

Modernity and Postcolonial Nationalism: An Islamic Feminist Reading of Maissa Bey's *Hizya*

الحدائثة و قومية المابعدكولونية: قراءة نسوية إسلامية لميساء باي "حيزية"

Hiba Bouaita ¹, Ilhem Serir-Mortad ²

¹ English Department, University of Abu Baker Belkaid, Tlemcen, Algeria

hiba.bouaita@univ-tlemcen.dz

² Department of English, University of Abu Baker Belkaid, Tlemcen, Algeria

seririlhem@gmail.com

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Abstract : Maissa Bey's *Hizya* (2015) delivers an image of the Algerian woman in contemporary Algeria, where the protagonist appears to exhibit internal malaise due to the circulating socio-cultural beliefs. The Algerian national identity highlights its parameters through an adoption of the Islamic heritage as the source of socio-cultural structures that were vastly promoted in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Grounding from an Islamic feminist perspective, it is argued that Maissa Bey condemns the Algerian postcolonial nationalist ideology for the misfortunes of her protagonist instead of 'orientalising' religion as promoted in secular readings. Hence, the writer uses a literary recall of Algerian historical figures to highlight the tolerance of the Algerian past towards women contrasted to the post-colonial realities. Moreover, the text delivers an anti-hegemonic stand through delivering the characters' consciousness about the nationalist hegemonies, and promotes a progressive version of religion instead.

Keywords: postcolonial nationalism; Islamic feminism; Maissa Bey; *Hizya*; Algeria, cultural identity

المخلص: تطرح رواية "حيزية" (2015) للكاتبة ميساء باي قضية المرأة الجزائرية المعاصرة، حيث تُظهر البطلة اضطرابا داخليا سببه المعتقدات الاجتماعية والثقافية المتداولة. تقوم معالم الهوية الوطنية الجزائرية على موروثات التراث الإسلامي كمصدر أول للبنى الاجتماعية والثقافية التي تم الترويج لها بشكل كبير في الفترة الاستعمارية وتم تأكيدها في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار. انطلاقا من منظور نسوي إسلامي، تؤكد هذه المقالة أن الكاتبة ميساء باي تدين الأيديولوجية القومية الجزائرية كمسبب أول للنكسات النفسية التي طالت بطلة الرواية حيزية، وهذا ما يخرج الكاتبة من قائمة القراءات العلمانية التي تصب في حوارات "الاستشراق" حول موضوع الدين والمجتمع. تستخدم الكاتبة تذكيرا أدبيا بشخصيات تاريخية جزائرية لإبراز تسامح الماضي الجزائري تجاه المرأة على عكس الواقع الما بعد استعماري. علاوة على ذلك، يقدم النص موقفاً مناقضاً للهيمنة من خلال الخوض في وعي الشخصيات حول الهيمنة القومية، كما تعزز نسخة تقديمية من الدين بدلاً من ذلك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قومية ما بعد الاستعمار، النسوية الإسلامية، ميساء باي، حيزية، الجزائر، الهوية الثقافية.

Corresponding author: Hiba Bouaita, e-mail: hiba.bouaita@univ-tlemcen.dz

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction of the independent Algerian nation has favored the legacy of Islam as a source for socio-cultural structures (Abd-Al-Janabi, 2018). The contemporary image of the nation attributed women a certain social status that distances from the western image of females, and corresponds with a nationalist silhouette -that sources its foundations from Islamic heritage. However, the highlighted status is questioned in the intellectual arena for the assumed invalidity of the aforementioned image in the modern realities (Bouatta, 2017). Islamic feminists negotiate the position of women in society from an 'ijtihadi' perspective that dissolves from the inherited legacies (ibid). Notably, such call for re-evaluation finds an echo in the literary works of Arab writers like Nawal Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi and Asia Djebar (Cooke, 2001) who use literary texts to point that the Muslim woman's status is not coded in religion.

