

Nationalist Didacticism in Fatima Mernissi's "Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood"***Fatima Mernissi'nin "Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood" Başlıklı Eserinde Milliyetçi Öğretiler****Sihem Arfaoui ABIDI****

Abstract: Running counter to the imperialist claim of Children's literature as a European invention and manifestation, this article goes a step further by reading into the ideological interpellation of Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. Published in 1994, *Dreams of Trespass* is explored as an African children's text that reads into national education as a means to and a backbone of childhood education. Mernissi's text undermines the child-adult binary (and beyond it the personal/political split) in the process of exemplifying the formative impact of Moroccan nationalism on the Mernissi children and *vice versa*.

Keywords: Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass, icon, national heroism, children as citizens

Özet: Çocuk edebiyatının Avrupa'nın bir buluşu ve dışavurumu gibi emperyalist bir söyleme karşı bir duruş sergileyen bu makalede Fatima Mernissi'nin *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* adlı eseri incelenmektedir. 1994 yılında yayımlanmış bulunan bu eser Afrikalı çocukların milli eğitimin çocukluk eğitiminin belkemiği olarak kabul ettiği bir metni olarak incelenmiştir. Fas milliyetçiliğinin Mernissi'nin çocukları üzerindeki etkilerini örneklendirirken eserde Mernissi'nin çocuk-yetişkin zıtkutup-luluğunu reddetmekte olduğu görülmektedir. Bu reddediş bireysel-siyasi ayrımını da reddetmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass, ikon, milli kahramanlık, vatandaş olarak çocuklar

"To assert that only our conception of childhood can result in children's literature, a literature that only we are able to judge as literature in terms of its literary value (which for some reason must include 'entertainment'), is the kind of cultural imperialism and ideological colonialism that modern critics --- often seek to avoid" (sic. qtd. in Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, 83).

"I was very proud to have a role to play, even though it was a silent and marginal one [...] it did not matter what role you played, as long as you were useful. The essential thing was to have a role, to contribute to a common goal" (Mernissi, 1994, 126).

Ideological Interpellation

To the extent that the conception that children's literature is a European invention in origin and should remain so is a common view, the category African children's literature could sound a bit

* In my analysis, I will refer to the considered text as either *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, or just by writing either part of the title.

** PhD, Jendouba University, Jendouba, Tunisia, sou.benarfa@gmail.com

awkward and surprising for some readers and cultures. This way, from the perspective that children's literature has always been associated with such canonical texts like *Alice in the Wonderland* by Carroll (1965), the venture of this article to go beyond this elitist configuration, by exploring the area of African children's literature, may be as challenging as the assumption of the latter as an identifiable body. In this respect, what motivates the interest of this paper in African children's texts is the fact that critic Fayose (2004, 929) goes a step further as to distinguish "three distinct periods in the publishing of children's books in Africa: 1960-c.1974, 1975-85, and 1985 to the present".

As an English text published in 1994, yet written by the Moroccan woman writer Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* can be considered as an African children's book which technically falls in what Fayose (2004) speaks of as the third phase in the history of this literary corpus. Most essential of all is the argument advanced in this paper about *Dreams of Trespass* as a memoir wherein the discourse of childhood both informs and is informed by ideas of nationalism. By moving within the broader orbit of the strong connection between text and context, the present article shall benefit from the conception that "cultural and historical antecedents, social, political, economic issues give rise to regional, national or ethnic differences" (Fayose, 2004, 927). It also shares the postcolonial perspective that "literature interpellated and continues to interpellate its readers into social and political thinking; in other words, literature deals in ideological matters" (McGills, 2004, 893). By definition, literature is politicized.

More particularly, let us remind ourselves that [w]e are implicated in and complicit with ideological and political positions and hailings and that ideology is at work even in that literature that seeks to 'echo or awaken ... thoughts or feelings of human communality' (McGills, 2004, 898). In this same context, E. Oluwasanmi *et al.* equally insist that the relevance of children's books "to their own environment in textual content and illustration" is a quintessential edifice in both the emergence and growth of this corpus (qtd. in Fayose, 2004, 929). Such concurrent readings represent sufficiently strong enhancements to reconsider Children's Literature in Africa, through the suggested example of Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*, with a special eye to its correlation with nationalism. They help shape nationalism, both in the sense of a "mnemonic space of popular resistance" and as a category encompassing the coalition of the masses, as concerns of a certain depth in Mernissi's children's text (Mowitz, 1992, 169).

