Female Voices in Revolution: Autobiography and Collective Memory in Assia Djebar’s *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* and Merle Collins’s *Angel*

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**Abstract**

Although set in different historical and socio-political contexts, Assia Djebar’s *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and Merle Collins’s *Angel* (1987) are both autobiographical narratives depicting women as the protagonists of history. While *Fantasia* juxtaposes the nineteenth-century history of French colonization in Algeria and the war of independence, *Angel* describes the history of Grenada Revolution during the 1970s and the development of radical nationalism in the Caribbean country. In diverse ways, the two writers show female figures seeking to challenge the dominant power imposed by patriarchy and colonialism. Djebar and Collins share the common authorial project: attempting to recover the forgotten experiences of both Algerian and Grenadian women and conceptualizing the autobiographical self. However, the two texts show different ways to construct female subjectivity in relation to collective memories. While *Fantasia* portrays history as a collection of fragmented stories, *Angel* seeks to combine those fragments in order to create a unified community. By examining similarities as well as differences, this essay will analyze how the two narratives grapple with the complex relationship between the personal and the collective in Africa and the Caribbean.
Although set in different historical and socio-political contexts, both Assia Djebar’s *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and Merle Collins’s *Angel* (1987) employ the autobiographical narrative in order to portray women as the protagonists of history. In diverse ways, the two writers show female figures seeking to challenge the dominant power imposed by patriarchy and colonialism. On the one hand, *Fantasia* juxtaposes the nineteenth-century history of French colonization in Algeria and the subsequent war of independence. The story revolves around a girl who, caught between two cultures (French and Algerian), traces her origin by narrating the experiences of Algerian women. *Angel*, on the other hand, describes the history of Grenada Revolution during the 1970s and the development of radical nationalism in the Caribbean country. The book focuses on three generations of women who struggle to voice their concerns against the oppressive society before and after the Revolution. Echoing other post-colonial novels and reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s critique of historical materialism, *Fantasia* and *Angel* similarly disavow the concept of history as continuous progress. Djebar and Collins share the common authorial project, attempting to not only recuperate the forgotten experiences of Algerian and Grenadian women but also conceptualize the meaning of the autobiographical self. However, the two texts show different ways to construct female subjectivity in relation to collective memories. While *Fantasia* portrays history as a collection of fragmented stories, *Angel* seeks to combine those fragments in order to create a unified community. By examining similarities as well as differences, this essay will analyze how the two narratives grapple with the complex relationship between the personal and the collective.

**Theory of Autobiography**

The tradition of autobiography has an extended history, tracking its origin as early as St. Augustine’s *Confessions* in AD 397. Critics have generally considered autobiography a complex genre because of its disruptive, interdisciplinary nature: it challenges the traditional boundaries between fact and fiction, literature and history, theory and practice, the personal and the collective, and the everyday and the
literary. As Laura Marcus indicates, an autobiographical text appears “either as a dangerous double agent, moving between these oppositions, or as a magical instrument of reconciliation” (7). Furthermore, the autobiographical practice becomes even more complex when examined from the perspective of gender politics. Feminism has often criticized the genre of autobiography as being essentially constructed by the masculine viewpoint (Smith; Brodzki and Schenck). According to this view, the notion of the ideal autobiographer as a unified, transcendent subject has emphasized the presence of white male writers, whereas a woman’s voice remains marginalized and unrepresented within the canon of autobiography. The “authentic” female figure is inevitably absorbed into the male representation since, as Terry Eagleton points out, “woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond [man’s] ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is” (132).

