al-fann al-rūmānsī al-faransī* [Orientalism in French Romantic art], p. 13.
[7] ʿAbd al-Qādir, Ḥamīd. (2022). *Asīr al-shams* [Prisoner of the sun], p. 98.

Thus, despite its aesthetic beauty, Delacroix's painting contributed to embellishing the colonial project and legitimizing domination. The "marvelous" appears as primitive and in need of civilization, while its sadness awaits a heroic savior.

Among the paratextual thresholds that play a crucial role in introducing and framing the novel, while also contributing to decoding its meanings and probing its depths, is the prefatory discourse. It functions as "a kind of guiding compass through which the reader may arrive at an informed reading that avoids excessive interpretation and misjudgment"[8]. The novel *Prisoner of the Sun* is preceded by a self-authored preface entitled *"Eugène Delacroix… Women of Algiers in Their Apartment… The Painting and the Empire."* In its opening, the novelist Hamid Abdelkader states that the work is the outcome of a research study grounded in a previously published article bearing the same title.

This prefatory discourse constitutes a vessel of ideological and epistemological density, within which the author embeds his interpretations and reflections derived from reading Women of Algiers in their Apartment within the context of its production and practices. One of the central functions of these imagined narrative worlds, woven around a historical artistic event, is to reinforce a counter-reading of the painting from a postcolonial perspective. This perspective is grounded in linking art to the twin institutions of Orientalism and colonialism, associating the artistic product (the painting) with Orientalism "as a corporate institution for dealing with the East, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the East"[9].

In his prefatory discourse, Hamid Abdelkader advances his position, defending it through historical evidence, regarding the functions of the painting, stating: "The purpose behind the creation of this painting is quite clear and unambiguous. It formed part of the broader attempts to impose subjugation and conquest, and to complete control over Algeria. It was embedded within an expansionist (imperial) process that did not enjoy political consensus within the French National Assembly (Parliament) at the time. It thus became necessary to generate popular support for this costly invasion in order to bring it to completion. From the outset, debates surrounding the invasion did not support the policies of King Charles X, nor his desire to revive Napoleonic visions"[10].

Within these historical conditions surrounding the production of the painting, the novelist elucidates its role as a cultural product that promotes a form of soft domination, concealed beneath aesthetic and symbolic forms. This occurs through representing the East via the lens of the Orientalist institution, in the absence of any genuine attempt to understand it as lived reality, since it is already preconfigured through a preconceived epistemic framework. Thus, for Eugène Delacroix, North Africa/Algeria is not an existential or natural given, but rather an imagined construct shaped by Orientalist discourse.

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[8] Ashhabbūn, ʿAbd al-Mālik. (2004). *Khiṭāb al-muqaddimāt fī al-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya* [The discourse of prefaces in the Arabic novel]. *ʿĀlam al-Fikr*, 33(2), p. 92.

[9] Saʿīd, Edward. (1984). *al-Istishrāq: al-maʿrifa, al-sulṭa, al-inshāʾ* [Orientalism: Knowledge, power, and construction] (Trans. Kamāl Abū Dīb). Beirut, Lebanon: Muʾassasat al-Abḥāth al-ʿArabiyya, p. 30.

[10] ʿAbd al-Qādir, Ḥamīd. (2022). *Asīr al-shams* [Prisoner of the sun], introduction, p. 10.

Accordingly, the painting operates as an instrument that, through its artistic and symbolic dimensions, advances a form of propaganda reproducing negative stereotypical representations of Algeria, representations generated by the Orientalist institution and serving colonial domination. Through art, what politics could not achieve is ultimately realized.

The prefatory discourse, therefore, is grounded in the intellectual system that produced the novelistic text. It assists the reader in understanding the work and identifying the interpretive trajectory intended by the novelist. Yet this trajectory remains pre-framed and guided in advance by this paratextual space and the set of ideas it conveys.

3. Within the Frame: West/East… Masculinity/Femininity

Hamid Abdelkader reconstructs the pictorial scene, transferring it from the realm of pigments into the poetics of narration in order to reveal details that have been suppressed within a singular and reductive visual composition. The painting is confined to four female bodies occupying the space of a room, a configuration that implicitly signals the devaluation of the female body, as multiplicity here diminishes individuality and worth.

