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Disorienting the Native Struggle for Independence: A Postcolonial Reading of Leila Slimani's Historical Novel, *The Country of Others*

Hamza BEKKAOUI
A PhD Candidate at Sidi Mohamed ben Abdellah University.
hamzabekkaoui@outlook.com

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Abstract

Novels can both reinforce colonialism and undermine liberation movements, especially when they echo colonial narratives. This dynamic is critically examined in Leila Slimani's historical novel, The Country of Others, through a postcolonial close reading approach. The novel's depiction of France's colonialism in Morocco is presented in a misleading light. It offers a stark contrast in character portrayal: European characters are depicted as agents of a "civilizing mission," with aspirations to bring prosperity, good health, and education to Moroccans. This portrayal not only feeds into a narrative of cultural superiority, depicting Europeans as emotionally complex and culturally advanced but also subtly suggests benevolence in their colonial endeavors. Conversely, indigenous Moroccan characters are shown in a more one-dimensional and negative manner, often associated with violence, particularly against women. Furthermore, the novel intertwines Morocco's struggle for national independence with contemporary discourses on Islamic extremism, casting this historical fight less as a pursuit of freedom and more as an aggressive and antagonistic movement.

1. INTRODUCTION

From 1912 to 1956, French and Spanish colonialism of Morocco operated under the guise of a protectorate, a term that thinly veiled its exploitative and extractive nature. It was an era that saw the entrenchment of economic and social hierarchies that were harmful to Moroccans.

The vast Moroccan countryside, once the backbone of its agrarian society, became a stark tableau of dispossession. Over 70% of the rural population was stripped of their land, becoming landless peasants at the mercy of a few affluent native landowners who themselves were often in league with colonial interests (Miller, 2013, p. 153).

Within the urban and rural mosaic of Morocco, the majority of Moroccans were cornered into lives of poverty, faced with the double-headed beast of ignorance and limited prospects for advancement. The protectorate deliberately widened the gaps between classes, between the European settlers and the native Moroccans, and even among Moroccan communities themselves, often exacerbating differences in strategic governance.

The literacy rates under colonial rule are a testament to the neglect of human development; illiteracy soared to 90%, a mirror reflecting the grim reality of educational deprivation (ibid.). Also, the truncated life expectancy of forty-seven years (ibid.) for

Moroccan men was not just a demographic footnote but a dire indicator of the health and living conditions that were compromised under French oversight.

Furthermore, the colonial economy was structured to prioritize the extraction and export of resources for the benefit of France and a select elite, paying little heed to the development needs of the Moroccan people (ibid., p. 116).

Gershovich (2000) asserts that these colonial policies are concomitant with the harrowing loss of approximately 100,000 Moroccan lives at the hands of the French colonial administration alone (p. 74). Such a legacy of subjugation and deprivation has markedly hindered Morocco's efforts to regain sovereignty and has posed considerable challenges to its post-colonial social and institutional reconstruction.

The development of the Moroccan nationalist movement was integral to the country's resistance against colonial dominion. It was not until the 1920s that Moroccan nationalism emerged as the guiding ideology for Morocco's pursuit of independence. The imposition of the French educational system engendered widespread dissatisfaction, leading to the establishment of alternative pedagogical institutions and cultural organizations that served as incubators for nationalist ideology and mobilization.

In a defining moment in 1930, the enactment of the "Berber Dahir" by colonial authorities, which threatened to fragment Arab and Amazigh communities, provoked significant alarm over potential Christianization efforts. The resultant mass protests throughout Morocco compelled the colonial regime to concede. The revolt of 1930, as highlighted by Miller (2013, 129), stands as a seminal event in the chronology of Moroccan nationalism, signalling its foundational importance.

Moroccan intellectuals, among them Ahmed Balafrej and Mohammed Hassan al-Ouezzani, utilized newspapers such as *Maghreb* in Paris and *L'Action du Peuple* in Fez to articulate a spectrum of nationalist concerns. In 1934, these intellectual efforts culminated in the presentation of a Reform Plan that advocated a restructuring of the French Protectorate. The proposed reforms encompassed governance, judicial process, media freedom, workers' rights, educational and land reforms, and the restoration of Arabic in public life.

The period leading up to the Second World War was characterized by intensifying friction between the French colonial authorities and the growing nationalist movement. Diverse factions within the nationalist movement crystallized during this era. Notably, the National Party, led by Allal al-Fasi, distinguished itself through its organizational adeptness and capacity to mobilize widespread support, subsequently reconstituting itself as the Istiqlal (Independence) Party.

The standoff between the nationalists and the French reached a critical juncture in Meknes in 1937 over the redirection of a vital water resource to colonial settler farms. The protest and the consequent lethal response from the French, coupled with harsh reprisals against nationalist leaders—including the exile of Allal al-Fasi to Gabon, the imprisonment of many, and the flight of others—underscored the repressive colonial policies. Nevertheless, the nationalist movement remained undeterred.

Throughout World War II, the Istiqlal intensified its campaign for independence, promulgating the "Manifesto of Independence" in 1944, which envisioned a democratic Morocco under the Sultan's leadership. Despite initial opposition and the arrest of its leaders, the movement gained public traction through widespread protests. The Istiqlal, synthesizing democratic, religious, and anti-colonial sentiments, strategically allied with the Sultan, leveraging his emblematic and spiritual stature to advance their cause amidst the inherent dissonance between monarchical tradition and democratic ideals.

The increasing influence of Sultan Muhammad V and his resistance to French rule prompted French officials, with the support of certain Moroccan elite factions, to engineer his exile to Madagascar in 1953. The sultan's banishment became a symbol of national unity, fuelling intensified demands for independence.

Istiqlal's leader, Allal al-Fasi, used the radio to call for armed resistance against the French, heightening the civil unrest. From 1953 to 1955, violent clashes intensified, with nationalist figures being targeted for assassination and French infrastructure under attack. The formation of the Moroccan Army of Liberation in the north, campaigning for the Sultan's reinstatement, marked a significant escalation in hostilities. The attack on Oued Zem in 1955 dispelled any illusions of Amazigh allegiance to the Protectorate, leading to brutal French retaliation. France's deployment of additional troops, including veterans from Indochina, exacerbated the conflict.

Eventually, France recognized the necessity of engaging Sultan Muhammad V as the intermediary to quell the turmoil. In Paris, the sultan pledged to establish a constitutional monarchy with enduring ties to France. His return to Morocco on November 16, 1955, marked the cessation of the Protectorate and the commencement of Morocco's journey towards self-governance and renewal.

In the landscape of Moroccan literature addressing the colonial era, several historical novels stand out for their exploration of this period. *We Have Buried the Past*, penned by Ghallab and originally published in Arabic as (*Dafanna al-Madi)* in 1966, later appeared in English translation in 2018. Another significant work is *Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman's Journey Toward Independence*, authored by Leila Abouzeid and first published in Arabic in 1979 as *(ʻAm al-fil*), with its English translation emerging a decade later in 1989. Adding to this corpus is Leïla Slimani's *The Country of Others: War, War, War*, initially released in French as (*Le pays des autres: La guerre, la guerre, la guerre)* before its English version was published in 2021.