Concerned with the absence of women’s voices, feminist critics have increasingly engaged with the genre of autobiography since the 1980s, contributing to a critical re-evaluation of such diverse issues as subjectivity, knowledge and power, sexuality, memory, and collective identity (Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield). Carolyn Heilbrun notes that “[o]nly in the last third of the twentieth century have women broken through to a realization of the narratives that have been controlling their lives” (60). The growing academic interest in women’s representation through autobiography has seen two noticeable consequences. If the traditional category of autobiography objectifies women from the patriarchal gaze, the recent emphasis on women’s autobiographies serves to subjectify the female voice. On the other hand, more and more female authors prefer to write autobiographies rather than “an” autobiography or “the” autobiography. These writers incorporate factors from diverse categories of difference including race, class, nationality, and sexual orientation (Stanley 247-248).

One of the most important aspects of women’s autobiographies lies in the question of memory. Since an autobiography promises an exploration or a revelation of “self” through a literary text, the author seeks to recover an often-shifting set of personal and collective memories that constitute the foundation of female subjectivity. Having studied theories of women’s autobiographies, Sidonie Smith
claims that memory represents a crucial element in their autobiographical practice, through which a “fictional” self creates certain connections with the past. As Smith highlights, the autobiographical “self” is not a fixed entity but rather “cultural and linguistic ‘fiction’ constituted through historical ideologies of selfhood and the processes of our storytelling” (45). The narrative “I” is therefore essentially a fictive persona: the act of recuperating memories symbolizes an attempt to describe the “fictional” nature of the historical autobiography.

History of Revolution and Anti-Colonial Language

Both Djebar’s Fantasia and Collins’s Angel are undoubtedly autobiographical texts. Unlike in her previous novels, Djebar undertakes an autobiographical project in Fantasia: “[i]n my first books, I went veiled. In the quartet, I expose myself” (qtd. in Mortimer 102). Similarly, Collins explains that the creation of Angel is indebted to the author’s reflection of her own life. She calls it a “fiction drawing heavily on the reality of my existence, of the existence of those around me, reconstructing stories around images from the Grenada of the 1950s onwards” (Collins “Writing” 25). As some critics have noted, the fact that Collins’s middle name is “Angela” also insinuates the autobiographical nature of the novel (Scott 153; Lima 55). The two autobiographies can also be identified as historical, nationalist novels because they are deeply engaged in specific accounts of Algerian and Grenada revolutions, representing the texts of the so-called national allegory. What Djebar and Collins share is a challenge to rewrite the history of their respective nations, the history that is indescribable by any colonizing subject.

Djebar’s Fantasia chronicles the process in which the autobiographical self develops her perceptions about the two conflicting cultures she inhabits: the Algerian and the French. By using the former colonizer’s language, the author describes different stages of her life: 1) her adolescence which emphasizes the value of French culture, 2) her subsequent alienation from the Arabic community, 3) her educational experience and intellectual success, 4) the moment of anxiety caught between the two cultures, and finally, 5) her burning desire to return to the past in order to reconnect with the Arabic world through a literary text. As Mildred Mortimer notes, “[a]utobiography becomes Djebar’s way back to the cherished
maternal world of her past, where she seeks healing and reconciliation for a self fragmented by the colonial experience” (103). The whole text represents a personal journey in which “a little girl in a village in the Algerian Sahel” (3) eventually becomes an adult woman perplexed and disoriented in the multicultural paradox of “foreign” and “native” land: “I am alternately the besieged foreigner and the native swaggering off to die” (215).

The Algerian history of French colonization plays a crucial role in the formation of Djebar’s subjectivity, as the narrative “I” is constructed through the rewriting of the national history. Two definite moments in Algerian history concern the author: the French conquest of 1830 and the Algerian Revolution (1954-62), which marks the end of 132 years of colonialism in the country. When the French troops invaded “the Impregnable City,” the city remains tranquil and “no sound accompanies this transformation” (Djebar 6). The soundless scene of the city also implicates the presence of silent spectators in the Algerian community, revealing the impossibility of historical narration from the colonized perspective. After illustrating the people’s reaction to the French invasion, the author wonders, “Who will pass on the number [of vessels]? Who will write of it? Which of all these silent spectators will live to tell the tale when the encounter is over?” (Djebar 7). Amable Matterer, the French officer of the Ville de Marseille, is apparently unable to recount the history (Djebar 7). It is at this point when the novelist declares her authorial project to write the history of her own people, in response to the scene of complete silence: “I, in my turn, write, using his language, but more than one hand and fifty years later” (Djebar 7). The enemy’s language becomes an effective tool for Djebar in terms of both producing an autobiography and inscribing the colonial history of Algeria.