Holding the aforementioned concerns, Maissa Bey's latest work *Hizya* (2015) reflects upon the status of women in contemporary Algeria. She structures her narrative around the inner life of her protagonist, who appears to be disrupted by the circulating socio-cultural beliefs. Following a logical stream of thought, it is systematically comprehended that Islam is received as the premiere hinder of the female condition in Algeria regarding that society sources its behavior from the legacies of religion. Consequently, such proposal pours into an 'oriental' outlook that rejects religion and calls for the promotion of secular stands; received to furnish a better status for the Algerian woman. To contest such proposal, it is argued that Maissa Bey's latest novel *Hizya* (2015) condemns the nationalist ideology as the primary cause for the female socio-cultural malaise rather than pointing fingers towards religion. Intertwined with the postcolonial perspective, the nationalist ideology is contended to perform hegemonic agendas to adopt a set of ideologies for the sake of a unified national identity. Consequently, the writer aligns with an Islamic feminist vision that holds the integrity of religion and condemns the nationalist agendas for the socio-cultural misfortunes of her protagonist. To distribute her premise, Bey alludes to historical figures to highlight the tolerance of the Algerian past vis-à-vis women compared to the post-colonial realities. In addition, she defines traits of a

progressive version of religion that consciously resists the nationalist hegemonies.

2. Reading Maissa Bey: Islamic Feminism and The Literary Text

The Algerian feminine writing is received as a tentative to free the socially-jailed thoughts into a written space (Yebdri, 2019). Maissa Bey (1950-), among the Algerian female writers, projects the concerns of women through her literary texts. In her *Cette Fille là* (2001), she appears to portray the misfortunes of the female protagonist amidst social and political malaise, with a particular emphasis on the absence of an expressed individuality (Valat, 2009). Similarly, her latest novel *Hizya* (2015) offers a glimpse on the life of the contemporary Algerian woman struggling to assert her identity and individuality in a collectivist-based society. She is visualized as an ordinary young female of twenty-three years old, who holds a graduate degree and works as a hairdresser. The narrative is represented without a complicated plot, and emphasizing on the psychological level conveying the thoughts, feelings and perception of the main character. Her inner world and responses appear to be reflective of the Algerian female readers; consequently, being a representative text of the contemporary Algerian realities experienced by women.

The literary works of Maissa Bey are being critically received as a feminist production for stressing on the issues of women and the limitations accorded to their social status. Nevertheless, she appears to reject the 'feminist' attribute to designate her stands. As a matter of fact, Bey's thematic concerns in her literature are perceived to be an extension to Islamic feminist writings. Indeed, her particular interest in portraying a perspective that reflects the Algerian 'oriental' identity dismisses her probable partnership with the western feminist outlook.

To clarify the orientation of the Islamic feminist perception, it is pronounced that the concept refers to the responses towards the 'Orientalized' perspectives apropos the 'Third World' women, and the hegemonic agendas to solve women's issues. Mohanty Chandra (1988) observes that western (secular) feminism replies to the misfortunes of the Muslim female through offering

secular-based improvements, which positions the Muslim woman as a further subject of change (Darvishpour, 2003). This leads to say that it is ‘the white man’s burden’ to spread an enlightened version of human rights to the ‘periphery’ and ‘rescue’ women from their austere circumstances (ibid). Moreover, Islamic feminism is understood to be a response, not merely the western hegemonies but, to the misfortunes of women in the Islamic societies. Similar to the post-colonial ‘Third World’ spaces, women in Islamic communities appear to vow certain limitations upheld by a claimed religious discourse. The latter has seemingly attributed a subordinate position in comparison to her male counterpart, which has been reinforced by a fundamentalist and a traditionalist discourse collected from the Islamic heritage. On this regard, Miriam Cooke (2001) defines Islamic Feminists as:

Whenever Muslim women offer a critique of some aspect of Islamic history or hermeneutics, and they do so with and/or on behalf of all Muslim women and their right to enjoy with men full participation in a just community, I call them Islamic feminists. (p.61)