It is noteworthy that both Abouzeid and Ghallab chose to write their novels in Arabic. This decision contrasts with the pressures faced by Moroccan writers who write in French, as described by Abouzeid. She argues that these writers are often compelled to meet French audience expectations, which typically involve reinforcing stereotypes like eroticism and fantasy, resulting in their work being detached from the actual political and social context of Morocco (Abouzeid, 1993). The decision to use Arabic by Moroccans for writing represents a deliberate move to challenge the lasting influence of French colonialism. Historically, French held a prominent position as the language of the urban, educated middle and upper classes, reinforcing its status of power since colonial times. This dominance of French marginalized Arabic, casting it as a language associated with backwardness (Laachir, 2021, pp. 157-158).

Slimani's novel inaugurates a tripartite saga, anchored in the year 1944. The narrative pivots on Slimani's ancestral heritage, particularly the story of her grandmother, Anne Ruetsch, who hailed from a well-to-do family in Alsace, France. The plot revolves around Ruetsch's romantic entanglement with Lakhdar Dhobb, a Moroccan colonel in the French colonial army. It was this acquaintance that prompted Ruetsch's eventual move to Morocco. Thus, Slimani's trilogy commences with this personal historical account. Demonstrating her commitment to the verisimilitude of the historical narrative, Slimani remarks, "I read a lot of books, of course. I did a lot of interviews with historians and scientists and also with friends of my grandparents, people who lived in Meknes at that time. I interviewed my family: my mother, my grandmother, and my aunt, about what they could remember" (2021, Drinkard).

Slimani's steadfast fidelity to the historical aspects of her narrative enables her fiction to transcend mere storytelling, entering the domain of political commentary. Georg Lukács, a preeminent critic of the historical novel, articulates in his seminal essay "The Historical Novel" the inherent qualities and significance of this literary form. For Lukács, the essence of a historical novel extends beyond the recounting of historical events; it is the portrayal of characters whose distinctiveness is directly influenced by the historical specificity of their times. This notion is encapsulated in his assertion of "the specifically historical, that is derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (Lukács 1962, p. 19).

Influenced by Hegelian philosophy, Lukács perceives history as a dialectical process that profoundly informs human consciousness and self-awareness (ibid., pp. 23-29). He observes a correlation between the emergence of the historical novel and burgeoning nationalism, where a revived interest in national history is intimately tied to the pursuit of national identity. Lukács remarks, "The appeal to national independence and national character is necessarily connected with a reawakening of national history" (ibid., p. 25).

Furthermore, Lukács positions the historical novel as didactic. It serves an educative purpose by portraying how historical events and personas authentically unfolded, affirming that "the historical novel, therefore, has to demonstrate by artistic means that historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such-and-such a way" (ibid., p. 43). He emphasizes the political import of this genre, presenting an unembellished glimpse into the mentalities of bygone eras, as epitomized by Walter Scott's *Waverley*. Such works foster historical empathy, providing insights into societal and individual evolutions through the authenticity of character psychology, as Lukács puts it, "This historical faithfulness of Scott is the authenticity of the historical psychology of his characters, the genuine *hic et nunc* (here and now) of their inner motives and behaviour" (ibid., p. 60).

More recently, Galda and Cullinan (2002) conceptualize historical fiction as "imaginative stories grounded in the facts of our past," adding clarity by suggesting that this genre differs from nonfiction not solely in its factual presentation but also in its interweaving of those facts into a fictional narrative. They elaborate, "Historical fiction differs from nonfiction in that it not only presents facts or re-creates a time and place, but also weaves the facts into a fictional story. Historical fiction is realistic—the events could have occurred, and the people portrayed could have lived—but it differs from contemporary realistic fiction in that the stories are set in the past rather than the present" (Galda and Cullinan, 2002, p. 205). Therefore, the fundamental essence of historical fiction resides in its profound connection to the reimagined actions and events that transpired in the past.

Slimani's avowed method in crafting her novel, defined by a scrupulous selection of historical and scientific sources, sets the stage for readers' expectations. The novel lays claim to authenticity with the portrayal of pivotal historical events, such as the enforced exile of Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef (Mohammed V) to Corsica by French colonial authorities in August 1953 (Slimani, 2021, p. 43), and the evocation of Qara Prison—a penal establishment dating back to the era of Moulay Ismail in 18th-century Meknes, visited by the protagonist's daughter with her Christian school (ibid., pp. 112-114). Furthermore, in chapter IV, the novel situates its characters amidst the turmoil of 1954, a year marked by the appointment of Francis Lacoste as the new resident-general amidst the upheaval following Mohammed V's exile (ibid., p. 138). Within the ambit of the historical novel as a genre laden with political and didactic heft, Slimani's *War, War, War* is approached as a text of profound importance to the narrative of Moroccan history, particularly during the period of French colonial rule, which forms the backdrop of the narrative.

The novel's narrative style has been acknowledged for its distinctive character. Meena Kandasamy, in her review for The New York Times, observes, "The fragmentary nature of the novel, like refracted light, allows us multiple points of entry into the characters' lives" (2010). Echoing this sentiment, The Tablet (London) commends the novel for its deft portrayal of characters', "contradictions, restlessness, uneasy alliances" (Backler, 2021). While these critiques laud the novel for its narrative execution, this paper posits that the novel's fragmented structure goes beyond an innovative literary device; it presents a misleading depiction of Morocco's quest for autonomy from French dominion. Through the prism of postcolonial theory, the novel seems to affirm the colonial order it depicts. Employing deconstructive strategies, this analysis aims to illustrate the novel's alignment with a colonialist paradigm, replete with imperialist leanings.

Amidst discussions of decolonization and literature, the reflections of Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe in his influential lecture “The Novelist as Teacher” are of particular relevance. He articulates, "Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Edmondson, 2000, p. 103). Achebe's assertion underscores the transformative capacity of postcolonial literature to emancipate minds and cultivate a reinvigorated self-perception in communities ravaged by the colonial experience.

Consequently, literature emerges as a crucial participant in the dialogue surrounding colonialism and its persisting aftermath. It possesses the potential to either reinforce colonial dogmas or to actively challenge and subvert them. An excursion into the domain of postcolonial theory equips one with the analytical tools to navigate and elucidate this intricate interplay.

2. A POSTCOLONIAL CLOSE READING

Postcolonial theory serves as an essential lens for understanding politics and cultural resistance and deconstructing the legacies of colonialism and neocolonial systems. By employing rigorous epistemological examination of texts and theoretical inquiry, it formulates a powerful mode of political resistance. Postcolonial theory advocates for concepts of social justice, liberation, and democracy to resist pervasive systems of racism, inequality, and exploitation. Simultaneously, it highlights the agency of the colonized amidst continual oppression, opposing the reductionist view of uniform cultural or racial identities. The focus here is nuanced, celebrating the local and the particular over-generalized colonial categorizations of the native “other” (Nayar, 2008, 17).