At this point and from the point of view of a reader with no particular knowledge of the considered text or the geo-political circumstances it describes, an introduction of Mernissi and the publication history of *Dreams of Trespass* and structure arise to the status of a necessary prerequisite. On the basis of Donadey's (2001, 148) *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (2001), Mernissi, a Moroccan woman writer and sociologist holding an American PhD., publishes in English, such as *Beyond the Veil* (1975), as well as in French. In a pointer to the international significance of Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*, critic Donadey (2001) equally adds that "although Mernissi lives and works in Morocco, her memoir's target audience is international due to her choice of writing in English" (148). In her view, Mernissi's knowledge of English allows her to bypass the dangers of writing about the self in the language of the former colonizer, "especially that English is a more neutral language, one that may allow writers to distance themselves from the text and possibly reveal certain things that may be difficult to say, and even more to write, in Arabic, the language of the sacred text" (148). In the meantime, the same critic stresses that the writer's choice of writing this memoir in a language unfamiliar to the majority of Moroccan people puts certain constraints on Mernissi's memoir such as the obligation to provide detailed explanations (148).

In addition to this, Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* falls under the genre of African children's

literature, precisely because it only covers the childhood years of a North African Moroccan girl between the ages of four and nine (Donadey, 2001, 148). In this respect, Melissa Matthes describes the involved book as "*Fatima Mernissi's account of her early girlhood in a Moroccan harem in the city of Fez*" in the sense that it "*recounts life in her childhood harem from her earliest recollections*" (73) until she is declared by an older cousin to be "*officially mature*", that is, when she is approximately tiptoeing into her ninth year (Mernissi, 1994, 219). As to the structure the considered memoir, we should mention that the latter "*is organized according to the structure of *The Arabian Nights**", including the latter's framing device and some of its stories (Donadey, 2001, 150).

With this biographical and critical background in view, it should be indicated that the purpose of this paper is to examine the inherently solid connection that this narrative generates between childhood and national education, hence, the commitment announced in the title to read against African children's literature, with a special focus on nationalist didacticism. In this respect, speaking of "*reading against*" *Dreams of Trespass*, this paper intends to see through the ways in which Mernissi's text attempts to "*manipulate one's emotions and influence one's understanding and moral judgments*" (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, 26). It suggests that political and social assumptions of Mernissi's text are brought into the reader's consciousness. On the basis that Mernissi's text mirrors a personal narrative which is situated during the expansion of the European empire in the twentieth century, meaning the colonization of Morocco by Spain and France in 1912, this article will focus on the informative impact of the national scene in Morocco on *Dreams of Trespass*. According to Alison Baker, 1912 is the year that "*a weakened sultan was forced to sign the treaty of Fez, establishing a French protectorate over the largest part of his kingdom, with a Spanish protectorate in the Sahara and the North of the country*" (14). It reads into Mernissi's childhood narrative as an ideological vehicle for representing the Moroccan national experience during and after Western encroachment. One of its main assumptions is that the considered text mirrors a nationalist activism that makes of the notion of Morocco as an independent nation inseparable from the modernization and emancipation of Moroccan women.