Accordingly, Cooke’s notion of critiquing some aspects of ‘Islamic history’ signifies a return to the colonial and post-colonial periods in order to reevaluate history and the promoted ideologies. These women seek to identify their rights within an Islamic discourse that resists: globalization, nationalisms, Islamization and patriarchy (Cooke, 2001); in addition, they attempt to recognize and craft an identity for the Muslim female that distances from the nationalist parameters distributed by an outdated version of religious interpretations. Therefore, among the agendas of the Islamic feminists is to broadly highlight the nationalist ideology and its emphasis on the ideals of unification and national identity that appear to hold further hegemonic structures. By the same token, Ferial Bouatta’s *Islamisme-Féminisme: Des Femmes Réalisent les Textes Religieux* (2017) gives an account on the Islamic Feminist activists like Ziba Mir-Husseina and Amina Wadud, who reveal that the fundamentalist Islamization has based its discourse on a pre-modern historical context that no longer find validation in today’s

realities, which necessitates further 'ijtihad' to arrive at a non-stagnated vision towards the status of women in today's society.

Such call for socio-cultural critique finds relevance in Maissa Bey's works. Brinda Mehta (2014) comprehends that the works of Maissa Bey are thematically concerned with the Algerian female as a victim of colonialism and of a nationalist ideology, where her works are an attempt to challenge the existing forces. Bey's female characters, therefore, contests the promoted discourses placed upon them by the leaders' circulating ideologies under the banner of nationalism. Moreover, the writer critiques the hegemonic structures of the Algerian state, which Seza Yilancıoğlu (2010) receives as a feminist endeavor. Thus, resistance to the nationalist hegemonies is argued to be inscribed in the literary articulations of Bey, which fall consistent with postcolonial nationalist discourse. The latter reflects upon the condition of the post-independence societies and cultures and their relations to the nationalist movements, which exert particular agendas to highlight their distinctive national identities (Abd-Al-Janabi, 2018). The aforementioned reflections tend to be harmonious with Miriam Cooke's (2001) notion of historical re-evaluation, which disseminates a call for a progressive religious discourse, related to women's social status, that escapes the promoted historical legacies.

3. Postcolonial Nationalism: Constructing a Nation via Cultural Hegemony

The human assemblage within the geographical boundaries of a nation is characterized by similarity of cultural characteristics that are likely to be modeled by nationalism as a feeling of belonging to a particular community. According to Homi Bhabha (1990), the forming of nations is expressed in the modern history that attested the forming of defined geographical boundaries among groups (p.1). Correspondingly, the nation is defined as "An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'" (Smith, 2010, p.12). Relating the concept to the 'Third World' context seemingly holds multiple connotations: a movement and a feeling of belonging. Nina Glick Schiller (2002)

maintains that ‘nationalism’ as a discourse is understood as an effort to frame aspirations “by identifying [the self] with a nation” (p.571). Similarly, Benedict Anderson (2006) defines it within the parameters of culture, where he comprehends nationality as a “cultural artifact of a particular kind” (p.4). He views national entities as an extension to cultural belonging of a certain geographical location that defines itself through its culture. Within an opposite proposal, Gellner sees that “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (Quoted in Benedict, 2006, p.6). His use of the term ‘invent’ is intended for a fabricated and falsified components of national identity (ibid), as Benedict Anderson comes to notice. Furthermore, Nina Glick Schiller (2002) describes nationalism as a project that consists of social movements and state policies, through which people seek to act in terms of the nation they are identified with (p.571). Hence, nationalism as a movement is understood as an ideological space that attempts to create a national identity for a particular group of people.

