À contre-silence: Articulating a Taxonomy of Maternal Grief in Maïssa Bey’s Puisque mon coeur est mort (2010)

Siobhán McIlvanney

Selected essay from the Women In French International Conference 2018
A contre-silence: Articulating a Taxonomy of Maternal Grief in Maïssa Bey’s Puisque mon cœur est mort (2010)

Siobhán McIlvanney

The entire corpus of the Algerian francophone author, Maïssa Bey, is subtended by an overwhelming drive both to articulate and to transgress the silence surrounding a specifically feminine Algerian historicity. In her autobiographical essay L’une et l’autre, Bey describes her writerly role as that of de-exoticising the Algerian woman, of bringing her out of the distortive shadows in which the male imaginary has imprisoned her and into the public realm of literature; her writing endeavours to replace representations of a mythologised female “essence” with real women’s everyday experiences in a hyperpatriarchal society: “D’aller au-delà de la décence, de la pudeur, des convenances, de sortir les femmes des réserves dans lesquelles l’imaginaire masculin les a parquées, du harem, des gynécées et autres lieux domestiques pleins de mystères” (56-7). Her work seeks to give textual voice to the unsaid and at times unsayable experiences of women living in contemporary Algeria. It is not to overstate the case to say a thematics of silence—and thus, implicitly of its antithesis, speech—is ultimately the key subject around which all of Bey’s publications revolve. In an interview with the Algerian French-language newspaper Liberté in 2004, Bey sums up her writing project as “un engagement contre le silence trop longtemps imposé et qui continue d’être imposé aux femmes. C’est un engagement alors contre tous les silences.”

While the silence imposed on Bey’s female protagonists is—to adopt Marnia Lazreg’s three categories—typically both “circumstantial”, in that it is “the result of social, cultural or personal circumstances”, and “structural”, in that it is “dictated by historically determined structures” (although there is surely some overlap between these two categories), it is not in any positive sense a “[s]trategic silence” in the form of a “voluntary act of self-preservation”—again, the use of the term “voluntary” seems to be endowing human will with an autonomy of choice which is clearly compromised when coupled with “self-preservation.” In the writing of Maïssa Bey, women’s silence is neither the result of postcolonial abuses, nor is it portrayed as an eloquent means of resistance. Rather, it typically originates in a post-Independence indigenous, often religious, interdiction on female expression. This article will consider the emphasis given to speaking out from, and giving formulation to, a mother’s profound grief following the murder of her only son at the end of the décennie noire of Algeria’s civil war—and with
it, the multiple non-dits which make up Algerian women’s silences. As this article makes clear, Bey is no advocate for the restorative power of silence, but portrays it overwhelmingly as a state of enforced conformism, in which the (female) subaltern is verbally straitjacketed. To paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, the subaltern can indeed speak, but is not permitted to—in this case, by the religious discourses propagated by the indigenous Algerian male, rather than the hermeneutic discourses propagated by the postcolonial Western critic.4

The binary of silence/speech is at the heart of Puisque mon cœur est mort, with the former associated with religious and political oppression and fear, and the latter with a woman’s maternal testimony and sense of liberation from societal norms and expectations following the death of her son. This is not a text in which the traumatised mother is unable to give articulation—or even voice or noise—to her overwhelming suffering. Rather, Puisque mon cœur est mort is fuelled by an intransigent need for communication, a communication which seeks to bridge the divide separating the textually represented from the extra-textual real. For Bey, literature does not exist in a monde à part to which the privileged reader may escape during moments of her choosing, but is a part of the world and can—indeed should—exert a transformative influence on it. When Bey was a child, literature spoke to her more powerfully than the language(s) of her everyday environment, it sustained her with its virtual community, and, in a mise en abîme paradigm, Bey the author invests her works with a similarly transformative potential as she and her female protagonists refuse to take up the silent roles interpellated for them by Algerian society.5 Echoing the earlier quotation given in the title of this article, in L’une et l’autre she describes her act of writing as a means to “[e]nter par effraction dans un territoire essentiellement masculin, celui de la parole publique. Aller à contre-silence” (55). Speaking up and speaking out through writing is a political act for Bey, as it is for her protagonist Aïda, an act profoundly anchored in their rejection of the oppressive masculine norms silencing female expression in contemporary Algeria and in their construction of transgressive counter-narratives.