Through this narrative reworking, the novelist deconstructs the representations underlying practices of domination imposed upon the female body, which is subjected to two patriarchal systems: the colonial patriarchal order and the indigenous patriarchal order. In the imaginatively reconstructed details, the female body is pulled by two forces, colonial power and patriarchal authority, each sustained by systems that converge in their hierarchical structuring of gender relations. In both, the man occupies the center, while the woman is relegated to a subordinate position, her identity reconstructed through masculine cultural frameworks.

In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, argues that humanity has historically been defined through masculinity, and femininity has subsequently been understood only in relation to it. Woman is thus defined relationally, always in reference to man, who possesses the authority to define. The male body becomes the universal human body endowed with autonomous identity, whereas the female body is constructed, framed, and shaped through the male gaze. Woman does not appear as an independent being; rather, she is reduced to a dependent body, possessed and perceived as an object of pleasure, a body created for seduction and desire.

However, the modes of patriarchal domination over this body differ between the two systems in terms of concealment and exposure. The indigenous patriarchal system envelops the female body in modesty and honor, operating through a regime of concealment in which even the woman's name, as a marker of identity, is obscured. She is instead defined relationally within a triadic patriarchal structure: daughter, wife, or mother of a man. Her physical presence is similarly confined within a spatial triad, from her father's house to her husband's house, and ultimately to the grave. As expressed in the narrative: "…every man has a harem that he protects; it is his possession, and it is not easily entered without his permission. The owners of harems always refuse to allow a stranger's feet to cross the threshold of their homes. They

consider the harem an intimate extension of themselves, bound to their honor; it is a forbidden space for outsiders"[11].

Through this logic of concealment, the Algerian woman's body, and, by extension, her thought and behavior, is regulated, thereby reinforcing domination under the guise of protection.

In contrast, colonial masculinity seeks to dismantle the barriers of concealment in order to access the female body as an object of desire. This body, imagined as sensually exposed, becomes a lure that attracts colonial desire and draws it toward Algeria. The desire to possess and enjoy the female body thus becomes, in essence, a desire to possess Algeria itself. The female body is constructed as available, shareable, and open to appropriation, symbolizing both sexual gratification and the metaphor of soft colonial domination. As the narrative states: "You will paint what lies within the harem… the full, alluring, tender, and overflowing bodies of women. You will incite people to desire them and awaken in them the urge to possess them. Whoever desires the body of a woman will inevitably come here, he will cultivate the land and enjoy the women. You will make this land desirable"[12].

The violation of the harem space and its subjugation function as a symbolic reenactment of the subjugation of the الوطن (homeland). Here, the gendered relation (man/woman), framed by a set of values and representations, expands beyond its natural dimension into a broader cultural one encompassing race and nations. Among the defining features of this relational structure is domination. Within the frame, the imagined narrative is built upon a binary relationality, West/East, masculinity/femininity, borrowing, in inverted form, the title of a work by Georges Tarabishi. In this configuration, the civilizational relationship between West and East is gendered, with each side's representations projected onto the paired oppositions of masculinity and femininity. This paradigm flourished during the era of conquest and colonial expansion.

European literature in the colonial context celebrated the virtues of masculinity, whereby "Western discourse invades the East through a form of masculinity symbolizing the conventional relation between man and woman: the West is strong and dominant, while the East is silent, weak, passive, and above all… seductive, receiving the initiative that comes from the West and accepting penetration"[13]. This receptivity is not confined to the alluring female body that incites desire or to melancholic gazes awaiting salvation; rather, it extends to everything associated with femininity in the collective consciousness. Even the furnishings within the harem acquire feminized connotations of submission. As Georges Tarabishi notes, drawing on a Freudian interpretation of dreams, "cabinets, boxes, carriages, and stoves stand in for the female organ"[14]. These feminized symbols thus signify openness to conquest and control.

[11] Ibid., p. 74.
[12] Ibid., p. 75.
[13] Ḥammūd, Mājida. (2013). *Ishkāliyat al-anā wa-al-ākhar (namādhij riwāʾiyya ʿarabiyya)* [The problematics of self and other (Arabic novelistic models)]. Kuwait: ʿĀlam al-Maʿrifa, p. 21.
[14] Ṭarābīshī, Jūrj. (1977). *Sharq wa-gharb, rujūla wa-unūtha: dirāsa fī azmat al-jins wa-al-ḥaḍāra fī al-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya* [East and West, masculinity and femininity: A study of the crisis of gender and civilization in the Arabic novel]. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, p. 7.