The post-colonial realities witnessed the creation of independent nations that are assembled through rallying their respective communities to resist colonial powers and consequently adopting their ‘exceptional’ identities (Abu-Al-Janabi, 2018). In other words, the call for liberation ignited a nationalist feeling that united the colonized communities to contest the agendas of the colonizer. The resistance is presumably based upon the notion of cultural distinctiveness that separates the colonizer from the colonized. Such cultural highlights promote the legitimacy of the liberation pursuits that Gellner evokes through the use of the term ‘creation’ of nations (Benedict, 2006, p.6). On the same wavelength, the postcolonial discourse, as an intellectual stream, describes nationalism as a hegemonic structure that attempts to create a unified national identity. In his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Franz Fanon pronounces the worthiness of the leaders’ nationalist approaches for the sake of liberation from the colonial powers (p. 187), yet in the context of post-independence, he equates them to neo-colonials for employing structured agendas to meet their ‘narcissist’ ends (p.124). Equally, Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) discusses the role of the nationalist ideology in receiving wider embrace of the prescribed identity, where the leaders entrench their ideologies in the minds of the

community members and rally them into accepting the new 'created' identity. Thus, the post/colonial national identities are created for a specific purpose rather than being the result of a non-compulsive collective feeling.

Terms like: 'neo-colonials', 'rallying', 'entrenching' and 'agendas' insinuate a belonging to the lexical field of hegemony. Following the logical stream, it is presumably argued that the revival or the creation of a national identity is in fact an outcome of cultural hegemonic pursuits attempted by nationalist leaders. To put the concept into words, Owen Worth (2015), in his *Rethinking Hegemony*, paraphrases Gramsci's conception of Hegemony to articulate:

It consists of a set of norms and common assumptions legitimized with the aid of social and cultural agents, and as a result it rests on a set of key principles that go far beyond mere ideology. Included here is the primacy of religion, the cultivation of national myths, and the formation of what Gramsci defines as common sense. That is the set of materially constructed practices considered to be logical in nature. (p.5)

To put it differently, the nationalist leaders appeal to the components of culture: religion, myths, history and common sense to arrive at their 'unification' purposes. Additionally, Abd-Al-Janabi (2018) sides with Fanon to announce that nationalist leaders, similar to the colonizer's agendas, attempt to unite the mass through appealing to the components of identity: nation, culture, ethnicity, language and religion that are promoted to be superior to the other. Hence, a hegemonic process on basis of cultural identity is presumably stressed upon to highlight to parameters of the newly formed nations.

In the Algerian context, Arabness and an Islamic-based culture define the parameters of the national identity, which was promoted for during the colonial era, and has been emphasized upon in the post-independence period. 'Les évolués' -a group of educated young Algerians- were fueled by the nationalist movements, set throughout the colonized communities, to resist the imperial powers for the sake of an independent nation (Abd-Al-Janabi, 2018). As a means of resistance, the movement leaders emphasized on the irreconcilability of the

Algerian identity with Frenchness; therefore, the legitimacy of separation to create an independent state (ibid). The call for cultural distinctiveness, not only persisted in the post-colonial period but, was enhanced through the promotion of a nationalist ideology by the state leaders. To put it in clear terms, the Algerian constitution, laws, educational system, administrative dealings, media speeches and others sponsored the prescribed Algerian identity to be disseminated to the population; thereby, in Benedict's terms, fostering the community's imagination to adopt the national identity (Benedict, 2006). With all things considered, it is permissible to contend that the Algerian community has adopted a religious-based culture that defines its beliefs, thoughts, behavior and manner of conduct, which are oriented by a hegemonic structure of the nationalist movement.

4. Revisiting the Past: Questioning the Algerian Nationalist Culture

In her article "Unveiling the Individual Memory of War in the Work of Maïssa Bey" (2014), S. Seza Yilancioglu sees that memory is an important element in the works of Bey as she visits and revisits the colonial history in an attempt to come to terms with the complexities of the Algerian Identity vis-à-vis the colonizer as the other. In her *Hizya* (2015), she presumably revisits the past in an attempt to rewrite it, which reflects her statement on rewriting history to render it more balanced (Metra, 2014). It is argued that Maïssa Bey revisits the Algerian past to demonstrate the tolerance of the cultural past in contrast with the nationalist realities of the post-colonial era. Such perspective aligns with Franz Fanon's stands against postcolonial nationalism. He announces that "seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one's people" (Fanon, 1963, p.160). Similarly, Amina Wadud sees that the stress on medieval context, as the basis of identity, is no longer applicable in modern societies; thus, stands against the notion of cultural validity throughout time and space (Bouatta, 2017). Hence, the writer reflects such views through appealing to historical figures to show the tolerance of the past and stress on the invalidity of the nationalist identity.