Voicing the Maternal

Puisque mon cœur est mort takes the form of an epistolary novel written by a mother, Aïda, to her dead son, Nadir, in which she provides a chronologically fluid anthology of fifty personal and national stories and anecdotes leading up to and succeeding his murder at the hands of an executioner—which is how she terms his killer, evidence of her unflinching desire to verbally relieve reality of all its distortive, silencing euphemisms. The text begins with a prologue, a first-person account of the son’s murder from his own perspective, reflecting his fear and vulnerability since he can only hear his executioner approaching, but cannot see him—“J’entends, j’entends des pas[…]/J’entends, j’entends l’écho[…]”/ J’entends, j’entends un souffle”—a repetitive, poetic incantation that acts like a climactic funereal refrain. Nadir’s killer breaks the silence by his religious invocation—“il dit la formule sacrificielle. Seul s’inscrit en moi le nom de Dieu” (12; original emphases)—while Nadir’s own last speech is to call out to his
mother, “Ya M’ma, ya Yemma!” (12), as she in turn will spend the text symbolically calling out to him and calling Algerian society to account.  

This double articulation which forms the opening scene of the text reinforces the religious/maternal duality that underpins it: the former symbolizes masculine repression, deadening religious discourse and enforced mutism in a clandestine world in which one is condemned without trial; the latter represents a quintessentially feminine counterculture that refuses to be silenced, but finds in words a primary source of comfort and company. Analogous to Bey’s own relationship with books, Aïda perceives literature as a productive, quasi-personified medium, as promoting a form of nurturing (maternal?) communicative confluence of “l’une et l’autre”—of mother and son, of self and Other, of literature and life; this is evidenced by her soothing repetition of “seul[…]” which paradoxically indicates the sense of belonging, of shared experiences, that reading fosters: “C’est seulement à ces moments-là, quand, au hasard de mes lectures des mots surgissent du creux des ténèbres et viennent à ma rencontre, c’est seulement en ces instants que je ne me sens plus seule” (53). The novel associates Islamic fundamentalism with a masculinised silence, with a surreptitious form of espionage that can creep up on unsuspecting victims like Aïda’s son and kill them without qualifying their guilt or elucidating their putative crimes. In contrast, in Bey’s work maternal discourse symbolises a courageous bringing to light, an unveiling of experiences and feelings which are not conventionally articulated in the public domain, and an affirmative ownership of them.

If the mother figure has long been a literary lacuna, and a silent witness to domestic events, as highlighted thirty years ago in Marianne Hirsch’s seminal *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989), the cultural and literary norms surrounding the self-expression of motherhood in Algeria make her doubly so. The notion and expression of the “I” is not one that sits easily with Arabic writers and Arabic women writers especially. The emphasis in Muslim societies on the collective rather than the individual has been seen as antithetical to traditional Western notions of autobiography which privilege singularity and autonomy. As Chilla Bulbeck comments: “Muslims see individual identity as a disturbance of collective harmony, and a traditional Muslim should be submissive to the group” (74). With reference to Assia Djebar’s *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, Bart Moore-Gilbert remarks:

In the Algerian context […], the access of women to auto/biography is fraught. According to Djebar, even relatively class-privileged and well-educated females have to negotiate “two absolute rules” of traditional culture: “one, never talk about yourself; and two, if you must, always do it ‘anonymously’”. As for speaking anonymously, she goes on exasperatedly, “one must never use the first person”. This suggests that in the eyes of the majority of Algerian society […], auto/biography is a solecism as potentially serious for women as appearing in certain contexts without a veil. (94)

The literary and cultural silences surrounding key components of women’s experience are those that Bey the author speaks through and to by the very choice of topics her corpus treats, whether more personal in the form of her treatment of
the loss of virginity or abortion, or more public in women’s relationship to the legacy of the Franco-Algerian war or “la guerre sans nom.” Bey draws an implicit contrasting parallel between fundamentalism and writing, between silencing the Other and communicating with them, in that she felt compelled to write during Algeria’s bloody civil war, to pick up the pen “[p]our entendre et vouloir faire entendre tous les mots qui bruissaient en moi au cœur des silences imposés. Pour [me] résoudre enfin à prendre la parole comme d’autres prennent les armes. Avec la même appréhension, mais aussi la même détermination.”8 Bey characterises writing as a vocal activity. While the usual mode of expression would be “[p]our lire et vouloir faire lire tous ces mots…”, the use of “entendre” further diminishes the status of the literary text as hermetic artefact and anchors it firmly in the real world as an influential communicative conduit; it also pays homage to the prevalence of orature in Algerian cultural transmission, particularly for women. Later in the same article, Bey discusses her aim to “porter la parole des femmes, la rendre […] audible.”