European versus Third World Nationalism

Given that the present paper aligns itself with the general umbrella theme of "*Nations of Childhood*", as a paramount guideline, to proceed with a brief literature review of the concepts nation and nationalism, both of which amount to key contextual axes along which the argument of the whole paper is developing, seems a required step. Most often understood as a large group of people inhabiting the same country and governed by one civil law, the term nation and its existence rely on such prerequisites as "*a great multitude of men*" who "*must obey the same laws and the same country*" and "*inhabit [...] a defined country*" which "*must be circumscribed by frontiers*" (qtd. in Foucault, 1976, 142). Within a Foucaultian framework, it is also possible to reject the limited consideration of a nation as "*something that is defined by its territorial unity, a definite political morphology, or its systematic subordination to some imperium*" (Foucault, 1976, 134). Instead, a "*nation can exist as a nation, and can enter history and survive through history, only if it is capable of commerce, agriculture, and handicrafts; only if it has individuals who are capable of forming an army, a magistrate, a church, and an administration*" (Foucault, 1976, 220). Foucault equally reminds us:

The essential function and the historical role of the nation is not defined by its ability to exercise a relationship of domination over other nations. It is something else: its ability to administer itself, to manage, govern, and guarantee the constitution and workings of the figure of the State and of State power. Not domination, but State control. The nation is there-

fore no longer a partner in barbarous and warlike relations of domination. The nation is the active, constituent core of the State.(sic. 223).

Thus, the extent to which the existence of a nation “*is linked to the rise of a merchant class and capitalist economic system, a centralized, bureaucratic state, a common language, and an educated public*”, rather than the ideals of expansion in other countries, is one of the fundamentals that gives the term nation its historical meaning (Baker, 1998, 13). In her article, Baker points out that “[*t*]he roots of Moroccan nationalism -of the Moroccan nation- go back to the seventh century, when Arabs started arriving in Morocco. The Arabs not only conquered the country and took political power, but they also converted the local Berber populations to Islam and began a process of Arabization, changing the ethnic make-up of the population, the language and the culture. Morocco's first national government was the Islamic monarchy founded in 787 AD by Idriss I2, who established from the very beginning a monarchy whose political legitimacy was based in blood descent from the Prophet Mohammed” (13).

In parallel with this latter framework which describes a European model of nationalism, we should not overlook the third world perspectives of national consciousness during colonization. As a matter of fact, nationalism in colonized nations is credited ambivalent implications of resistance which engulfs at least two main traits or domains, that is, in terms not only of political/cultural activism, but additionally of armed struggle against the colonizer. However, because history abounds with instances where “*the colonized intellectual has thrown himself headlong into western culture*”, there is an emphasis of the fact that political activism by itself is not sufficient in the national-building (Fanon, 2004, 156). As Fanon (2004) puts it, “[*w*]e should not therefore be content to delve into the people's past to find concrete examples to counter colonialism's endeavours to distort and depreciate. We must work and struggle in step with the people so as to shape the future and prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already sprouting” (168). As such, the political, the cultural and the military should go hand in hand in the context of national activism and resistance.

With respect to military resistance, Fanon (2004) openly states that “*when it comes to talking about that one thing in a man's life that involves opening up new horizons, enlightening your country and standing tall alongside your own people, then muscle power is required*” (167). Homi K. Bhabha equally considers the repossession of land and territoriality “*in order to ensure the security of national polity and global unity*” the primary purpose of decolonization (xi). He furthers that, “*the colonized emerges as a guerrilla in camouflage waiting for the colonist to let down his guard so that he might jump; each obstacle encountered is a stimulant to action and a shield to hide the insurgent's intention to take the colonist's place*” (xxxviii). In a similar context, Sartre (cited in Fanon, 2004, xiv), deems the rural masses “*the true reservoir for the national and revolutionary army.*” Although suggestive of different standpoints, such readings converge on assuming the mobilization of a collective action a pre-condition in national liberation.

With these framing remarks, what is of interest to this paper is the historical embeddedness of *Dreams of Trespass* through its allegiance to nationalism. It is the use of this children book as a vehicle to express the national concerns of colonized Morocco and formulate the latter's national consciousness and experience. What contributes in bringing further notice to this issue of ideological interpellation is the fact that Mernissi's work emphasizes such ideologically embedded topics as armed resistance and the education of women as part of the Moroccan nationalists' political platform (Donadey, 2001, 151).