Significantly, colonialism is more than just physical subjugation; it pervades the consciousness of the colonized, infiltrating their subjectivities through discursive practices. As expounded by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, "Colonialism (like its counterpart racism) is a formation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse, it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p. 3). Postcolonial theory challenges such systems by probing into their constructs.

Said's *Orientalism* offers valuable insights into the workings of colonial discourse. It deconstructs discourses that represent and exercise dominance over individuals from the Orient as it seeks to know them (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 54). An effective approach to deconstructing Orientalism within a text involves examining the establishment of binary oppositions between the Occident and the Orient, the colonizer and the colonized. This analytical framework allows for a critical exploration of power dynamics and the underlying assumptions that shape representations within the text. Colonial texts tend to construct the native as a figure characterized by perceived primitiveness, inferiority, danger, underdevelopment, and homogeneity, which are juxtaposed with the European colonizer who is perceived as cultured, superior, advanced, and individualized.

Employing Said's theoretical insights, the concept of binary oppositions is extensively employed in the analysis of Slimani's *The Country of Others*. This methodological choice facilitates an understanding of how the text either reinforces or challenges entrenched colonial stereotypes. Through this critical exploration of oppositions, the analysis aims to reveal the complex power relations and prevailing ideologies that influence the narrative's depiction of characters and situations.

The construction of identities for both the Europeans and the natives through oppositional frameworks within colonial discourse serves to legitimize the interventionist nature of colonialism. In his seminal work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said observes that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said, 2003, p. 3). The construction of the identity of the native and the colonizer is often based on fantasy and fabricated by those to dominate (ibid., p. 5). Orientalist colonial writing assumes that the Orient does not evolve through time “Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient” (ibid., p. 96)

Building on the insights derived from the analysis of binary oppositions, the exploration further navigates the layers of Orientalist discourse by considering its sexualization and exoticization of the Orient. According to Said, Orientalist representations indicate that the Orient alludes to "not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire" (ibid., p. 188). The critical examination of this eroticization and exoticization becomes instrumental in understanding the multilayered and complex manifestations of Orientalism within the text.

Shifting from the lens of Said's Orientalism to another influential postcolonial framework, the exploration leads us to the compelling insights offered by Homi K. Bhabha on colonial discourses. Bhabha identifies a collection of assumptions present within these discourses, purposely constructed to affirm the act of colonizing foreign territories and populations. He posits that the core intention of colonial discourse is to construct the colonized as an assembly of degenerate forms, rooted in racial origin, thereby justifying conquest and the institution of administrative and educational systems (Bhabha, 1994, p. 70).

Crucially, representations within such discourses have the power to subjugate, reinforcing hierarchical structures and perpetuating existing power dynamics. Given this, the necessity of scrutinizing the representations of Europeans and natives in Slimani's *The Country of Others* becomes evident. Such an analysis enables the discernment of the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which these representations might perpetuate colonial ideologies or challenge them.

In conversation with Librairie Le Failler, Slimani emphasizes her focus on portraying her characters in their individuality rather than as mere conduits for ideologies. A perspective, she claims, was embodied by her grandfather, and reflected in the novel's character of Amine. She states, “My grandfather was someone who always told me “The people who come and say that to me ‘these are your enemies, you have to believe in this, you have to believe in that.’ I believe in one thing only, it is the individuals, I respect people” (Librairie Le Failler, 2020). Such a viewpoint resonates strongly in Amine, who shows little interest in engaging in the confrontation between colonizers and nationalists.

Slimani initiates her novel by expressing a deliberate effort to extricate Amine from the engulfing “big discourses” of colonialism and nationalism. She illustrates this through a powerful symbol—the land acquired by Amine's father, Kadour, an interpreter in the French colonial army, who referred to it as "our land". Yet, the omniscient narrator highlights, "He uttered these words not in the way of nationalists or colonists—in the name of moral principles or an ideal—but simply as a landowner who was happy to own land" (Slimani, 2021, p. 1). This assertion effectively signifies Kadour's—and subsequently, Amine's—disconnection from the conflicting colonial and resistance ideologies.

Nevertheless, Slimani's novel challenges and deconstructs this ostensible idealism. The character of Amine, who was co-opted by the French colonial regime in its fight against Germany in World War II, grapples with his dual identity, a war hero, on one hand, and a citizen marginalized in his own country on the other. Slimani depicts this internal conflict, noting, “In public, he gave the impression that he had no problem with France after almost dying for its honor. But as soon as they were alone, Amine would shut himself away in silence and brood over his cowardice, his betrayal of his people” (ibid., 2021, p. 25).

As the novel navigates the terrain of historical realism, it defies being read solely as a narrative of individuals representative of themselves, especially within its politically charged context. The identities of these characters are undeniably shaped by the historical and political contexts of the time, echoing in today's era of neo-colonialism. Furthermore, despite Slimani's claim that her novel is not Manichean, the conflicting discourses embedded in her writing appear to skew in favor of the colonists and European characters, rather than the proponents of independence and natives.

Slimani expresses her astonishment upon discovering that some readers identified with the story recounted in the opening chapter of *The Country of Others* as it resonated with the experiences of their mothers or grandmothers. This revelation compels her to contemplate that, "it's crazy how the destiny of Morocco and France are linked" (Librairie Le Failler, 2020). Yet, it is critical to criticize these assertions of intertwined destinies, as they may inadvertently gloss over the inherent violence and exploitation entrenched within the colonial narrative.

This potential elision, whether intentional or not, might contribute to the sustenance of colonial discourses. By overlooking the harsh realities of French colonial rule in Morocco, such narratives risk upholding a romanticized perspective of colonial history. Consequently, they facilitate the neocolonial enterprise by not interrogating its oppressive structures and injustices. Thus, careful and critical reading is paramount to avoid falling into this trap and to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the colonial past and its continuing influences.

2.1. DETRIMENTAL REPRESENTATION OF NATIVES

In colonial narratives, a disparaging portrayal of the Orient is frequently endorsed. This construct aligns with Jhon Mcleod's analysis that identifies, "Orientalist stereotypes fixed the Orientals' typical and definitive weaknesses as (among others) cowardliness, laziness, untrustworthiness, fickleness, laxity, violence and lust" (McLeod, 2010, p. 43). Such stereotyping serves to shape an image of Easterners, resulting in their dehumanization and perpetuation of colonial discourse.

The pattern of male violence, particularly against women, is markedly present in Slimani's novel, with the main male character, Amine, serving as a prime example. Amine, whose presence in the narrative is often vague and obscured, is depicted as a man capable of intense violence. His very presence instils fear in his daughter, as evidenced by the line, "Aïcha had been asleep for a long time, her heart crushed by fear, when Amine came home" (Slimani, 2021, p. 83).