The issue of language choice is central to Djebar’s nationalist discourse. The significance of her project lies in translating Arabic, her “mother tongue,” which has been “neglected and left to fairground barkers and jailers” (214), into French, her “stepmother tongue,” which “has established a proud presidio” within herself (214-215). Through the act of translation, Djebar appropriates, or “steals” as she prefers to describe it (216), the power inherent in the French language, providing a discursive space of enunciation from which alternative, non-historicized nationalism emerges. By combining her own story with the official history provided by the French colonial

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regime (military reports, chronicles, personal letters, etc.), Djebar successfully deconstructs the colonizer’s vision of history. At the core of Djebar’s story is the poetic of resistance against French colonization as well as against the patriarchal Algerian society.

*Fantasia* narrates, for instance, the history of the 1845 insurrection and the subsequent fumigation of the Dahra caves to illustrate the way in which Djebar employs the colonizer’s language to reinscribe Algerian history. In depicting the tragedy that occurred near the Dahra Mountains, she juxtaposes the Colonel Pélissier’s military accounts (official story) with her own narrative taken from two witnesses (unofficial story). According to her, Pélissier is unable to recount the history of this “incongruous *Fantasia*” (74) because he bases his story on authorized documents. Djebar, on the other hand, uses the Colonel’s information to write a different historical narrative according to personal testimonies: “I accept this palimpsest [of Pélissier] on which I now inscribe the charred passion of my ancestors” (79). Rather than submitting to the authority of the dominant language, Djebar inverts the power relationship between French and Arabic and provides an alternative vision of the national history from the perspective of the colonized.

Similar to Djebar, Collins uses anti-colonial language to narrate her own story and the history of revolutionary movements in Grenada. However, their approach to the local language is different in various ways. In *Fantasia*, Djebar juxtaposes the colonizer’s language with her mother tongue, but the novel is mainly written in French. Collins, on the other hand, eschews describing her country’s historical turbulence in the imperial language, “standard” English, and her novel clearly emphasizes the significance of the Grenadian Creole, known as Patois. Collins’s representation of the Creole speakers as the agents of their own history is significant. In this sense, Maria Helena Lima’s reading of Collins’s language choice seems suggestive: “Collins’s choice of Grenadian Creole, the language of the ‘subaltern’ class, as the novel’s language may also signify, among other purposes, her concern that the novel be accessible to those of that class who can read” (37).

The Caribbean dialects thus play a crucial role in *Angel*. Patois, which Collins identifies as “a secret language,” is spoken by older generations of female characters, including Ma Ettie and Doodsie. On the other hand, Angel’s generation learns English Creole as a mother
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tongue at home, which is the language she considers the symbol of political resistance against the colonial authority. Finally, the “standard” English is represented by the figure of “Leader” who changes from a popular union activist to a powerful head of the oppressive, military regime. Each one of these three languages carries in itself distinct cultural expectations through which the novel’s characters define their personal identities as well as their particular relationship to society. Ma Ettie and Doodsie’s adherence to Patois demonstrates their desire to maintain the community through the traditional language. In order to show the rich oral culture of French Patois, Collins incorporates many ritualistic phrases, proverbs, poems and songs in the novel.

For example, when Doodsie discusses the country’s political issues with her brother Regal, the section is entitled “Gadé mizè mwen, non!” [Look at my trouble] (12), and the phrase “Bon Jé” [Good God] is frequently used by female characters in their conversations. Moreover, during the celebration of traditional music and storytelling, people at the ceremony, including Angel, Doodsie and Ezra, hear a joyful song by “the voices of the happy spirits” (83) in Patois: “Manman-o-o-o! Mwen vivé./ Pwangad waya piké mwen!” [O Mother/I have arrived/ Take care lest the wire pricks me] (82). Angel’s Patois song in the last scene of the novel further depicts her connection with the Grenadian female community as well as her awareness of their cultural heritage (290).