Armed Resistance and Anti-colonialist Heroines

Dreams of Trespass seems to impart that what puts the nation on the stage of history is the national liberation based on armed struggle (Fanon, 2004, 180). To this extent, it intentionally mentions several names of nationalist heroes and heroines in Morocco, such as Al-Hiba in the

South at the edge of the Sahara who resisted until 1934 (Mernissi, 1994, 36). In a significant way, Mernissi expresses her pride as a child who is born in the Atlas region, because the latter, she clarifies, is the birthplace of a nationalist hero called Hamou Zayani “*who kept the French at bay until 1920*” (Mernissi, 1994, 36). In addition to this, the memoirist refers to nationalist symbols in the North such as Abdel Krim, entitled the prince of fighters, who was defeated only in 1926 (Mernissi, 1994, 36). Of similar appeal to Mernissi as a child are the nationalist heroines. In this vein, Baker (1998) explains that, in the center of Morocco, in the Middle Atlas mountains, “*according to oral tradition, women followed the male fighters into battle, loaded their guns, and even carried guns themselves to take their turn fighting when the battle got really intense*” (19). The same critic informs us:

Women participated in active, even armed, resistance against the colonizers from the very beginning of the protectorate, especially Berber women in the Rif mountains, the Middle Atlas, and the Anti-Atlas and Sahara in the south. In 1913, one year after the establishment of the protectorate, the women in the Khemisset organized the first known demonstration against the French. It was so large and effective that the French had to resort to the military to bring things back under control (Baker, 1998, 18).

At this level, the colonizer had to fight the colonized at least at two camps.

In reinforcement of the notion of anti-colonialist female nationalists, Mernissi shows further zeal when she relates the heroic journey of Tamou, a relative to the Mernissi family, and a symbol of the Berbers' nationalist struggle in the South. Tamou appears in 1926, “*after the defeat of Abdelkrim by the combined Spanish and French armies. She appeared early one morning over the horizon of the flat Gharb Plain, riding a Spanish saddled horse, and dressed in a man's white cape and a woman's headdress so that the soldiers would not shoot at her*” (Mernissi, 1994, 50). Out of admiration for this relative heroine, Mernissi recounts all the details of her adventures and background, indicating that “*Tamou was a Riffan and a war heroine. Morocco was full of admiration for the Rif people, the only ones who had kept on fighting the foreigners long after the rest of the country had given up, and here was this woman, clad as a warrior, crossing the 'Arbaoua frontier into the French Zone all by herself to look for help*” (51). Further on, she comments, “*Tamou became a legend the moment she appeared. She made people aware of their inner force and their capacities to resist all kinds of fates*” (53). In this sense, *Dreams of Trespass* does function as a tribute to the Rif heroines and fighters, as iconic models of national struggle.

Mernissi's (1994) *Dreams of Trespass* indicates that women are a central part in the nationalist struggle of Morocco for independence, given that they have provided an essential component in the political agenda of Moroccan nationalism, in addition to their participation in the war of resistance to colonization. Critic Baker states:

Following the defeat of Abdelkrim in the Rif War in 1926, there was a shift from armed resistance based in rural areas to political resistance based in the cities. The Moroccan nationalist movement was initially out of a concern among a few individuals in the cultural and intellectual elite that the values of Moroccan Islamic culture and society were being subverted by France [...] It was in this context that the young Moroccan nationalists turned their attention to the status of women (Mernissi, 1994, 20).

It is also in this context that the considered memoirs unravel the fact that Mernissi is born and educated in a family of nationalists (Mernissi, 1994, 36). Though her grandfather was a slave

holder and tradesman, later on he adopts the principal nationalist slogans such as the abolition of slavery and monogamy (36).