In the opening chapter of the novel, the narrative takes us back to Amine and Mathilde's initial encounter in Morocco. Here, Amine's interaction with Mathilde immediately reflects Said's characterization of the Orient as a domain intertwined with sexual allure and menace. As the text depicts, "He seized her right arm in a way that was simultaneously sensual and threatening" (ibid., p. 7). This moment is emblematic of the Orient's "sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire" (Said, 2003, p. 188). This dualism of allure and menace is further encapsulated in the portrayal of Selma, who only at 14, personifies an Orientalized woman, brimming with sensuality and the capacity for "driving men wild" with her unbridled desire (Slimani, 2021, p. 91). The analogy of Selma to a black panther underscores this concept, melding her beauty with the wild and the dangerous aspects of nature (ibid., p. 93).

As the novel unfolds, it reaches a pivotal juncture wherein Mathilde articulates her disparagement of the Feast of the Sacrifice. This utterance precipitates a perturbing response from Amine, whose propensity for violent expression emerges conspicuously. The text reads, "Her husband would raise his shaking hands above his head and the only reason he held back from smashing them against his wife's mouth was that it was a sacred day and he had a duty to God to be calm and understanding" (ibid., p. 22). In another instance, the narrative delves into a situation where Mathilde shares a story that ultimately proves to be uninteresting during a gathering with Amine's former comrades. The consequence of this underwhelming tale becomes distressingly evident when the scene shifts to their return home. As the text recounts, "As soon as they were home Amine slapped her" (ibid., p. 31).

In the disquieting escalation of events, the narrative captures a crucial moment (ibid., pp. 267-270) where Amine learns of his sister Selma's clandestine romance with a French man, a fact obscured by Mathilde. The narrative unfolds with Amine confronting Mathilde, leading to a violent altercation marked by physical and verbal abuse. This intense scene culminates with Amine threatening his sister Selma at gunpoint, although he refrains from pulling the

trigger. Through Amine's portrayal, Slimani's narrative engages with and potentially perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes, often seen in colonial discourse about natives, by depicting him as a character prone to brutal aggression and gender-based violence.

This phenomenon of stereotyping perpetuates an imperialist narrative that serves to legitimize the colonial endeavor. A seminal elucidation of this dynamic is provided by Leila Ahmed in her work *Women and Gender in Islam*, where she observes, "The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 151). Slimani's portrayal, which amplifies and normalizes gender-based violence, insidiously codes it as both cultural and religious, thereby tacitly insinuating the inherent regressiveness of Islamic and Moroccan mores. This characterization potentially serves as a tacit endorsement of colonial intervention, ostensibly to liberate Moroccan women from the oppressive patriarchy of their own society. Indeed, the depiction of gender violence is so overstated that the narrative suggests that Aicha, Amine's daughter, believes that cosmetics serve solely to conceal the contusions inflicted by male violence (Slimani, 2021, p. 271).

Mathilde interprets the Eid al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice, through a prism of otherness that frames it as uncivilized. She observes, "Streams of hot, bubbling blood trickled from house to house. The smell of raw flesh filled the air and the woolly skins of sheep were hung from iron hooks on front doors. This would be a good day to murder someone, thought Mathilde […] They had to separate the fat from the flesh and cook the animal's head, because even the eyes would be eaten by the oldest son, who would poke his index finger into the sockets and pull out the glistening white balls" (ibid., p. 21).

Mathilde's designation of the ritual as a "feast of savages" and a "cruel rite" encapsulates a prejudicial viewpoint (ibid., p. 22). Within the narrative, this perspective is connected to the portrayal of Moroccan society as regressive, a depiction that intertwines religious adherence with gender norms to produce dire outcomes. This is exemplified in an incident where a wealthy shopkeeper, constrained by these intersecting dimensions, permits an examination of his wife by Dr. Dragan only behind a "thick curtain" (ibid., p. 157). The subsequent death of the woman the following morning starkly illustrates the fatal consequences of such societal restrictions.

Another instance reflecting this theme occurs when a Moroccan man stabs a French bureaucrat for touching his wife's headscarf (ibid., p. 266). This event further illustrates the strict adherence to religious and cultural norms regarding women's visibility and conduct in public spaces.

In a related vein, Amine dismissively rebuffs his wife's insight, stating, "I already told you to mind your own business. That's just how things work here. You really think you can teach me how to run a farm?" (ibid., p. 72). His rigid commitment to traditional gender roles not only undermines the value of his wife's intelligence but also predisposes him to fall prey to Bouchaib's fraudulent machinations, culminating in the loss of his livestock (ibid., p. 74).

The narrative positions the depiction of gender and religion within an imperialistic framework, suggesting the potential for such representations to justify interventionist policies. This concept is notably exemplified in the realm of feminism as a vehicle for imperialism. Katharine Viner, in her 2002 article for The Guardian entitled "Feminism as Imperialism," articulates how former President George Bush invoked feminist arguments to validate acts of violence in Afghanistan and Iraq. Viner cites Bush's pronouncement in the New York Times that "The repression of women [is] everywhere and always wrong," as a prelude to his argument for the invasion of Iraq under the pretext of liberating its female population. This, she observes, mirrored his earlier rationale for military action in Afghanistan to ostensibly rescue women from the imposition of burqas.

In a critical tone, Viner denounces Bush as a “thief of the feminist rhetoric.” She details that Bush, immediately upon commencing his term, terminated funding for international family-planning organizations that included abortion services or counseling in their offerings, a decision that Viner implies would endanger the lives of thousands of women and children.

In the narrative, we encounter another character consumed by aggression. Omar, Amine's brother and a nationalist fighting for independence, exhibits a deeply violent nature. The novel introduces Omar's violent tendencies on a train journey to Rabat, where he senselessly slaps his sister. The scene unfolds as follows, "Omar slapped his sister. She cried. She didn’t understand. Omar said: ‘Don’t even think about wearing makeup when you’re older, you understand? If I ever catch you in lipstick, I’ll give you something to smile about!’" (ibid., p. 94). This sudden act of violence leaves his sister bewildered and in tears.

Furthermore, upon his sister's return home from her excursions, a distressing pattern emerges. Omar frequently awaits her on the patio, watched by their mother Mouilala, and subjects her to relentless beatings, resulting in her bleeding. As the text states, "Omar would often be waiting for her on the patio and, watched by Mouilala, he would beat her until she bled" (ibid., p. 230).

Mouilala's passivity, or even tacit approval, introduces the hazard of characterizing male aggression against women as an ingrained cultural standard, as opposed to an anomaly. This perspective echoes the apprehensions of Nawal El Saadawi where she cautions against a prevailing inclination within dominant Western discourse to ascribe the tribulations encountered by Arab women to cultural and Islamic tenets and to perceive the developmental hurdles of Arab nations as primarily the consequence of the same factors (1980: i–ii).