4.1. Hizya: A Poem of Appeal to a Non-Hegemonic Past

Maissa Bey appeals to the legendary poem 'Hizya' chanted by Mohamed Ben Guittoune (1857) who is an Algerian poet from the nineteenth century dwelling the southeastern areas (today as Biskra). The poem, belonging to the Algerian folkloric culture, orbits around Hizya's physical attributes and behavior along with her husband's feelings towards her. The protagonist, as the subject of mourning, challenges the familial and tribal values to reach the objective of marrying her cousin Sayed. The poem reveals that the legendary Hizya was aged twenty-three when a fatal disease marked her departure from the life of her husband, who, in return, mourns her loss in a poem chanted by Ben Guittoune under Sayed's emotional and descriptive influences. The poem is perceived as a space of revolt and criticism rather than being a space for simple literary recall. Consequently, it is argued that Bey alludes to the poem in order to criticize the Algerian post-colonial nationalism through a cultural comparison between the past and the present.

The protagonist links herself to the legend as she associates her to freedom and individuality received absent in the life of Hizya. The socio-cultural norms of Hizya's society, fueled by a traditionalist religious discourse, is less tolerant towards diversity and freedom reflected in the spread of psychological fear, shame, and guilt cultures for the sake of maintaining national unity and preserving the 'exceptional' Algerianness. The notion of national unity dismissed Hizya from possessing an individualized self, since she is expected to mirror society's behavior. Therefore, the protagonist refuges in the legend of Hizya for receiving her as a symbol of individuality and revolt against the social conformities. The protagonist finds no satisfactory solid grounds to construct her identity upon since her individuality is concealed by a demanded social conformity. This is noticeable when she makes instant references to the legend at the early start of the novel:

Depuis que j'ai entendu ce chant, repris dans maintes versions musicales, depuis que j'ai découvert qu'il avait été écrit en hommage à l'amour que portait un homme, bien réel, à une femme, bien réelle elle aussi, j'ai

décidé de tout mettre en œuvre pour vivre une histoire d'amour. Moi aussi. (Bey, 2015, p.12)

Ever since I heard this song, covered in many musical versions, ever since I discovered that it had been written in honor of the love that a man had for a woman, a very real one, I decided to do everything I could to live a love story as well. (My translation)

Hizya decides to take cultural reference from the past to create meaning for herself and to associate her identity with for being unsatisfied by the promoted cultural discourse. The reality delivered by her contemporary society equated psychological stress and ambivalence; thus, reliving the past permits her to have a cultural reference for her individuality as well as having a degree of freedom.

The announced similarities between both protagonists permits to say that Bey creates a doppelganger for the legend of *Hizya* in modern Algeria, where the legendary character appears to have a wider space of liberty unlike her modern times twin. The tribal system that *Hizya* lived in comprehended Islam as the basis for the community culture, which is exhibited in her family's refusal to marry her to her cousin. In the Islamic traditions, it is discouraged to marry first degree relatives; and therefore, *Hizya* was denied to be with Sayed. However, *Hizya*'s "will, courage, and determination" (Bey 2015, p.169) gave her access to her wishes; consequently, demonstrating the tolerance of the Algerian community towards the female individuality. Hence, despite of the religiousness of the community, a degree of freedom of choice and individuality is promoted in the Algerian past, which is an absent phenomenon in the present Algeria.

Moreover, alluding to the poem highlights a further theme related to taboos concerning the female body and sexuality. It is argued that the Algerian past displays less conservatism regarding the female body, contrary to the present social realities. The poem contains heavy references to the physical attributes of *Hizya*, which appears to cause no alarm for the community despite of its oral transmission for many decades. In an interview with Maissa Bey, she vows to be compelled by such an idea. Although sharing the same religious grounds, both cultural backgrounds -the past and the present- are dissimilar in their reception of utterances related to the female body, which can be detected in the aggressive

tone that the mother displays towards the sexual references uttered by her daughters. By the same token, Fanon articulates that the heavy reliance on Islamic history has created a discourse that “is increasingly cut off from reality” (Fanon, 1963, p.154) under the banner of identity exceptionalism. Therefore, the present, as an extension to the postcolonial nationalist ideologies, uses a stricter perspective of religion that allows less tolerance towards women.