This symbolic dimension is captured in the narrative: "He began to let his gaze wander across the room, then paused once more at the open wardrobe door, staring at it intently. He moved toward it and opened it further, contemplating it carefully before leaving it as it was. The idea of the open door fascinated him: for the door to remain closed in his painting would mean that Algiers was not permitted, not accessible"[15]. The open wardrobe thus becomes a signifier of the country's susceptibility to penetration and domination. Interpreting the painting's details, laden with gestures and symbols, within the colonial cultural context, rather than within a purely Romantic frame, transforms the alluring features of the female body and its contours into metaphors for the strategic geography of North Africa. It is for this reason that Hamid Abdelkader designates it as a "colonial painting."

Eugène Delacroix reduces the harem, originally a space tied to social roles within the institution of marriage, to a constructed domain shaped by illusion and fantasy. It becomes a space inhabited by submissive, enchanting women awaiting a guardian to liberate them from confinement. In doing so, domination is justified through the violation of a supposedly weak guardianship and the neutralization of indigenous patriarchal authority, both through physical violence enacted by military force and through symbolic violence, as expressed in the utterance: "Is this how men behave?"[16]. Patriarchal masculinity thus becomes entangled in ambitions realized through the female body, which is reduced to a commodity, a medium of exchange, negotiation, and profit. Its visibility or concealment is controlled, and through its boundaries and details, gains and interests are secured. Yet it is the woman's body alone that bears loss and abandonment.

At the same time, the woman remains the faithful guardian of the system of concealment, as it aligns with her innate disposition, her modesty and her remaining sense of self. As the narrative recounts:

"…Zahra Toboji and Mouni Ben Sultan seized their cloths lying nearby, in that dimly lit corner, and covered their almost naked bodies. Zahra Toboji looked at Delacroix with a harsh gaze and said:

'I feel they have killed me again, after killing my brother in Ketchaoua Mosque.' Mouni Ben Sultan replied, as she prepared to leave the room: 'I am going to the bath. I want to rid myself of the impurity of this wretched man's gaze.'"[17]

Amid this tension between concealment and exposure imposed upon the female body, the novelist restores to the woman her silenced voice, lifting the imposed muteness so that she may speak for herself. He redefines her identity, naming her explicitly, in contrast to the identity erasure evident in the painting. In doing so, he dismantles the false Orientalist vision that constructs the East as inherently erotic, for "eroticism in Western painting is always embodied in the man who gazes upon a nude woman confined within a frame"[18]. Here, the subaltern speaks, revealing the truth of her reality, her identity, and her indigenous culture

[15] ʿAbd al-Qādir, Ḥamīd. (2022). *Asīr al-shams* [Prisoner of the sun], p. 92.
[16] Ibid., p. 100.
[17] Ibid., p. 100.
[18] Mernissi, Fāṭima. (2010). *Shahrazād tarḥal ilā al-gharb* [Scheherazade goes West] (Trans. Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ Azruwīl). Beirut, Lebanon: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, p. 197.

grounded in purity, modesty, and dignity. One may thus argue that Hamid Abdelkader ultimately sides with the oppressed woman, restoring her dignity against Orientalist distortion and fabrication.

Algerian feminist narrative and the painting *Women of Algiers*: a written response

The presence of Women of Algiers in their Apartment is particularly striking in contemporary Algerian feminist narrative. The novelist Assia Djebar appropriates the title of the painting as the title of her short story collection, supplementing it with a subtitle, *Forbidden Gaze, Silenced Voice*. She places the pictorial scene at the forefront of her work, yet subverts its foundational imagery through a narrative that grants women a voice, enabling them to represent themselves, even if within the realm of fictional imagination.

Similarly, the painting becomes an open window for the Algerian novelist Hajer Kouidri to reflect on what was, what is, and what ought to be. In a dialogic exchange between painting and narrative, she constructs feminine narrative worlds in her novel *Line of Sand*, dismantling the false representations imposed upon Algerian women through counter-representations grounded in lived reality. The novel undertakes a conscious deconstruction of stereotypical images propagated by the painting's narrative, exposing how women's identities and positions remain confined within ideological frameworks of patriarchy that extend beyond the colonial and postcolonial contexts into the present.