Collins develops her autobiographical character, Angel, in relation to the Grenadian history, from the success and the failure of the People’s Revolutionary Government to the US invasion of 1983. “The Revolution,” Collins tells us, “has given me a theme and has also developed a greater awareness of self and pride of being” (qtd. in Searle 14). Various historical figures and events are fictionalized in the novel: Eric Gairy as the character of “Leader,” Maurice Bishop as “Chief,” and the New Jewel Movement (NJM) as the “Horizon.” The discourse created by the Horizon initially shows the possibility of social transformation based on a “revolution from below.” However, Collins’ primary focus is the history of a people’s revolution, not the one invented by the privileged intellectuals of the NJM who, with their “new ideas influenced by a cumulative and available ideological context of the late sixties,” become “occupants of high positions in the society, enhanced significantly by their travel and study abroad”
Influenced by the political discourses of other characters surrounding her, Angel gradually acquires revolutionary ideologies in the novel.

Angel maintains distance from the revolutionary politics during her adolescence, only interested in playing the role of “an angel” in a school play (113). However, her intellectual experience at the University of West Indies in Jamaica radically changes her worldview. She is no longer a mere “little matité [dull]” (54) girl, but a matured revolutionary who devotes herself to the student organization called “Search” and who overtly criticizes Leader’s corruption, just like her mother. When discussing the national politics with Kai, another member of “Search,” Angel recalls Doodsie’s earlier claim about Leader:

“But it not doing us no damn good,” said Angel suddenly. ‘Look at Leader!’ […] I actually said that! she marveled. It was a line borrowed straight from Doodsie in answer to arguments about Leader’s control of the country. Jesus, thought Angel! I said that! She focused more intently on the conversation. (157)

This is an important scene since it reveals the first moment in which Angel recaptures the memory of her mother, Doodsie, who used to say, “Dese people up there don care a damn bout you an me” (13) or “that man Leader just want everything for himself” (52). Furthermore, we learn that this memory is also shared by many other women in the country. Aunt Jessie tells Doodsie, “I don like all this confusion [caused by Leader] at all at all” (27), whereas Ma Ettie also reminds Regal that Leader’s revolutionary project does not produce an ideal society for the people but rather creates a world of fear and uncertainty: “I don’t know what this worl comin to at all” (28). Therefore, the above-mentioned scene about Angel’s epiphany represents a moment of reconciliation: the autobiographical subject is reunited with the collective whole through the act of remembrance.

Translation of Collective Memory in Fantasia

The presence of women’s voice appears to be a point of convergence between Djebar’s Fantasia and Collins’s Angel. Both writers attempt to provide multifarious interpretations of their
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respective countries’ colonial history from the female perspective. In Fantasia, Djebbar anxiously seeks to “resurrect” the innumerable voices of her “vanished sisters” (204), the voices that were silenced and modified according to the paternalistic vision of Algerian nationalism. For Djebbar, writing serves to reconstruct the lost affinities with her maternal, Arabic world: “Writing does not silence the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters” (204). Similarly, Collins also suggests that the novel is a unique genre that allows the existence of diverse female “voices.” By exposing these voices through the Patois speech, she portrays Grenadian women as the narrators of their own history. This intersection between the two novels suggests that both Fantasia and Angel can be considered what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “polyphonic texts,” in which we see “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (Bakhtin 6).