Continuing with the depiction of Omar's extreme beliefs and violent behavior, his treatment of his sister-in-law, Mathilde, is another troubling instance in the narrative. Motivated by her French nationality, Omar unleashes his aggression upon her, asserting that violence is the only means to achieve liberation for his country (Slimani, 2021, p. 138). Mathilde attempts to reason with him, highlighting that not all Europeans share the same views and providing examples of French individuals who support independence efforts and have been arrested for assisting rebels (ibid.). However, Omar remains stubborn, dismissing her words disdainfully, shrugging and spitting on the floor (ibid.). Omar's violence reaches a heightened intensity on Christmas Eve directed towards Mourad, his brother's comrade in the war and the farm manager (ibid, p. 219). In Omar's eyes, Mourad is “a traitor to Islam” and their country (ibid.). Fueled by this belief, Omar's aggression boils over, and he strikes Mourad (ibid.).

The portrayal of Omar in the narrative as an extremist engaging in violence does not exist in a vacuum. It is reflective of a broader historical pattern that Ikechi Mgbeoji elucidates, where the image of the “savage” needing to be tamed is deployed to justify imperialism. Mgbeoji (2006) states that the “burden of taming the savages” is a pretext for “brutality and imperialism.” This imperialist agenda seeks to de-legitimize and brutally suppress legitimate struggles for independence by framing them as inherently violent and uncivilized. In doing so, it echoes the rhetoric of the past, where violence was rationalized by the alleged need to civilize. Therefore, the depiction of Omar as an extremist can be seen as an extension of this colonial mindset, where violence is deemed acceptable and necessary when directed at those who challenge Western hegemony. Such representations can have the effect of undermining sympathy for the cause of liberation and perpetuating the narrative that resistance to Western dominance is the product of barbarism rather than a fight for self-determination and freedom.

In fact, the depiction of native violence reaches far beyond the characters of Amine and Omar. The novel portrays a broader pattern of violence exhibited by many Moroccans. An illustrative example occurs early in the narrative when Amine and Mathilde visit the farm. During their visit, a gypsy cart driver, responsible for guiding the cart pulled by a mule, exhibits aggressive behavior by subjecting the animal to insults and lashes. When Mathilde attempts to intervene, the situation escalates as the driver spits on the ground and menacingly asks if she, too, desires a "good whipping" (Slimani, 2021, p. 5). Later in the narrative, Mathilde's sense of

sadness deepens as she realizes that her love for animals is not shared by others on the farm, including Amine, her Moroccan husband (ibid. p. 23). Another violent act is committed by Mourad. On one occasion, after accusing a laborer on the farm of spying on Amine's family, he forcefully seized the man's hair, "and punched him repeatedly" (ibid. p. 252).

Additionally, the narrative tells violent episodes enacted by Moroccan Muslims against Christian and Jewish individuals. A particularly chilling event is relayed to Mathilde by Corinne, who describes the nationalists' murder of six Jews with a harrowing intensity, detailing "A father of eleven with his chest ripped open. Houses looted and burned" (ibid. p. 146). She further narrates the appalling spectacle of "savaged corpses brought to Meknes for burial," augmenting her account with references to the rabbis' proclamations that "God will not forget" (ibid.). Moreover, the text includes portrayals of Christian persecution, with a guide morbidly delighting in telling young children, "There are skeletons. The Christian slaves, who also built the high walls that protect the city, sometimes collapsed with exhaustion, and when that happened their masters would wall them in" (ibid. p. 114). These portrayals cast Moroccan characters in a uniformly hostile light towards both Jews and Christians, positioning Islamic civilization in stark opposition to Judeo-Christian traditions.

The graphic accounts of violence against Christians and Jews by Moroccan Muslims in the novel are not merely historical; they feed into a contemporary narrative that is alarmingly reminiscent of the divisive rhetoric discussed by Jeffrey Haynes (2017). Haynes highlights the way in which "Trump's rhetoric and that of his key ideological allies in the White House" casts the relationship between the West and the Muslim world as a "clash of civilizations," a narrative that has deep roots in the ideas presented by Lewis and Huntington (Haynes, 2017, p. 67). This worldview artificially segregates the world into mutually antagonistic blocks—"the Judeo-Christian USA" and the "Muslim world."

2.2.THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

In the novel, European characters are portrayed as seeking improved education, health, and prosperity in Morocco as a result of their humane nature, a contrast that is highlighted when compared to the native characters. This dichotomy is particularly evident in the character of Amine, who is depicted as emotionally underdeveloped and lacking empathy. For example, when confronted with his wife Mathilde's surprise about residing with his mother, Amine's response is dismissive, "That's how things are here" (Slimani, 2021, p. 9). His inability to empathize is further highlighted in his interactions with Mathilde, especially when she expresses her homesickness. Instead of providing comfort, he counters with a harsh comparison, saying, "Stop crying. My mother lost children and became a widow at forty, and she's cried less in her whole life than you have in the last week" (ibid. pp. 27-28)

Moreover, Amine's lack of emotional support extends to his reaction to Mathilde's grief over her father, George's death. He displays impatience and advises her unsympathetically, "Here people don't mope about for days. We say farewell to the dead and we continue to live" (ibid. p. 163). This emotional detachment is not unique to Amine but is also seen in other native men who dismiss the tears of mothers in court with cold directives to "move out of the way and shut up" (ibid. p. 227).

In stark contrast, Mathilde is portrayed as deeply empathetic. This is particularly evident in her reaction to their daughter's distress on her first day of school. While Amine scolds the child without any fatherly reassurance, saying, "I've had enough of this nonsense! Let go of that door now! Behave properly! This is shameful!" (ibid. p. 48), Mathilde's response is of profound empathy. She finds the sight of her daughter's distress unbearable, "She was devastated. It was torture to see her cry like that. She wanted to take Aïcha in her arms" (ibid.)

Furthermore, Unlike Amine, who exhibits a dismissive attitude towards his wife's feelings, Dragan, the Hungarian, displays a profound empathy towards his wife. This is especially evident in their shared sorrow over their inability to conceive a child. Dragan's deep

emotional connection with his wife is captured poignantly, “Dragan, with his drowned man’s eyes, answered her gently, holding his beloved’s body in his arms” (ibid., p. 145).

In a similar vein, the character of Mathilde's father, George, despite his struggles with alcoholism and unfaithfulness, George possesses an endearing humanity. This attribute of George is summarized as, "He understood people and there was something in his character — a sort of tender, benevolent pity for mankind (himself included)—that always aroused the sympathy of strangers. Georges never negotiated out of greed but purely as a game, and if he ever conned anybody it wasn’t deliberate" (ibid., p. 35). His character stands in stark contrast to Bouchaib, the native character, who is portrayed as deceitful, exploiting Amine's trust.

The European characters in the novel, particularly Mathilde, are depicted with greater emotional depth and complexity. Mathilde's journey invites the reader to deeply empathize with her experiences. Despite the omniscient narrative style, it is often Mathilde's perspective that guides the reader's understanding of Morocco and its inhabitants. The reader is drawn into her internal world, sympathizing with the challenges she faces due to her decision to marry a Moroccan and live in Morocco, which is represented as exile (ibid. p. 190). Her life in Morocco is described as being overwhelmed with melancholy (ibid., p. 11).