Political Activism and the ‘New Woman’

The following section brings to the foreground the ways in which Mernissi’s (1994) memoir emphasizes the overarching part devoted to the education of Moroccan women in the political agenda of the Moroccan nationalists of the 1940s. It stresses the interactive relationship between the emergence of Moroccan nationalism during the French Spanish colonization of Morocco and the education of local women as an edifying infrastructure for the progress of a Moroccan nation. In this respect, Baker (1998) considers the emancipation of Moroccan women a prerequisite in the nationalist movement in Morocco, particularly, upon suggesting that the education of women “*as one of the most effective means of fighting ignorance in the family*” (22). In fact, from the perspective that “[w]omen were the guardians of Moroccan tradition, and the family was the basic cell of Moroccan Muslim society”, also “*the mother of all social institutions*” (Baker, 1998, 28), the nationalist leaders in Morocco “*took up the cause of girls’ education*” and “*created their own free schools where instruction for girls (and boys) would focus on the Arabic language, the Koran, and nationalism*” (22). This is in addition to the notion that “[T]he status of Moroccan women -their seclusion and lack of education- had become an embarrassment to French-educated Moroccan men who wanted to show that they were civilized and modern by getting rid of everything that was backwards in the old society. Thus, they imagined a ‘new woman’ who was presentable in colonial society, yet whose primary role was still in the home” (21).

Moving along a similar orbit, Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*, in turn, represents the modernization of women in Morocco as a paramount step to the achievement of independence. This is the reason why most of the Mernissi children go to the nationalist schools while the brightest few attend the college (Mernissi 86).

[T]he nationalists, who were fighting the French, had promised to create a New Morocco, with equality for all. Every woman was to have the same right to education as many as well as the right to enjoy monogamy ---a privileged, exclusive relationship with her husband. In fact, many of the nationalist leaders and their followers in Fez already had only one wife, and looked down on those who had many. Father and Uncle, who espoused the nationalist views, each had only one wife (Mernissi, 1994, 24).

Towards the end of Mernissi’s (1994) tales, the national consensus on a modern education of women is embodied as a turning-point in the history of nationalism in Morocco, especially, when we consider the following reference:

The entire town was turned upside down when the religious authorities of the Qaraouiyine Mosque, including Fquih Mohammed al-Fassi and Fquih Moulay Belarbi Alaoui, supported women’s rights to go to school, and with the backing of King Mohammed V, encouraged the nationalists to open up institutions of learning for girls. Upon hearing the news, Mother immediately petitioned Father that I be transferred from Lalla Tam’s Koran school to a “real one,” and he responded by calling for an official family council meeting (196).

According to this passage, Fatima herself gains the benefits of the expansion of nationalism in Morocco. As she puts it, “[t]he change was incredible, and I was elated” (Mernissi, 1994, 197). Fatima’s elation mirrors itself in her recent attendance of a modern school where she “*learned by heart many of the nationalist songs that we sang in school, and Father was so proud that he would ask me to recite them in front of Grandmother Lalla Mani at least once a*

week" (199). In this sense, a modern school is assumed not only to improve women's status but also to enhance the transition of this nationalist consciousness to the younger generation.

At this level, *Dreams of Trespass* best depicts women's roles in passing on the modernizing spirit of the nationalist agenda in Morocco to their children. For one thing, even if Fatima dresses in the traditional Moroccan garment, the caftan, especially on religious festival days, her mother insists on dressing her "in the latest Western fashions --- short, fluffy lace dresses with colored ribbons and shiny black shoes", Fatima also (Mernissi, 1994, 85). In the mother's perspective, "[d]ress says so much about a woman's designs," she said. "If you plan to be modern, express it through what you wear, otherwise they will shove you behind the gates. Caftans may be of unparalleled beauty, but western dress is about salaried work" (85). Likewise, even Fatima's grandmother hints to "the creation of the beautiful, new Morocco, the Morocco that I, her little granddaughter, was going to step into. 'Morocco has changed quickly, little girl,' she often told me, 'and it will keep on doing so'. That prediction made me feel very happy. I was going to grow up in a wonderful kingdom where women had rights, including the freedom to smuggle up with their own husbands every night" (36-37). Suffice it to mention that, in New Morocco, "we will have one man, one wife" (37). Even this note of humour does not undercut its indication of the great enthusiasm for a monogamous Modern Morocco.