Given Bey’s overriding focus on the importance of freedom of expression, it is highly symbolic that Aïda’s twenty-four-year-old son was killed by having his throat slit. Aïda gives voice to a generation of abandoned mothers, to their cries of revolt, in the stories she tells of and to her dead son. The book is dedicated “À celles que je ne pourrais toutes nommer ici,” and the narrator repeatedly highlights that her position is shared by numerous other mothers whose children and relatives have “disappeared” and, in some cases, never returned; she also mentions the Argentinian mothers who continue to meet weekly in an endeavour to prevent their children’s disappearances from sinking into historical oblivion (164-5).9 The Algerian movement for National Reconciliation demanded that all files on persons gone missing during the décennie noire be closed by their families if they wished to claim compensation.10 Through her letters, Aïda undertakes a figurative post mortem less on the corpse of her son than on the corpse of free speech in Algeria which she declares has been murdered by religious fundamentalism and political apathy. Bey’s characterisation of the act of writing as forming part of “des actes contre l’oubli, contre le caractère éminemment éphémère de notre passage sur terre” (Bey, Algérie: Rencontre) becomes particularly poignant and urgent in Puisque mon coeur est mort: rather than constitute a laudatory hymn to the joys of motherhood, or even a literary mausoleum in memory of her dead son, this is above all an historically determined, politically embedded experience of (non)motherhood that rails against Algerian society’s desire to silence all contestatory counternarratives.11

That binary of speech/silence, or perhaps more accurately expression/silence, is most immediately apparent at her son’s funeral where the mother wants to give voice to her suffering but must conform to conventional norms of silence which dictate that even organised grieving as embodied by “les pleureuses” is no longer deemed acceptable: “On a voulu bâillonner ma douleur. On a voulu me réduire au silence. M’obliger à vivre ton départ sans bruit, sans éclat, à jouer ma partition en sourdine. […] Il leur faut des silences et des prières” (14). This mother is not allowed to articulate her grief or even to lament audibly the loss of her son. She invokes times past when “les pleureuses” acted as a performative conduit for the
expression of grief, a conduit now perceived as transgressive yet one she longs for: “Qu’elles désaccordent les silences, qu’elles débusquent les mensonges et forcent les consciences!” (15). Any vocalisation of her suffering, verbal or non-verbal, is deemed heresy or bid’aa (16), but even a staged, vicarious dramatisation of her loss by “ces femmes qui savent donner voix à la souffrance des autres” (17) would constitute a form of catharsis for her.  

In an endeavour to speak out against such enforced silencing and to continue to nourish the mother-child bond and their daily conversations, Aïda writes to her son every evening. The multiple brief entries reflect her fractured sense of self and the discordant, disconnected irrationality of her daily existence following his death; chronological time no longer has any meaning for her, since Nadir has ceased to inhabit it.  

The letters also act as layers of sediment—or of social conformism—which are gradually cast off until Aïda feels she can see the world around her more clearly without a distortive filter. Interestingly—and in this she echoes Bey’s characterisation of writing as audible—she repeatedly employs a lexicon related to the auditory field when describing the act of written communication with her son, emphasising her need for “rapprochement” through the thematics of breaking silence again: “je sais que tu m’écoutes […] Que tu m’entends […] Poursuivre nos conversations” (19); “Pour tout te dire” (20); “je ne peux pas te parler de moi” (21); “Écoute, écoute, là, pour moi, pour nous ce soir ces mots d’un poète que j’aime” (53); “Que te dire, que te raconter ?” (97); “Écoute jusqu’au bout ce que j’ai à te dire” (215).

**Speaking Women’s Silences**

Alongside Aïda’s personal need to communicate with her son, *Puisque mon cœur est mort* has a clear political message in that it also speaks out for women’s greater participation in Algerian society. The narrator makes numerous tangential asides, which, by a process of accumulation, build up to make a convincing indictment of the hypocrisy and inequality of contemporary Algeria’s religious regulations governing sartorial or behavioural conduct, regulations that are particularly intransigent in the case of women: “Pourquoi les femmes n’ont pas le droit d’accompagner le défunt jusqu’au cimetière” (25); she later adds wryly: “Par contre, je ne sais pas s’il est prévu des dispositions spécifiques pour les hommes” (45). Aïda feels strangely liberated from norms and mores following her son’s death and no longer attempts to conform to society’s expectations. Previously, the fact of being a divorcee, of casting off the shackles of marriage as she sees it, had paradoxically curtailed her freedom in that she had to police her own actions in order to fit in and prove her social respectability. Now she could not care less: “Que m’importent l’opprobre, l’exclusion? Je n’ai plus rien à perdre puisque j’ai tout perdu. Puisque mon cœur est mort” (102). The conjunction “puisque” has a self-evident ring of finality to it, a hopelessness that brooks no dissent, which the explicatory, and thus implicitly attenuatory, “parce que” does not.