It is noteworthy that colonial literature often ascribes an inferior emotional landscape to indigenous groups. This is in comparison to that of the colonizers, thereby upholding a social hierarchy with colonial authorities at its apex. By stripping indigenous communities of emotional intricacies, such narratives reduce their emotions to basic, elemental responses. This effectively becomes a part of the dehumanization process. As Smith poignantly points out, the function of this dehumanization is “to override inhibitions against committing acts of violence.” (2011, pp. 447– 448).

Unlike European settlers, Moroccans in the novel, including Amine, are depicted as leading joyless lives, devoid of cultural and aesthetic appreciation. Amine's social interactions are cloaked in silence and austerity, “Amine and his friends clinked glasses but they didn’t say much. There were long silences punctuated by quiet laughter or the telling of an anecdote" (Slimani, 2021, p. 30). Mathilde finds this unfamiliar, as she herself loves the vibrancy of theater, music, and dance (ibid., p. 28). She is uncomfortable at her husband's reluctance to feel or express joy, “He’d never been able to laugh freely; he always covered his mouth when laughing, as if he considered happiness the most shameful and immodest of all the passions” (ibid.). The indifference of the natives to beauty and aesthetics further troubles her, “It was killing her, people’s indifference to the beauty of things.” (ibid., p.24).

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism explores the West's historical patronizing representation and perception of "The East" as culturally inferior. This theme can be utilized to understand the depictions of Amine and his peers in the novel, whose joyless and austere lives are sharply contrasted with the culturally rich and expressive world of European characters like Mathilde. Said's assertion that European identity was constructed as superior, "as against all 'those' non-Europeans," (Said, 2003, 7) echoes in the narrative through Mathilde's perspective, highlighting the perceived lack of cultural and aesthetic appreciation among the indigenous people.

The native people's embedded superstition starkly contrasts with the rational mindset of Europeans as Mathilde finds herself butting heads with these entrenched beliefs. She often dismisses them with a roll of her eyes, brushing aside the repetitive tales of "genies, babies sleeping in their mothers’ bellies, or pregnant women whom no man had ever touched" (Slimani, 2021, p. 150).

Mathilde assumes the role of a cultural emissary, striving to impart her knowledge and values to the native population. Her efforts frequently meet resistance or apathy, exemplified in Mouilala's disregard for her daughter Selma's education, “Mathilde would find Selma asleep on a bench in the living room. She would scold Mouilala, who didn’t care about her daughter’s education” (ibid. p. 19). Despite such adversity, Mathilde remains steadfast in her mission, casting herself as a liberator of women. She challenges the “norms of Moroccan society,”

which often brings her into conflict with Amine, “The few times she’d dared to speak to Amine about the condition of Moroccan women, about how poor Mouilala never left the house, her husband had cut short the discussion” (ibid., p. 86).

In a similar vein, Mademoiselle Fabre, another Frenchwoman, also embodies the “civilizing mission”. Having lived among the Moroccans for over three decades, she provides aid and advocates for education. “During the war,” the narrator informs the reader, “she’d fed poor families and given clothes to children in rags” (ibid. p. 236). She even goes to the extent of offering to send a girl to a university in France, only to be met with mockery, “The old man had roared with hilarity and raised his arms in the air. ‘University!’” (ibid.). This portrayal is layered with irony when contextualized against the historical backdrop of Moroccan literacy rates post-colonialism. As cited by Miller (2013), approximately 90% of the Moroccan population was illiterate following the era of colonial rule (p. 153). This statistic reflects the French educational policy in Morocco at the time, which was primarily focused on cultivating an educated elite to serve colonial interests. The hesitance to educate the broader population stemmed from a fear that widespread education might undermine France's colonial aspirations in Morocco, as noted by Miller (2013, p. 101).

From an advocate for education and gender equality, Mathilde further elevates her status to that of a self-appointed healer. With her homemade clinic, she takes care of the basic health needs of the impoverished native population from the nearby villages, “Mathilde could clean wounds, anaesthetize ticks with ether, and teach a woman to clean a baby’s bottle and change a diaper” (Slimani, 2021, p. 28). Her empathetic nature is often reflected in the face of native suffering, “the children with their sunken eyes and gaunt cheeks, and sometimes tears would well in her own eyes when she couldn’t console them” (ibid., p. 150).

Moreover, Dragan offers tangible support to Mathilde's cause, which is to provide free medical support for poor villagers. He often provides her with necessary medical equipment and resources, signifying his commitment to alleviate suffering wherever he can. Dragan's dedication to his patients and his active involvement in Mathilde's mission showcase his empathy and determination to make a difference in the lives of those in need. He carries the physical toll of their pain, "His face, like any good doctor's,” the narrator of the novel tells the reader, “Bore the marks of fatigue. Their patients' pain is always visible in their features" (ibid., p. 154).

The depiction of Europeans as benevolent healers providing medical care for philanthropic reasons in the colonial context may obscure some historical realities related to medicine during colonial times. Medical practitioners often served as effective agents of imperial expansion in Morocco. A notable example is Fernand Linares, a French doctor who resided in Morocco from 1877 to 1902. Linares exemplified the dual role of medical professionals during this era; while he provided medical care, he primarily functioned as a diplomatic agent promoting French colonial interests. This is illustrated through his strategic relationship-building with Sultan Mawlay Hassan and his significant political influence at the Moroccan court, as detailed by Paul (1977, p. 4).

The deployment of "foreign affairs missionaries" by the French government further highlights the intertwinement of medical practice and colonial politics. These individuals arrived in Morocco concurrent with France's financial control over the country. Practitioners like Weisgerber were involved in diverse activities, including journalism and espionage, aiding and justifying colonial expansion. In this context, the medical profession was often portrayed as a symbol of European humanitarianism, obscuring the more aggressive facets of imperialist penetration (ibid., pp. 5-6).

Furthermore, medicine was strategically used to perpetuate colonialism. Hubert Lyautey, the first Resident General of the French Protectorate in Morocco, introduced mobile health units for “medical pacification.” This approach involved repurposing military doctors to disseminate “medical propaganda” in regions yet to be conquered. Such healthcare diplomacy

played a crucial role in facilitating colonial control, ultimately leading to the submission of local populations (ibid., p. 8).

The novel also portrays a stark binary between the wealth of settlers and the poverty of the natives, reinforcing colonial narratives. This contrast is vividly illustrated through the representation of the indigenous population, often depicted as the embodiment of poverty. In contrast, European settlers, exemplified by characters like Mariani, are surrounded by an aura of prosperity and sophistication. Mariani's farm, teeming with "fat, healthy pigs" and European agricultural practices (Slimani, 2021, p. 36), starkly contrasts the precarious, disease-afflicted lives of the natives. An example of this is the description of a young shepherd, afflicted with scabies and attracting flies (ibid., p. 71), and the vivid representation of the destitute conditions in the market, "The skinny animals stared placidly at the ground" (ibid. 70). In comparison, the narrative describes Mariani's successful cultivation in an otherwise poor and arid region, "In this poor and arid region it was a struggle to grow anything, to harvest anything, to take care of the animals" (ibid.).