So far, it could be noticed that, in the background of Fatima's elation, so to speak, her mother's recommendations and her grandmother's expectations lies the nationalist penchant for taking France itself as a model of nation formation (Baker, 1998, 20). In the early 1930s, Baker (1998) indicates, young Moroccan men educated in France, who took Europe as their point of reference, dominated the debate on women's emancipation (20). Fatima herself is a representation of this project, since her grandmother keeps reminding her, "[y]ou will be a modern, educated lady. You will realize the nationalists' dream. You will learn foreign languages, have a passport, devour books, and speak like a religious authority" (Mernissi, 1994, 64). Everybody around Fatima enhances her status as a potential representation of New Morocco.

Union against Conquer and Divide

Considering all these complementary perspectives on the struggle against anti-colonialism, *Dreams of Trespass* reveals that all components of the Moroccan nation, ranging from the monarchy to women and children, spared no effort in their resistance to the French-Spanish rule. In fact, in January 1944, when the child-narrator was barely four, the Moroccan King Mohammed V, "backed by nationalists all over Morocco, went to the top-ranking French colonial administrator, the *Résident Général*, to make a formal demand for independence" (Mernissi, 1994, 23-24). In her childhood narrative, Mernissi also shows that what brings Moroccans together is the idea that Morocco "had existed undivided for centuries, even before Islam came along fourteen hundred years ago. No one ever had heard of a frontier splitting the land in two before" (1). As a result, the moment when the Spanish and the French crossed the Moroccan frontier, making the North Spanish and the South French, signals a turning-point in the historiography of Morocco (2).

In the spirit of a nationalist unity against the imperialist dictum of Conquer and Divide, *Dreams of Trespass* emphasizes that this resistance not only takes precedence over any other issue but also dictates solidarity even among family members. As far as women are concerned, the common goal of regaining the notion of Morocco as a whole nation is the reason why the claim of Fatima's mother for an independent nuclear family almost goes without notice in the Mernissi family. "Mother, who hated communal harem life and dreamt of an eternal *tete-à-tete* with Father, only accepted what she called the 'azma (crisis) arrangement on the condition that no distinction be made between the wives" (Mernissi, 1994, 6). Apart from the great reserve that surrounds every demand of modernizing the family structure, even the fact of skipping a meal on the communal dinner table in the Mernissi family, Fatima tells us, "was considered terribly

rude and too openly individualistic” (76):

Eating at fixed hours was what Mother hated most about communal life. She would nag father constantly about the possibility of breaking loose and taking our immediate family to live apart. The nationalists advocated the end of seclusion and the veil, but they did not say a word about a couple’s right to split off from their larger family. In fact, most of the leaders still lived with their parents. The male nationalist movement supported the liberation of women, but had not come to grips with the idea of the elderly living by themselves, nor with couples splitting off into separate households. Neither idea seemed right, or elegant (75-76).

The rationale seems to be that the preservation of the extended family structure embodies a solid ground on which to build an agenda of resistance to colonization. As future citizens of a New Independent Morocco, even the Mernissi children share a sense of responsibility for holding the Moroccan family strongly together. In their eyes, one way of achieving this cohesion is by never uttering the word “*harem*” in public, since that word causes along serious disputes between the harem women (Mernissi, 1994, 40). Mernissi defines the harem “*as the place where a man sheltered his family, his wife or wives, and children and relatives. It could be a house or a tent, and it referred both to the space and to the people who lived within it [...] No other men could enter it without the owner’s permission, and when they did, they had to obey his rules*” (61). All that the children could do is try to figure out the concept and its embedded meanings in total discretion.

Salafiya Islamic Reforms

In essence, it is what is termed the neo-salafiya thought which passes on the equal responsibility of the Mernissi adults and children, men and women, for protecting the maximum level of cohesion. In this same context, Baker (1998) reminds us of the salience of “*the conception of the family that was at the core of*” this Islamic nationalist movement, explaining that:

[T]he Islamic reformers didn’t promote the education of women or defend the rights of women under Islamic law primarily in order to let women develop as human beings, but rather to buttress the Muslim family, and through the family, to reinforce social cohesion, and women were important because of their traditional roles at the heart of the family. Thus the reforms sought to strengthen the basic structures of the old society, especially the bourgeois family, not to change them (22).