The text portrays Aïda’s gradual reconciliation with herself: at first she expresses guilt at failing to protect her son and at somehow contributing to his death because she refused to wear the veil, or, as a university lecturer, refused to be dictated to by her students who felt she was not Islamic enough in her conduct.
Eventually, however, the death of her son brings with it a feeling of liberation vis-à-vis both behavioural and writerly norms; his death gives her courage to embrace the liminal: “Ensemble nous allons au-delà des marges” (141). The act of writing this diary is transgressive in its refusal to silence the lives of those murdered and affected by murder during warfare, those whose names are effaced from history, who are deliberately forgotten for the “national good.” Aïda does not reply to—or even open—the official letters she receives following the death of Nadir, but devotes her time to composing personal letters to him. With his death comes the empowering realisation of her own ultimate powerlessness to adhere satisfactorily to the multiple norms dictating, for example, how she should express her grief in public or when she should return to work. This in turn liberates her to write her own life and literary narratives: “je suis à présent maîtresse de mon destin” (81).

In many ways, this work is an exculpatory account of Aïda’s mauvaise foi in pretending to be someone she was not in order to gain social acceptance and her recognition of the futility of such an undertaking. This confession of her own silent acceptance of social norms and conventions, and her subsequent refusal to read from another’s script, make the text’s emphasis on speaking (out) all the more resonant. Aïda describes her previous existence as hollow and silent play-acting: “Un peu comme si j’assistais à une pièce qui se donnait sans moi, où seul le décor m’était familier” (23). The growing reconciliation she feels towards her previously severed sense of self is further reflected in her new hope that her son called out for her before his murder (140), despite having earlier rejected the possibility (31). Words are a source of relief and release for this mother, particularly, given her profession as a university lecturer in English, literary words—whether from Shakespeare, John Milton, William Styron, Jacques Roubaud or Françoise Hân—but resolutely not formulaic religious incantations (101): “Ils sont là, mes compagnons de toujours. Les livres” (184). Indeed the work’s title is an extract from a Victor Hugo poem (“Veni, vidi, vixi,” Les Contemplations [1856]), written following the death of his daughter by drowning, and expressing his own desire to die, since life no longer holds any pleasure for him. Analogously, Puisque mon cœur est mort constitutes a public, since published, document, bearing witness to a parent’s overwhelming grief following the death of their child but, in this case, also denouncing the conspiratorial society that contributed to it.

On a meta-level, the text can also be read as a form of detective novel, thriller, or indeed revenge narrative, as the previously silent witness to Algeria’s bloody narrative of civil war becomes the active, speaking subject of her own narrative—a woman determined to face down her son’s killer. Indeed, she twice uses the term “roman[s] policier[s],” when intimating her future plans (158, 198). On seeing a photo of the smiling face of her son’s killer early on in the text and its prophetic spontaneous combustion (13, 34), the mother realises what she has to accomplish. She deliberately manipulates her son’s best friend, Hakim, into giving her a gun, since she claims to feel vulnerable on her own. That a previously law-abiding mother is driven to plan the murder of her son’s killer graphically demonstrates her degree of social disenfranchisement, but equally her awareness that she must be the author of her own dénouement. The text builds up to a climax as, on
multiple occasions, the mother proleptically signals the narrative’s conclusion: “Il ne me reste plus que quelques jours avant d’interrompre ce dialogue avec toi” (156). Like all good thrillers, there is a double twist at the end of this tale when we learn that her son Nadir’s murder was a case of mistaken identity. His killers mistook him for Hakim, his best friend, whom they sought to murder because he was the son of a Police Commissioner. When Aïda’s moment comes, we are not sure whether she succeeds in killing Rachid, her son’s killer; we do know that she inadvertently kills Hakim, who feels consumed by guilt at his friend’s murder. He comes up behind her when she has shot or is about to shoot Rachid and, in the act of moving her gun away, gets shot (too). The text thus comes round full circle, opening and closing on a murder of mistaken identity: while the former, despite being callously premeditated, is ineptly executed from behind in the dead of night and gets the wrong man, the latter, while also accidentally killing an innocent party, none the less originates in an active and informed assumption of responsibility and is carried out in broad daylight, face-to-face.