Moreover, Mariani's character is complex. Despite his overt racism, as seen in his derogatory remarks about Arabs, "I know these Arabs! […] Lazy and filthy" (ibid., p. 38), he still embodies a sense of generosity aligned with the colonial "civilizing mission." He offers to assist Amine, "You want a tractor, right? That could be arranged" (ibid.)

This depiction echoes historical attitudes towards colonial policy in the nineteenth century, where the rhetoric of "welfare of the natives" was prevalent and controversial. As noted by Biccum (2005, p. 1009), poverty in the colonial context was not merely an economic condition but also a trope used to justify the objectives of colonialism.

2.3. THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE OR HOLY VIOLENCE

In Leïla Slimani's narrative, the depiction of the fight for national independence in Morocco is portrayed more as an aggressive movement than a quest for liberation, with the colonizers' actions framed as reactionary and defensive. The narrative describes a period in the early 1950s marked by rising nationalist sentiment and hostility towards colonists, characterized by acts of violence such as kidnappings, killings, and arson. This context led to the formation of white defense organizations by the colonists, as noted in the text, "Around this time, in the early fifties, the nationalist fever was on the rise and the colonists were widely hated. There were kidnappings, killings, farms set on fire. The colonists responded by forming white defense organizations" (Slimani, 2021, p. 36).

This portrayal suggests that the colonizers were primarily reacting to the escalating violence initiated by the nationalists. The narrative continues to highlight this dynamic stating, "The rising number of killings and kidnappings, and the increasingly violent response of the French military to the nationalists' actions" (ibid., p. 263).

Furthermore, Slimani's narrative implies that the independence movement was exploited for personal motives, rather than being solely driven by a genuine desire for national autonomy, "These killings were a mixture of politics and personal vengeance. People were killed in the name of God and of country, to wipe out a debt, to pay back a humiliation or an adulterous wife. The white authorities responded with racist attacks and torture" (ibid., p. 282).

The narrative also suggests a predominantly one-sided animosity from the colonized population. This sentiment is captured in a European music teacher's expression of weariness and desire to leave the tense environment, "I can't wait to escape this heat and this hate for a few weeks" (ibid., p. 144).

In Leïla Slimani's narrative, the depiction of protesters against colonialism often aligns with the image of fundamentalists driven by a fanatical zeal. A vivid scene describes the intensity of a protest, "The crowd of protesters had closed around them and Amine couldn't reverse the car. Strangers' faces pressed against the windshield. One man's chin left a smear of grease on the glass. Unknown eyes stared at this odd family, at this child who might be friend or enemy" (ibid., pp. 139-140). This passage evokes a sense of an ominous, faceless

crowd, capable of perceiving even a child as a potential foe. The portrayal of a young boy as an extremist underlines this atmosphere of fanaticism, "The boy couldn't have been more than fifteen; he had a soft, patchy beard and gentle eyes, but his voice was deep and filled with hate [...] 'Long live the king!' he yelled, and the crowd chanted 'Long live Mohammed Ben Youssef!' […] Some boys started banging on the roof with sticks, lending a beat to the almost melodic noise. They began smashing everything they could find —car windows, streetlamps—and the streets were soon paved with broken glass. The protesters walked on the shards in their cheap shoes, unaware of the blood oozing from their feet" (ibid., p. 140). This portrayal in the narrative effectively transforms the protesters into extremists, implicating even children in their ranks. It suggests that they are desensitized to pain, stripping them of typical human responses.

The narrative also casts a dark shadow on the portrayal of the liberation army. Slimani describes them as sinister figures who appear stealthily, "turned up in the douar in the middle of the night, faces hidden under black balaclavas" (ibid., p. 296). Such portrayals serve to paint the colonized population's fight for independence in a negative light, framing them as menacing or villainous.

Additionally, the novel undermines the legitimacy of the independence movement through Omar. As a nationalist, Omar is characterized as a repulsive figure with a violent, sadistic temperament. His admiration for Hitler, as he exclaims, "The Germans have taken Paris! That Hitler is a great man!" (ibid., p. 175), coupled with his apparent thirst for power, further taints the image of the nationalist cause. His ambition is portrayed not as a genuine quest for liberation, but a pursuit of personal power, "He wanted to destroy the lies, smash the images, melt down the language, and forge from it all a new order, with himself as one of the masters" (ibid., p. 177). This characterization adds to the narrative's overall portrayal of the independence movement as driven by unsavory motives rather than a noble struggle for freedom.

Contrarily, the French authorities, usually at the receiving end of the independence struggle, are often depicted in a benevolent light. They are portrayed as protectors, as evidenced during a funeral procession that they guard after the riots, "The French police had set up a security cordon at dawn, and they had protected the funeral procession as it peacefully entered the mosque" (ibid., p. 289). The French colonial army, too, is shown as non-aggressive and helpful, "A French army tank moved through the night onto their property […] the tank driver asked them if they needed help" (ibid., p. 289). Evidently, the reader is exposed to a humanized colonizer and a dehumanized native.

Slimani's narrative raises concerns by intertwining elements of contemporary Islamic terrorist rhetoric with the actions of the nationalists. A notable instance is Selma's recounting of a disturbing incident of a neighbor who was mutilated for smoking, perceived as an offense against Allah, "One of our neighbors had his lips cut with a razor because he was smoking and offending Allah" (ibid., p. 85).

The narrative escalates in intensity towards the end, illustrating the religious extremization of anti-colonial sentiment. A peasant, previously employed by Amine and aided by Mathilde's medical care, ominously warns Mathilde, "If I ever knock at your door, especially at night, don't open it. […] If I come, it will be to kill you. It will be because I've ended up believing the words of those who say that if you want to go to heaven you must kill French people" (ibid., p. 308).

This portrayal in the narrative effectively aligns resistance against colonialism with adherence to extremist Islam, crafting an image of barbarism. Such rhetoric not only serves colonial narratives but also perpetuates the notion of "blaming the victims", as highlighted by Tuastad (2003, p. 595). He argues that this mirrors the role of Orientalism in colonial times, where such depictions supported the policies of colonial powers. In a similar vein, the portrayal of "new barbarism" in Slimani's narrative serves the political interests of those keen on framing

conflicts as a dichotomy between civilization and barbarism, thereby shifting the focus away from the responsibilities of the colonizer and onto the colonized.

Unlike the portrayal of Islam, which is primarily represented in its fundamentalist form throughout the novel, Christianity is depicted as a solace and guiding force in the life of Amine's daughter, Aicha. Amid the frequent disputes between her parents, Aicha seeks refuge in her secret adoration for Jesus, a figure of peace and strength, "Aïcha didn't tell them anything. She never mentioned Jesus to her father. Her love for that bare-legged man who gave her the strength to master her anger had to remain a secret" (Slimani, 2021, pp. 65-66).

Christianity's soothing influence is further exemplified during a frightful encounter with the liberation army. Seeking solace, Aicha manages to alleviate her own fear and comfort her brother by visualizing the divine presence, "And the two of them sank into sleep, soothed by the image of the angel protecting them" (ibid., p. 311).