4.2. Allusion: Characters Comparison

The argument stating the tolerance of the Algerian past in comparison to the post-colonial cultural realities is additionally stressed upon through alluding to other historical figures. The protagonist’s two brothers seem to hold historical names associated to Algerian historical figures namely, the late President El Houari Boumediene and the colonial resistance symbol El Amir Abd-el-Kader. They both hold connotations related to the characters in the novel, where Bey compares the two brothers and puts them into opposition in terms of character and ideologies. Such comparison permits to contend that Bey attempts to highlight, again, the tolerance of the historical past contrary to the post-colonial era.

The portrayal of the elder brother Boumediene alludes to the president El Houari Boumediene (1978-82). The writer’s use of the name, corresponds not with the late president character in specific but, permits to historically contextualize the notion of a religious ‘masculine’ character to the post-colonial era. Boumediene is represented as a stiff, serious and a socially reliable character, who is intended for family leadership matters:

Ses nombreux amis, son empressement à rendre service à tous ceux qui le sollicitent, ses attentions envers ma mère et l’intérêt qu’il manifeste ouvertement pour tout ce qui concerne, de près ou de loin, notre famille. (Bey, 2015, p.76).

his many friends, his eagerness to be of service to all those who ask for his help, his attention to my mother and his open interest in everything that concerns our family in any way” (My translation).

His popular character among his family and friends corresponds with and image of the traditional ‘masculine duty’, which is a portrait of a pious, righteous and responsible male. Thus, he creeds the nationalist ideology that dictates a masculine obligation for the Algerian man. His ‘duty’ promotes no secession from attempting to oversee his sister’s actions despite of the presence of the father. For him, Hizya is ought to remain indoors, wears hijab and stop working as a hairdresser which reflects a true Muslim Algerian female. He constantly attempts to control her actions and triggers his father to use his authority on her to maintain her ‘feminine’ socio-religious role. Therefore, Boumediene holds cultural positions, fueled by religious fundamentalism, that are less tolerant towards women.

Hizya’s second brother alludes, not to the person of El-Amir Abd-el-Kader but, to the pre-nationalist historical context. He is visualized as a tolerant open-minded character, who possesses a lenient spirit towards the actions of his sister, which steers to argue that he represents the Algerian past that is characterized by tolerance and acceptances of the individualities displayed by women. The novel narrates an incident where Hizya dates her beloved Riyad to end up being noticed by her brother, who displays no reactions towards her socially-received misdemeanor. Moreover, Abd-el-Kader’s later confessions demonstrate his rejection of the circulating socio-cultural beliefs that instigate interference in the individual and personal choices:

... Tu comprends, la responsabilité du grand frère, la confiance des parents, la réputation de la famille... tout ce qu’on te met dans la tête depuis que tu es tout petit... C’est sûr que si je t’avais rencontrée dans le quartier, les choses ne se seraient pas passées comme ça ! Mais, contrairement à ce que tu peux croire, je ne suis pas un monstre. C’est de voir cette expression de terreur sur ton visage qui m’a fait mal et m’a fait réfléchir ensuite. (Bey, 2015, p.270)

... You understand the responsibility of the older brother, the trust of the parents, family reputation... everything that has been installed in your mind since your infancy... It's certain that if I had met you in the neighborhood, things would have happened otherwise. But, contrary to

what you might think, I am not a monster. It's seeing that look of terror on your face that hurt me and made me rethink. (My translation)

Abd-el-Kader rejects the promoted discourse of masculinity and femininity to favor individuality and equality of sexes when it comes to personal choices. He additionally reveals the hegemonic attempts practiced upon the social agents by stating "... everything that has been installed in your mind since your infancy" (ibid, p.270), which illustrates that people are being programmed to accept certain beliefs leading to the path of unity and collectivism instead of pronouncing diversity and individuality. Hence, the cultural mind of Abd-el-Kader carries anti-hegemonic and non-traditionalist perspectives dissimilar to his older brother.