In Fantasia, autobiographical fragments are entwined with collective voices. When Djebbar attempts to reinscribe her country’s history, she claims that the true hero of the Algerian resistance is not the legendary hero, Sultan Abd al-Qadir, but the long-forgotten female figures of the Revolution: the fumigated victims of the Dahra caves, the naked “Bride of Mazuna,” and many other anonymous women whose existence has been neglected by the official history. The author offers oral testimonies of Algerian female revolutionaries who recall their memories during the War of Independence. Priscilla Ringrose highlights that these women’s “verbal” testimonies are contrasted with colonizers’ “written” testimonies: “[t]he simplicity and terseness of these transliterated oral testimonies provide a sharp and deliberate contrast not only to the written testimonies of the colonizers […] but also to the richness of Djebbar’s own virtuoso use of the French language” (43).

Algerian women’s collective memories are exposed in the last part of the book entitled “Voices from the Past.” The section is divided into five chapters of “movements,” in which the author includes some essays whose titles indicate reference to diverse forms of Algerian women’s orality: “Voice,” “Clamour,” “Aphasia,” “Murmurs,” “Whispers,” “A Widow’s Voice,” etc. In one of the “Voice” sections, Djebbar details the history of an Algerian woman fighter who selflessly dedicates herself to the struggles of independence by working at field hospitals and by serving wounded soldiers. The woman is eventually
captured by the French army, imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured. When a French *goumier* insults her, she bravely declares, “Come closer, if you dare! You call us rats, so let’s see if we’re rats or lions!” (138). The author describes how the French soldiers later leave her in peace and the *goumier* disappears from her scene. This anonymous female fighter’s experience as an authentic revolutionary becomes apparent in her conversation with an official from the Red Cross:

“Why were you fighting?”  
“For what I believe in, for my ideals!”  
“And now, seeing you’re a prisoner?”  
“I’m a prisoner, so what!”  
“What have you gained?”  
“I’ve gained the respect for my compatriots and my own self-respect! Did you arrest me for stealing or for murder? I never stole! My conscience is clear!” (140)

The story is based on the oral testimony the author collected from the female revolutionary who, deeply committed to the country’s liberation, expressed her respect for other female fighters. The episode clearly demonstrates the strong bonds that existed among Algerian women. Djebar translates the recorded Arabic conversation into French in order to preserve the oral speech in the written form. From this perspective, the author attempts to recreate the Algerian history based on women’s testimonies that no colonizer can fully describe in his official report or documentation.

Nevertheless, Djebar’s attempt to recuperate the collective “voices” and memories of other women reveals its challenge as the author describes the loss of her Arabic tradition: “[m]y oral tradition has gradually been overlaid and is in danger of vanishing: at the age of eleven or twelve I was abruptly ejected from this theater of feminine confidences” (emphasis added, 156). Uncertain about her ability to represent the Algerian female voice and to speak for the collective whole, Djebar faces a dilemma, which is her own “aphasia.” She asks herself, “[c]an I, twenty years later, claim to revive these stifled voices? And speak for them? Shall I not at best find dried up streams? […] I see the reflection of my own barrenness, my own aphasia” (202). Here the split between her autobiographical self and the collective whole is apparent. Although Djebar evidently seeks an ideal reunion with the Arabic female community, such unity seems impossible since the
author realizes that she can never return to her childhood, her nostalgic past (156). She is, in fact, ultimately “ejected” from the collective whole.

Furthermore, a critical reading of the novel shows that the central focus of Fantasia is not so much the restoration of “many vanished sisters” as the reconstruction of the narrative subject of “I.” It is the “I” who “imagines” the “unknown woman,” who “recreates” the “invisible woman,” and who “resurrects” her ancestors’ experience during the Algerian War (189). In this sense, what Djebar calls “stifled voices” of Algerian women are disguised and transformed into devices from which the author’s autobiographical subject emerges. Djebar explains that she is able to produce her own discourse through these voices: “Before I catch the sound of my own voice I can hear the death-rattles, the moans of those immured in the Dahra Mountains and the prisoners on the Island of Saint Marguerite; they provide my orchestral accompaniment. They summon me, encouraging my faltering steps, so that at the given signal my solitary song takes off” (emphasis added, 217). According to this symbolic orchestra, the women’s voices, such as “the moans of those immured in the Dahra Mountains,” only manifest themselves as the instruments for Djebar’s musical project. The collective voices function to disclose her own self and to satisfy her desire for self-representation, acting “like a perfume, a draft of fresh water for the dry throat” (180). Djebar’s historical narrative, therefore, draws heavily on her autobiographical “self” rather than the collective “other.”