2.4.FANON AND THE INTELLECTUAL

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon postulates that intellectuals hold a pivotal role in the struggle against colonialism. They are, steeped in the national culture and aligned with the collective consciousness, serve as catalysts for social change. As Fanon writes, "It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to" (1963, p. 227). This underlines the intellectual's responsibility as a leader in the fight against colonialism, harnessing national heritage to shape a present centered on liberation. They aid in reforming traditional culture, an instrumental tool for the people to counter oppression, leading to its evolution. Thus, native intellectuals, in order to align with the people's aspirations and engage actively in the struggle, must continuously reassess their cultural heritage in light of the prevailing context.

However, the narrative of the novel presents a different picture of the native intellectual than that envisaged by Fanon. We see this in characters like Amine's father, Kadour Belhaj, and the lawyer Hadj Karim. Kadour, a translator in the French colonial army, meets an ignoble end, which is portrayed almost as a caricature: after consuming a powder from a sorceress, his family were ashamed of his, "naiveté and of the circumstances of his death, for the venerable officer had emptied his bowels on the patio of the house, his white djellaba soaked with shit" (Slimani, 2021, p. 4). This unfortunate circumstance derides the intellectual figure, casting him as credulous and pitiable.

Additionally, the character of Hadj Karim, a defense lawyer well-versed in Moroccan law, epitomizes a lifestyle imbued with Western affluence. His tastes for wine and German music, along with his possession of nineteenth-century furniture acquired from a former British ambassador (ibid., p. 226), symbolize a profound alignment with Western luxury and culture. These attributes starkly contrast him with traditional Moroccan society and distance him from the archetype of a liberator as envisioned by Frantz Fanon.

Further complicating his character is an element of hypocrisy in his approach to the fight for independence. While he distances himself and his son from the immediate struggle, he is prepared to assume a leadership role in an independent Morocco. This is encapsulated in his words, "I'm proud to have a nationalist son. I'm proud of all those sons who rise up against the occupiers, who punish traitors, who struggle to end an unjust occupation. But how many murders will it take? How many men must go before the firing squad before our cause triumphs? Otmane is in Azrou, far from all of that. He must study so he is ready to lead this country when it becomes independent" (ibid., p. 228).

The divergent portrayal of intellectuals in the narrative thus challenges Fanon's ideal of the engaged, culturally attuned native intellectual leading the charge against colonialism and deviates from the historical narrative of decolonization, where nationalist intellectuals played a pivotal role in the liberation movement. A notable figure in this context is Allal al-Fasi, who

was exiled to Gabon for nine years. His exile was a direct consequence of his eloquent and influential oratory against French colonialism, as highlighted by Miller (2013, p. 136).

Rather than championing active involvement or resistance, the novel introduces an alternative path of isolation and peaceful coexistence. Amine and Mathilde serve as the embodiment of this stance. They consciously carve out a tranquil haven, isolated from the tumultuous uproar of the town. This is highlighted in the narrative, "All the same, he knew that there was a sort of peace and harmony in this place, which Amine and Mathilde felt responsible for maintaining. He didn't realize that they kept themselves deliberately apart from the fury of the town, that they kept the radio silent, and that newspapers were used here only for packing up fresh eggs or making little hats and airplanes for Selim" (ibid., p. 290).

In the narrative, the refuge provided by Amine and Mathilde's farm extends beyond their immediate circle. Dragan, who escapes the tumultuous upheaval of revolution in Meknes, finds sanctuary within the confines of their farm (ibid.). This intentional disengagement from the "chaos", and the creation of a peaceful enclave amidst the turmoil, sharply contrasts with the ideas of Frantz Fanon, who advocated for active liberation. The narrative seems to suggest that resistance to French colonialism leads to disorder, contrasting the calm and stability found at the farm with the unrest associated with the anti-colonial struggle.

3. CONCLUSION

In the concluding part of the novel, Amine, previously a marginal character, steps into the spotlight to articulate his philosophy of cross-cultural coexistence. This shift occurs during a conversation with his daughter Aicha about the ongoing hostilities in Morocco. Aicha questions the nature of the attacks, asking, "Papa, only the bad French people are being attacked, aren't they? The workers will protect the good ones, don't you think?" (ibid., p. 306). Amine responds decisively, clarifying that the conflict transcends notions of good and bad, and justice, "There are good men whose farms have been burned and there are bastards who've gotten away scot-free. In war, goodness and badness and justice all go out the window" (ibid.)

Amine further explains that the struggle for independence in Morocco is complex, as it involves people who have been part of their lives for a long time. He observes, "Because our enemies—or the ones who are supposed to be our enemies—have lived with us for a long time. Some of them are our friends, our neighbors, our relatives. They've grown up with us and when I look at them I don't see an enemy, I see a child" (ibid.).

However, this perspective tends to negate the violent history of colonialism. It paints the colonizer, with their military strength and exploitative systems, as innocuous, leading readers to perceive the nationalists as attacking defenseless colonists. This approach decontextualizes and dehistoricizes the struggle for independence, transforming aggressive colonizers into victims and the colonized into ruthless aggressors.

When Aicha further inquires about their allegiance in the conflict, asking whether they were "on the side of the goodies or the baddies," Amine declares their neutrality, "We're not on either side." He uses a metaphor of a hybrid tree, "half lemon and half orange," to explain his stance and mixed identity (ibid.). This raises questions about Amine's past as a Moroccan soldier who fought for France's liberation from Germany, yet views the French occupiers in his own country as friends, neighbors, and relatives. This perspective suggests that harming them is akin to harming an innocent child, reflecting Amine's disoriented historical consciousness or Slimani's erasure of the violent colonial history.

As the novel concludes, there's a tone of apology and nostalgia for colonialism. The narrative describes the vanishing world of the colonists, with their burning houses and lost possessions, creating a poignant spectacle, "The colonists' houses were burning. The fire devoured the dresses of nice little girls, the chic coats of mothers. Books were reduced to ashes, as were family heirlooms brought from France and proudly exhibited to the natives. Aïcha couldn't take her eyes off this spectacle" (ibid, p. 313).

Slimani, in her portrayal, as a representative of French President Emmanuel Macron's "la Francophonie," suggests the nationalist struggle for independence is an immoral, absurd, and meaningless war. While attempting to create a conciliatory narrative of French colonialism and Moroccan resistance, the story disorients the victims' history and experiences.

Consequently, *The Country of Others* emerges as a characteristic example of colonial discourse. It presents a contentious portrayal of European and native characters, rife with stereotypes and dehumanizing tendencies. The narrative frequently employs violence, particularly gender violence, as a common trope, reducing indigenous communities to a simplistic portrayal centered on aggression. This reduction extends to the emotional landscape, with Europeans depicted as culturally superior and emotionally complex, while indigenous characters are often portrayed superficially, emphasizing the pervasive power dynamics of colonial discourse.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

***Hamza BEKKAOUI** holds an Erasmus Mundus Master Joint Degree grantee doing MA in Transnational Migrations and MA in Cultural Studies, from Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University.*