This particular passage puts in evidence the significance of the communal family as a backbone of the nationalist reforms. It downplays a strong sense about the primacy of family solidarity, as an embryo of national consciousness, in as much as it manifests the degree to which Moroccan nationalists bet on family ties as a microcosm of national union.

In consequence, it should be noted that the emphasis of *Dreams of Trespass* on the valorisation of each Western aspect about women’s status is not tantamount to mirroring an utter rejection of the traditions that keep Moroccans as a united nation. On the contrary, Mernissi (1994) depicts the latter stance at the very extreme of the father’s attitude which evinces a rejection of the complete westernization of the younger generation. In the context of clothes, for instance, the memoirist’s father notices in a critical tone:

“But what good does our wearing traditional dress do,” father joked one day to my young cousins sitting around him, “when all you young people dress like Rudolf Valentino?” Without exception, they all wore Western

attire, and with their short hair uncovered and cut above the ears, they looked very much like the French soldiers standing at the end of the street. "One day, we will probably manage to throw the French out, only to wake up and find out that we all look like them", added uncle (85).

In so saying, the Mernissi advocates for Moroccan nationalism to show their preoccupation with the questionable adherence to Europe as a model for rebuilding a modern Moroccan identity. They are closer rather to a form of nationalist leadership which "*based its ideology of social reform, and especially its ideas about women, not on European models but rather on the Salafiya Islamic reform movement,*" coming through Syria and Egypt (Baker, 1998, 21). According to the Salafiya movement, "*Islam and the Koran provide guidance for all times and places. If the Muslim world is stagnant, it is because Muslim populations have either neglected or misinterpreted Islam. What is needed is ijihad, an established method of going back to sources in order to interpret the general principles of Islam in the light of the current situation*" (21). Part and parcel of this standpoint is that independence requires modernization without effacement.

As a noticeable development in the nationalist movement in Morocco, the latter perspective reflects itself in *Dreams of Trespass* in powerful ways. In fact, the tales make reference to the encouragement of "*the youth to read the classic treatises of Avicenna and Al-Khwarizmi, 'just to have an idea about the way their minds functioned. It always helps to know that our ancestors were fast and precise'*" (Mernissi, 1994, 87). This brings to mind Zin, Fatima's cousin whose appeal lies in his French education besides his religious knowledge. Indeed, he "*worked very hard at becoming the ideal modern nationalist, that is, one who possessed a vast knowledge of Arab history, legends, and poetry, as well as fluency in French, the language of our enemy, in order to decode the Christian press and uncover their plans*" (87). Even the Mernissi family respect him "*as one of the new generation of Moroccans who was going to save the country. He led the procession to the Qaraouiyyine Mosque on Fridays, when all the men of Fez, young and old, turned up in the traditional white djellaba and fine yellow leather slippers to go to public prayer*" (88). The notion that Zin takes up leadership in the mosque makes him loom larger for Fatima, given that it is during the Friday gatherings in this place of worshipping "*that many important political decisions of the Maglis Al-Baladi, or City Council, were in fact settled*" (88). At this level, *Dreams of Trespass* hinges back to Fanon's statement that "*[i]n the colonial context, culture, when deprived of the twin supports of the nation and the state, perishes and dies. National liberation and the resurrection of the state are the preconditions for the very existence of a culture*" (177).

Childhood and Adulthood: A False Split

Although Mernissi sets the first pages of her memoirs in the 1940s, that is, "*in the midst of chaos*", meaning the apex of national resistance against the French-Spanish colonization of Morocco, yet, the remainder of her life-writing narrates the different convulsions before the birth of an independent nation (Mernissi, 1994, 1-2). In one respect, her personal tales feature the conception that she "*has indissolubly linked feminism and anti-colonialist nationalism in the Arab world*" (Donadey 151). Consequently, they represent an attempt "*to heal a false split [not only] between political and private life*" but also between the child and the adult worlds (Matthe 1999, 84). This way, *Dreams of Trespass* is in no way the autobiographical story of Mernissi's own singular childhood. It even amounts to a national allegory "*where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole labourious telling of the experience of the collective itself*" (qtd. in Hefferman, 2000, 472).