None the less Puisque mon coeur est mort is resolutely not an act of speaking out in order to explicate or attenuate maternal grief, but simply seeks to voice it through a variety of forms and vignettes: “La souffrance est incommunicable” (78); “C’est un mal irréversible, incurable. Aucun remède ne peut venir à bout de l’absence” (79). Indeed, the different noises and sounds that permeate the narrative are a more efficient means of communicating what Aïda is experiencing, and echo the multiple and disparate nature of the diary entries. The text comprises a varied lexicon of sounds: from the footsteps of her son and his killer, to his mother’s spontaneous screaming with grief at his funeral, to the internal shouts that only she hears in the silence of the night, to the busy market stalls at the cemetery gates on her daily visits to her son’s grave, to the music he listened to with his friends—Pink Floyd, Prince, Bob Marley—to the radio playing Boléro the night he was murdered, to the sound of gunfire, to his guitar-playing and the music of both Chopin and Clapton which she listens to in his bedroom on what would have been his 25th birthday, to his voice. It is noise—the words “bruit” and derivatives such as “bruisser” recur throughout the text—that forms the backdrop to Aïda’s suffering. She comments on the noise of crockery when the neighbours rally round to help her with the wake following her son’s death and the noise of death which continues to haunt her silences: “Mais je n’entends que le bruit sec des armes que l’on recharge et le crissement acide des couteaux qu’on aiguise” (33). The night before she plans to murder Nadir’s killer, she summarises the filial soundtrack that accompanies her life, one with strong sonic echoes of the prologue: “Il me semble que j’entends ton souffle. Le bruit de tes pas. Des accords de la guitare, là, tout près de moi. Ta voix un instant perdue dans la rumeur du monde ne cesse de bruisser en moi” (213).

This text also abounds with verbs related to writing and speaking, both of which are what keep Aïda and her son’s memory alive, and ultimately what Bey believes will allow Algeria to move beyond the traumatic effects of the past. Addressing her son, Aïda refuses to “tirer un trait sur [m]on histoire pour que l’Histoire puisse s’écrire. Sans toi” (131). Unlike the enforced silencing of the movement of National Reconciliation—something that Bey consistently
denounces throughout her oeuvre and in interviews—it is only by breaking the silences of the past through telling the personal stories of the victims, through giving voice to the soundscapes which make up their daily existences, that individual reconciliation with that past may be possible: “Chez nous, la réconciliation se passe très bien de la justice. Pas de confrontations, ni de débats publics” (145). Aïda makes clear that she condemns all those who promote the effacement of individual lives in favour of national unity—those whom Bey would describe as promoting commemoration in lieu of rememoration—who obliterate the crimes of the past in order to putatively move forward shrouded in silence: “Entre eux et moi, il y a un gouffre dans lequel se répercutent en échos lancinants les voix des suppliants, les appels des suppliciés. Eux ne les entendent pas” (132). While Aïda calls the fundamentalist perpetrators of the numerous murders that have afflicted both her village and Algeria “bourreaux” (27), the legal armistice insists that they be referred to as “repenti(s)” (91). For both Bey and Aïda, without any avowal of guilt on the part of these criminals, without language and communicating with the other—without writing which offers both a private and public space for mourning—there can be no repentance and thus no national reconciliation. *Puisque mon coeur est mort* combines a phonocentric emphasis on sounds, noises and conversations in Aïda’s personal communication with Nadir with a written, “public” account of the historical and largely effaced crimes committed against innocent Algerian citizens during the 1990s.

This article argues that we need to nuance and extend our interpretations of silence beyond an empowering or positively non-recuperable state in the manner of Durassian silence or one implicitly imbued with profound meaning in the Beckettian style—while recognising that speech is not available to everyone. The common adage that “Speech is silver but silence is golden” can appear a dangerously glib and politically expedient sentiment from the perspective of the female protagonists portrayed in Maïssa Bey’s corpus—and indeed of women generally. Equally, if there has been a tendency to equate voice with the direct, unwavering expression of male power, and silence with a more nuanced female expression of resistance, this cannot be applied to a reading of Maïssa Bey’s writing. This type of feminist equation of silence with empowerment, one which associates the marginalised with a form of the revolutionary Kristevan semiotic rather than the socially and discursively dispossessed, is apparent in the following remark: “[I]n entering the stillness of silence we might communicate deeply at the edges of sound” (Carillo Rowe 2). Silence has to be chosen in order to be empowering, while the majority of Algerian women in Bey’s writing are forced to take up a (non)speaking position “at the edges of sound.” In *Puisque mon coeur est mort*, Aïda refuses to take up that non-speaking position allocated to her by Algerian society: no longer prepared to “jouer [s]a partition en sourdine” (14), she gives eloquent articulation to the soundscape of maternal grief in contemporary Algeria which demands to be heard.