Here, the Algerian women’s voices seem impossible to represent themselves within Djebar’s discourse because the author functions as a translator whose task is to reproduce the other voices in the colonizer’s language instead of enabling those voices to emerge through their own agency. Djebar tells her “vanished sisters” that “[t]wenty years later I report the scene to you, you widows, so that you can see it in your turn, so that you in turn can keep silent. And the old women sit motionless, listening to the unknown village girl giving herself” (emphasis added, 211). In this scene, their voices remain silenced after years, their body immobilized, and their storytelling muted, albeit persistent in the author’s narration. The Algerian women continue to be subaltern subjects as they find themselves on the margins of the authorial discourse, separated from the center of the textual space they in fact inhabit.
When contrasted with Djebar, Collins emphasizes a more direct manifestation of the Grenadian female voices in Angel. Although her novel certainly shows autobiographical elements through the figure of Angel, Collins focuses not on the story of the narrative “I” but on the story of the collective “we,” which represents the Grenadian community of women. Collins holds the notion that “people without history” are the real agents of history as well as the protagonists of her novel. As she states in an interview, Collins asserts that the protagonists of Angel are ordinary people in Grenada who not only struggle to construct an authentic vision of a popular nationalist system, but also face the contradictions inherent in their own political project. In the novel, her female characters speak out as individuals and also blend their voices to form a polyphonic space that will resist the pressure imposed by the culture of colonialism. This “blending” is what distinguishes Collins from Djebar: while Grenadian women’s voices are intertwined with each other to create a community in Angel, Algerian women’s voices exist only in fragments—separate “movements” as seen in the third section—in Fantasia.

Collins’s account of Grenadian history depends on the idea of a collective sense of self. As Helen Scott points out, “Angel is primarily a collective tale rather than a conventional bildungsroman” (129). The autobiographical self is integrated into the collective whole in such a way that both Collins/Angel and other Grenadian women conceive of themselves in relation to one another. The autobiographical self represents “a self that exists in relationships, a self that is a product of all the discourses that the growing child incorporates as she develops” (Lima 45). What is at the core of Collins’s vision concerning the female subjectivity is a question of what Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield calls “intersubjectivity.” According to the critics, the idea of intersubjectivity refers to “the ways in which all selves are structured by interactions with others, and a more general attention to the ways in which the self is framed and created by the social” (Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield 7). Angel’s family functions as the microcosm of the Grenadian community of women: the intimate relationship between female members (Angel, Ma Ettie, Doodsie, Auntie Ezra, Jessie, etc.) embodies the notion of intersubjectivity. Cousin Maymay’s following words epitomize this particular unity of womanhood: “We caan let one another sink. Is you, is me. We ha to
hol one another up!” (78). Different from Djebar’s novel, in which the multiple voices are somewhat holding up the autobiographical “I,” Collins’s novel illustrates more clearly how women are holding “one another up” against dangers within the Grenadian community.

In *Angel*, one of the ways in which Collins displays collective memories is through personal letters. These documents serve not only to demonstrate written exchanges between female characters but also to create a symbolic, unified community of Grenadian women. In her first letter to Ezra, for instance, Doodsie shares her opinions about the true intention of Leader’s politics, which are contrasted with Allan’s fervent support for the government: “We friend Leader reach the top where he was aimin for and he have a lot of support but me, I not supportin him at all. Allan does say is because I just playing big.  Ezra, that man Leader just want everything for himself. His union is a big thief organization” (52). Because Doodsie is subjugated to her husband’s authority at home, the letter provides the secret space in which she can oppose him and express her own opinions. Miss Antonie also enjoys the same degree of freedom for self-representation through a letter when she writes to Doodsie, “[t]o tell you the truth, I get tired having people ordering me about and me cleaning their house and saying yes Maam all the time” (70). Collins enables both Doodsie and Miss Antonie to speak for themselves, creating an imagined, shared premise, which is the basis of the Grenadian women’s intersubjectivity against the patriarchal/colonial discourse.