The painting re-emerges through retrospective narration in the memories of Majda, across two distinct spatial contexts and different stages of life. At first glance, it appears as a familiar component of everyday life for both Majda (at the age of four) and her mother Salma, a painter living in Belcourt. Salma mechanically reproduces Women of Algiers in their Apartment, turning this repetitive act into a habitual scene in Majda's childhood. The child does not question what she sees; instead, she responds instinctively, driven by curiosity and play, repeatedly attempting to disrupt the painting: "I often dipped my fingers into this painting… I would ruin it as much as I could"[19].

Her childish imagination, shaped by playfulness, animates the figures: "I would wake the seated women, remove their headscarves, and play with them"[20]. What may initially appear as mere childish mischief reveals deeper psychological tensions, particularly when viewed through her repetitive drawings, "vertical lines… my dark scribbles… vertical lines in a darker shade"[21],which express a suppressed rebellious impulse against representation itself.

This impulse intensifies later in a different spatial context, when Majda, now an adult, encounters the painting in Paris: "Once, at the Georges Brassens market for used books in Paris, I saw the same painting. I stumbled before the vendor, lost my language, and as soon as I returned home, I scribbled over it, vertical lines in a darker shade… I could not enter it"[22]. The shift from childhood play to conscious rejection reflects an awareness of the painting's

[19] Quwaydirī, Hājar. (2024). *Khaṭṭ ramal* [Line of sand]. Egypt: Dār al-ʿAyn li-al-Nashr.
[20] Ibid., p. 102.
[21] Ibid., p. 102.
[22] Ibid., p. 102.

inadequacy and distortion. She ultimately discards it: "…I decided to take it out and place it beside the trash bin"[23].

Thus, the painting's narrative of Eastern luxury, "The painting suggests that Algerian women lived in comfort, seated in pleasant idleness, surrounded by servants, carpets, and tiles that enhanced their luxury"[24], is shattered by the harsh realities of women's lives in *Line of Sand*, marked by suffering, deprivation, loss, violence, and exile.

Through counter-representation, Hajer Kouidri portrays women struggling against their destinies. Yamīna bint Ḥūṭa embodies a female body resisting patriarchal domination, subjected to violence and abandonment within a tribal system that legitimizes male entitlement to the female body. This collective logic denies freedom of choice and reduces the body to private property. As the narrative recounts: "…He was strong, muscular, tall, and heavily built. He pulled my hair with cold brutality. There was nothing I could cling to. I felt my scalp tearing under his hands. I wished it would tear completely, if only I could escape him"[25].

Women of Waiting… I Will Not Live in Their Garments:

The statement "all of Delacroix's women are women of waiting" constitutes the core of the textual and intellectual interaction between *Line of Sand* by Hajer Kouidri and the previously mentioned short story collection by Assia Djebar. Waiting, here, is identity-bound to the figure of the man. For the woman, waiting is the man; for the man, however, waiting may signify something else, travel, death, or the unknown. A woman's time halts in the absence of the man and only resumes with his presence; she becomes a being who lives to the rhythm of approaching footsteps from afar.

According to the Algerian feminist narrative vision, Eugène Delacroix depicts Algerian women not only as captives in a dark room and as immobilized bodies, but also as figures suspended in waiting, static beings outside the flow of time, confined within a closed circle. Their identity remains incomplete, deferred until fulfilled by the presence of a man who grants them existential validation and justification. Thus, the existence of Yamīna bint Ḥūṭa attains completion in the presence of al-Būdālī; her spirit becomes fulfilled, finding in him a fortress of protection and containment. In his absence, however, she tastes the bitterness of emptiness, loss, violation, and suffering. What remains of her are only watchful eyes: "I understood nothing of my short life; I experienced nothing great except suffering and waiting (…) I bid farewell to my life as it remained open like a window"[26].