Furthermore, Bey's association of the name of Abd-el-Kader with modern ideologies implies the presence of a progressive mode of thought in the Algerian past. On the notion of modernity, Roger Garaudy and Tariq Ramadan's *Islam et Modernité* (2016) stresses on the evolutionary status of the Islamic-based culture throughout time and space, which opens to the novel realities and circumstances without rigidity and stagnation. Therefore, aligning with Stuart Hall's conception of fluid cultural identities, where he contends that a culture evolves throughout time and space. Maissa Bey, through her character, associates notions of modernity and progressivism to the Algerian past contrary to the postcolonial realities. The presence of a nationalist hegemonic mode of thought prevented a continuum in the cultural progress of the Algerian Islamic-based culture for the sake of maintaining a unified national identity that promotes self-exceptionalism. Hence, both brothers symbolize a historical period each with its characteristics. Bey attributes notions of progressivism and tolerance to the Algerian past contrary to the postcolonial realities that stress on a stagnated vision of religion and society due to nationalist beliefs.

5. Modernity and the Religious Discourse:

Maissa Bey represents her protagonist as a modernized individual who disaccords with traditional thinking. She appears to disfavor behaviors like:

conservatism, silence, submissiveness and obedience to call for an individualized self. Such characteristics are embodied by her mother as she follows a traditionalist version of religion. Additionally, the theme of modernity in the novel is intercepted by Sabrina Yebdri's article (2020). However, her analysis puts major stress on secular properties to position the novel among feminist works; and therefore, disregards the heavy religious references. Maïssa Bey puts an emphasis on religion and gives it a considerable space in the life of the main characters. In addition, the protagonist vows the religiousness of her family, similar to the rest of the Algerian society: "Dans notre famille, les relations avec Dieu, avec la religion, sont très particulières et très contrastées" (Bey, 2015, p.147). "In our family, the relationship with God, with religion, are very particular and very contrasted" (My Translation); thus, placing traditionalism versus modernity as a primordial ideological contrast.

The progressive perception towards the circulating religious discourse is avowed by the character of the father, who appears to embody an Islamic liberal perspective:

Il déteste les pratiques ostentatoires et les discussions des spécialistes autoproclamés des textes coraniques dans les cafés et sur le seuil des magasins. Ses propres connaissances en la matière sont rudimentaires mais suffisantes pour communiquer avec Dieu, affirme-t-il à qui veut l'entendre. (Bey, 2015, p.147)

He hates the ostentatious practices and discussions of self-proclaimed specialists of Quranic texts in cafes and on the threshold of stores. His own knowledge of the subject is rudimentary but sufficient to communicate with God, he says to anyone who wants to hear it. (My Translation)

He disapproves of the circulating religious discourse and the Quranic interpretations that distributes the inefficiency of individuals to validate their perceptions. Dissimilar to the common discourse, the father believes that his knowledge, although not vast, is enough to have a religious life without fundamentalist complications.

Moreover, Bey announces her discontent with the nationalist ideology through the mouth of the protagonists' father: "Ils nous prennent pour des enfants à qui il faut tout expliquer" (Bey, 2015, p.147). "They consider us as children to whom you have to explain everything" (My Translation). He pronounces the hegemonic aspect of the Imams –as symbols of religious institutions- who have the religious burden to direct their communities towards the 'right' social performance to ensure a 'right' path in life. It is argued that 'they' -nationalist leaders- institutionalize religion through imams to dictate cultural performances on the mass, where Hizya's father disfavours such practices that render him a child-like.