Moreover, poetry is another device the author uses to present the collective memories. When Sister Miona Spencer of the Literary Programme praises the achievements of the Horizon group, her voice is communicated to other women in the form of poetry:

Ay! Well we try it in ’51!/ We say come pa come/ Ting bad for so/ Take up we burden/ We go help you go!/ Pa take up we burden/ He take up he purse/ An when he purse get so heavy/ He caan carry de burden/ An hol on to purse/ He throw down we burden/ Down on de groun!/ So we cant im over! (247).

The crowd is excited about her discourse, which encourages her to further continue speaking with confidence. Her voice and memory are shared by other people who tell each other “[t]he sister really good, you know” (248). Everyone desires to keep a copy of the poem, which
implies that Sister Miona’s memory is transmitted into the voice of the collective whole.

In one of the final scenes, the presence of the collective whole is portrayed through the image of the chickens. Doodsie tries to congregate all the chickens in the yard to protect them from the predatory hawk, loudly shouting “Allyou stay togedder!” (289). She tells the chickens that the enemy only aims to separate the group in order to devour each chicken: “[i]t jus tryin to frighten allyou for you to scatter so that it could swoop down when allyou frighten an grab a chicken” (289). Following the call of warning, the fowls immediately joined her, demonstrating a daring attitude against the predatory as they “lifted one foot, kept their heads up, listening” (289). The solidarity of the chickens can be understood as a metaphor for a unified female community that challenges the power of its adversary, the colonial and patriarchal system. Based on the collective agency, the united women are capable of avoiding the enemy’s control because the “chicken-hawk” disappears from the scene in the end. Doodsie’s last remarks once again demonstrate the possibility of the women’s collective whole to resist the colonizing subjects: “Don run when they try to frighten you. Stay together an dey cann get none!” (289).

Unlike the paradox we find between Djebar’s emphasis on the autobiographical subject and her project of reproducing the scattered voices, Collins’s novel not only incorporates the narrative “I” into the collective “we” but also creates the possibility and the necessity of unified force and solidarity for future resistance. What is at issue in Fantasia is a “formal” reconciliation of Algerian women’s history, while Angel creates “substantive” reconciliation of Grenadian women’s collective subjectivity. It is through this substantive representation that Collins reaches the history of her fellow countrywomen, the history conceived “neither as utopia, nor as tragic failure, but as the hope and possibility of a new future” (Taylor 16). In contrast to Djebar, Collins shows more explicit focus on the notion that ordinary people themselves are the agents of history, as frequently articulated by Doodsie.¹ Despite their differences, however, both writers pursue the common goal of reinscribing their national history by problematizing the conventional discourse of nationalism invented by the privileged male figures. In this sense, we can claim that the two novels are undoubtedly “revolutionary” texts in which the

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authors present a new way of reflecting the history. To narrate the past in a literary text is ultimately an act of remembrance: Djebar and Collins remind us, in different ways, that such an act is fundamental in order to examine critically the past as well as to envision a better future.

Works Cited


Notes


2 Lima underlines the importance of the Horizon as follows: “[t]he rhetoric of Black Nationalism gives way to the discourse of revolution as Horizon, which takes control of the state with the full support of the majority of the Grenadian population” (50).

3 Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this notion can be found in Doodsie’s following statement: “Dey on top but is we dat make Revolution. […] Is we dat do we ting! Widdout us, de Angel O, de Micey O, de Rupert O, de Chief O, and all other Co-Chief an who not else, none o dem din nutting!” (258).