Through all this, Fatima Mernissi's *Tales of a Harem Girlhood* best exemplifies the notion of children as future citizens of a New Independent Morocco. One of the main messages that it imparts for these potential citizens is that "*[t]o live in a combination of two worlds was much*

more appealing than living in just one. The idea of being able to swing between two cultures, two personalities, two codes, and two languages enchanted everyone! Mother wanted me to be like Princess Aisha (the teenage daughter of our King Mohammed V who made public speeches in both Arabic and French) who wore both long caftans and short French dresses” (Mernissi, 1994, 180). Thus, although the Mernissi children have served as an indispensable complement to the political scenery, yet, much of their receptive role is quite informative at the level of emphasizing the harmonious existence of tradition and modernity (91).

In another respect, *Dreams of Trespass* stands out as a chronicle of the military and political activism against the French-Spanish encroachment on the Moroccan nation, with a considerable narrative space allocated to Moroccan women’s role in the national struggle for liberation. To this end, it is a recuperation of Fanon’s (2004) view that “[t]he restoration of the nation must [...] give life in the most biological sense of the term to national culture” (177) and that one “cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people’s struggle for liberation” (168). At the same time, its representation of nationalism during colonization reminds us that “the conscious, organized struggle undertaken by a colonized people in order to restore national sovereignty constitutes the greatest cultural manifestation that exists” (Fanon, 2004, 178). In both forms of national struggle during the Spanish/French colonization of Morocco, Mernissi’s text re-emphasises, rather than de-emphasizes, the active participation of Moroccan women. Although this national resistance is harvested by the younger generation in the Moroccan society, still “each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity” (145).

REFERENCES

- Adams, G. (1998). Medieval children's literature: Its possibility and actuality. *Children's Literature* 26, 1-24.
- Baker, A. (1998). *Voices of resistance and histories of Moroccan women*. New York: Suny Press.
- Bhabha, H. (2004). Foreword: Framing Fanon. In F. Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*. Trans. by R. Philcox. New York: Grove Press.
- Carroll, L. (1965). *The annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking Glass*. Ed. Martin Gardner. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- David, M. (2003). *Mauro Bertani and Aessandro Fontana*. New York: Picador.
- Heffereman, T. (2000). Apocalyptic narratives: The nation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46(4), 470-491.
- Donadey, A. (2001). *Recasting postcolonialism: Women writing between worlds: Studies in African Literature*. Portsmouth: Heinemann,
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The wretched of the earth*. Trans. by Richard Philox. New York: Grove Press.
- Fayose, P. O. (2004). African Children's Literature: An Overview. In *international companion of children's literature*, 891-900, 2nd ed. Vol. 2. Ed. Peter Hunt. London, Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *Society must be defended: Lecture at the College de France*. 1975-76.
- Jameson, F. (1986). Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism. *Social Text* 15, 65-88.
- Matthes, M. (1999). Shahrazad's sisters: Storytelling and politics in the memoirs of Mernissi, El Saadawi and Ashrawi. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Politics*, 19, 68-96.
- McGills, R. (2004). Postcolonialism: Originating difference. In *international companion of children's literature*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, 891-900, Ed. Peter Hunt. London, Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Mernissi, F. (1994). *Dreams of trespass: Tales of a harem girlhood*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mowitz, J. (1992). Algerian nation: Fanon's fetish. *Cultural Critique* 22, 165-186.
- Nation. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonne des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 11, 1758.
- Nodelman, P. & Reimer, M. (2003). *The pleasures of children's literature*. 3rd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Oluwasanmi, E., McClean, E., & Zell, H. (1973). *Publishing in African in the seventies*. Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press.
- Ramrag, V. (1999). The merits and demerits of the postcolonial approach to writings in English. In *Voices of the other: Children's literature and the postcolonial context*, 253-267. Ed. R. McGills. New York: Garland.
- Sartre, J. P. (2004). Preface. In *The wretched of the earth*. Ed. F. Fanon. Trans. by Richard Philox. New York: Grove Press.