Going further with the father, as a male character, it is argued that Maissa Bey forwards an equality between sexes that goes against patriarchal beliefs. Opposed to the themes brought in Bey's earlier work *Cette Fille Là* (2001), where the male characters are represented with a desire to control, dominate and possess (Valet, 2009), Hizya is free from masculine violence as her father and younger brother appear to give her freedom of action. Amina Wadud's reexamination of religious texts claim equality between sexes and considers that male and female status are determined by socio-economic realities and not by religion (Bouatta, 2017). Hitherto, what sounds to trouble her life is the socio-cultural voice in her head –the psychological voice resulting from spreading shame and guilt cultures- along with social beliefs that restrict her actions. Ultimately, as an Islamic feminist writer, Maissa Bey believes in the equality of sexes; however, blames hegemonic forces for patriarchal structures impacting the inner self of her protagonist, which is exhibited in the employed interior monologue that appears to hold aggressive criticism towards the actions and thoughts of Hizya.

The portrayal of both the protagonist as a progressive individual is pictured through clothing Hizya with no headscarf as she goes out 'bear-headed'. Her decision to not wear the hijab may contradict with Islamic traditions, which reflects the notion of Hijab as a 'recommendation' rather than an obligation. According to Muhammed Abdu and Qasim Amin, hijab is a mere symbol of the

Muslim identity rather than an enunciation of religiousness; and therefore, an innovation for Islamic practices in the contemporary era (Bouatta, 2017). Such perspective appears to be shared by the writer as she gives her main character a ‘non-Islamic’ appearance by the standards of society. The older brother –as the voice of traditions- criticizes his sister for her clothing and reminds the father of his duty to ask his daughter to wear hijab when outside. Yet, the ‘un-authority’ that the brother has over his sister gives her a space of freedom granted by the father –as a symbol of socio-religious progressivism.

Hizya’s modern-Islamic perceptions are furtherly articulated through her relationship with Riyad. She defies the traditional norms of female chastity and embraces a new self that engages in a love affair with Riyad; and thus, she responds to her individuality and desire to live a love story similar to the legend of Hizya. Her action is understood to be unconventional one in the Algerian society since they celebrated sexuality. Women in Islamic interpretations are perceived as a threat to men and society through celebrating their sexuality (Darvishpour, 2003). Fatima Mernissi elaborates that traditionalists understand women as creatures that are divinely gifted with the power to seduce men and lead their behavior to (sexual) anarchy; consequently, it is sensible to keep them under check (ibid). In addition, Hizya celebrates her individuality through evacuating the concept of ‘Mektoub’ as ‘the destined by God’, where noticing an ironic tone whenever the term is uttered. She vows a preference towards piloting her own destiny without being negatively submissive. Hence, Maissa Bey delivers a progressive image of religion that resists the nationalist hegemonies through admitting the inconsistency the promoted religious discourse.

6. CONCLUSION

The pronounced social and psychological misfortunes of the Algerian woman in Maissa Bey’ *Hizya* (2015) condemns the nationalist ideology promoted in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Grounding from an Islamic feminist perspective, the granted cultural identity of the Algerian woman is sourced from a traditionalist and fundamentalist perspective of Islam, which proves invalidity in contemporary Algeria for its restraining features. Maissa Bey detaches from secular feminist stands and defends Islam through shedding light on nationalism and the nationalist ideology. It is argued that the writer sips from the postcolonial

discourse on nationalism to highlight that the Algerian leaders promoted a national identity that is based on a traditionalist reading of religion to craft the socio-cultural rules and roles for the new independent community. Allusions to historical figures from the Algerian history highlight the tolerance of the past - with Islamic cultural traits- towards women vis-à-vis the post-colonial socio-cultural conditions. Therefore, stressing on the invalidity of the nationalist discourse with its hegemonic agendas through revisiting the Algerian past. In addition, the writer maintains her female and male characters' faithfulness to Islam, yet equips their behavior with a modernist perspective of religion that resists the hegemonic attempts of the nationalist ideology and its institutions. Hence, Maissa Bey's *Hizya* condemns the postcolonial nationalist ideology and contemplates on the religious discourse from an Islamic feminist perspective.

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