**King’s College London**
Notes

1 The title of a 1998 publication by Maïssa Bey.


3 See Marnia Lazreg’s The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question (1994), p. 18. It is important to note that this work was published while the civil war of the 1990s was ongoing, and thus it does not consider the position of Algerian women during this period.

4 This refers to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s seminal essay Can the Subaltern Speak? (1988).

5 In L’une et l’autre, Bey bears witness to this blurring of extra/textual lines: “Très jeune, sans jamais avoir de véritables amies, j’ai eu pour compagnons des adultes, personnages de papier plus proches de moi que mes proches, des femmes et des hommes qui m’ont confié les plus intimes de leurs pensées, qui ont, dans une communauté fraternelle, partagé avec moi le pain et le sel, je veux dire les mots et la vérité de leur être” (26).

6 This opening finds strong echoes in Leïla Slimani’s recent publication Chanson douce (2016), in which the opening words are: “Le bébé est mort” (13). As with Bey’s work, the reader is encouraged to investigate the hegemonic social forces that led to the murder of a child/children by beginning with a clear description of the murder itself; the perpetrator of the crime—the nanny, Louise—is never in doubt. In the first “diary entry” of Puisque mon coeur est mort, the narrator describes holding a photo of her son’s assassin (13), revealing that she knows who murdered her child.

7 If there are numerous theoretical and fictional texts on the women/silence synthesis, this is all the more apparent in texts dealing with Arabic women, whether literary—such as In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers (1998) or politico-theoretical, as in Marnia Lazreg’s previously mentioned The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question (1994).


9 The same weekly vigils continue to take place in Algeria, mainly by mothers seeking to find out the fate of missing relatives forcibly removed by government security services during the 1990s. See https://www.ictj.org/news/algeria-women-disappeared-truth.

10 In September 2005, a National Reconciliation referendum took place in Algeria, based on a Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation. The Charter had been drawn up in an endeavour to bring some form of closure to the civil war that had ravaged Algeria during the 1990s. Bey feels that to grant amnesty to those guilty of committing atrocious crimes as advocated by the Charter is to sweep under the carpet, to silence, a key period of Algerian history, and thus to run the risk of it happening again. Her writing constitutes an endeavour to give voice to that officially silenced History through personal female histories.

11 While it is important to highlight that, in the fragile decades following Independence, such silencing also affected Algerian men, women, designated the repository of a pre-colonial Algerian essence and identity, were firmly associated with silence and patriotism, as opposed to the perceived subversive agenda of the West promoting women’s social emancipation and participation. To speak out in the public realm was deemed a form of Western ventriloquism. As Maria Flood argues, with reference to the years following Independence: “To voice pain, suffering, trauma, or discontent was
therefore to be unpatriotic, and women therefore found themselves in the paradoxical position of desiring to speak about experiences that had contributed to the gaining of this independence, experiences that they undertook often because of their patriotism, but finding that to voice such memories went against the dominant national narrative,” “Women Resisting Terror: Imaginaries of Violence in Algeria (1966-2002),” September 2016, 109-31, p. 113. 

12 In the sense that Bey too offers a mediated, “performative” expression of Algerian women’s suffering, she may be seen as replicating the role of a “pleureuse.”

13 This episodic structure provides a natural continuum with many of Bey’s earlier publications which take the form of short stories. For Bey, this textual form mirrors closely extra-textual reality’s gaps, omissions and elisions and is thus a further means of emphasising the proximity between the represented and the real: “Dans mon écriture, comme dans la vie, il y a des halètements, des brisures, des ruptures dont certaines sont parfois inattendues, pas ‘classiques’ pourrait-on dire.” See “Algérie: Rencontre avec écrivaine Maïssa Bey,” http://www.wluml.org/fr/node/4111.

**Works Cited**


Hugo, Victor. *Les Contemplations*. Hachette, 1856