The subjection of women's destinies to the decisions and conflicts of patriarchal masculinity across time, within a heavy legacy of oppressive virility, drives Majda to seek an alternative image through which she may articulate her independent being and the fullness of her selfhood. She turns inward in an act of self-withdrawal, a reaction of denial against the generalized attribute imposed upon women when she hears her mother Salma declare: "All of Delacroix's women are women of waiting." Salma herself, whose life is suspended at the

[23] Ibid., p. 102.
[24] Ibid., p. 105.
[25] Ibid., p. 9.
[26] Ibid., p. 65.

moment of her husband's assassination and his designation as a terrorist, surrenders to loss and constructs walls that confine her among the women of waiting. She becomes a replication of the painting's women.

Majda narrates: "My mother's answer terrifies me, and I feel entirely implicated. When did I enter this painting? When did I become one of Delacroix's women? When did my mother paint me and imprison me within a canvas? I now locate my exact position inside the painting, and I do not want to wait. Who created waiting? Who allowed it for the first time, until it became a part of earthly life? Did waiting descend from the heavens and fall upon the hearts of believers?"[27].

Waiting, therefore, is not merely an emotional need but assumes a symbolic dimension expressing social positioning and the hierarchical structuring of gender relations within a patriarchal society. It reflects humanly constructed norms that regulate behavior and emotion in accordance with power structures. The "line of sand" becomes a fragile boundary, the fragility of the tenuous divisions separating man and woman, divisions that perpetuate domination and dependency. Waiting thus emerges as a mental constraint within which women have confined themselves, as if under a life sentence, suspending all possibilities of living and leaving existence perpetually incomplete.

In her attempt to break free from these imagined enclosures and to move from dependency toward autonomy, Majda rejects the frozen sperm sent to her by the lawyer of the deceased Mr. Mark Oster, declaring: "I do not want the sperm"[28]. This act constitutes a form of resistant cultural practice against all forms of subjugation that reduce the female body to a reproductive machine. In doing so, Majda seeks to liberate the female body from the grip of dominant patriarchal ideology. She even distances herself from motherhood as a defining trait of feminine identity,one that has historically functioned as a pillar of patriarchal culture reinforcing women's subordination. Motherhood, in this view, is not a merely biological relation; as Simone de Beauvoir suggests, within a culture structured by exclusion and inequality between the sexes, a woman cannot meaningfully nurture life unless she is fully engaged in economic, social, and political activity[29].

Through a counter-narrative vision, the novel empties the painting of its representational falsifications (the static, passive, waiting, sorrowful figure…). Majda liberates the women of the painting from their captivity in a scene imbued with movement and joy. The artistic scene, "joy and delight", carries a distinct cultural and identity-based specificity, linked to traditional Algerian attire that embodies modesty and to national sovereignty, as the artistic performance takes place after independence:

"تمتد لوحة ديلاكروا أمامي وتنزل منا راقصات بالي الجزائر إلى بهو مقام الشهيد، وهن يلوحن بمناديلهن في السماء

فرحة وزهوة في الجزائر..

قلبي يهوى البنت الحلوى في الجزائر"

[27] Ibid., p. 105.
[28] Ibid., p. 203.
[29] Ibrāhīm, ʿAbd Allāh. (2008). *Mawsūʿat al-sard al-ʿarabī* [Encyclopedia of Arabic narrative] (Vol. 2). Beirut, Lebanon: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, p. 253.

"Delacroix's painting stretches before me, and the dancers of the Algerian ballet descend toward the hall of Maqam al-Shahid, waving their handkerchiefs in the sky.
Joy and delight in Algeria…
My heart longs for the sweet girl in Algeria."[30]

From the foregoing, it becomes evident that *Prisoner of the Sun* by Hamid Abdelkader and *Line of Sand* by Hajer Kouidri are structured upon a network of resistant cultural representations that expose the hegemonic cultural constructs embedded in Orientalist narratives of the Algerian woman. These representations are founded on illusion rather than reality, fabrication rather than knowledge, reducing her, for instance, to figures of seduction, waiting, and passivity.

The path toward reclaiming her representation lies in granting her a voice, indeed, in restoring a voice that has been confiscated, so that she may speak for herself, represent herself, and defend her identity within a masculine world and under a masculine gaze that has failed to perceive her except through distortion or symbolic coding. In this regard, Women of Algiers in their Apartment by Eugène Delacroix stands as a paradigmatic example.

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[30] Ibid., p. 106.

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