Modern Woman’s Counterpoint: the Fluctuating Trope of Colonized Women in North African Colonial Periodicals

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In the European literary tradition, constructions of African and eastern women have long furnished a malleable, contrapuntal trope through which to negotiate the contours of western civilization.1 Expanding European incursion abroad and the advent of fictionalized travelogues and ethnography rendered the literary trope still more popular, as an increasingly ambiguous frontier between fiction and fact lent an air of *vraisemblance*, or plausibility, to even the most outlandish constructions. Early 20th-century literature produced by colonial writers in French North Africa both mobilized and embellished the figure of the African/eastern woman for strategic purposes. In her broadly researched study of Algerian documents, Marnia Lazreg argues that the French military staged veil-removal ceremonies so that hexagonal reports on these events would promote public support for colonization as a force emancipating women (150). Despite the contrived nature of these performances as well as the violence perpetrated against Algerian women by the French military, French readers were amenable to the figure of the Algerian woman liberated by the colonizer, prepared by a wealth of literary constructions depicting Muslim women subjugated by tyrannical men.

Colonial periodicals circulating within French North African and the hexagon include equally strategic constructions of Muslim women. Some portrayals of colonized women condone colonial enterprise. Others, by contrast, construct colonized women as a dissonant counterpoint to reflect critically upon hexagonal France. The Metropolitan context to which North African colonial periodicals were sent was one in which support for the colonial enterprise was dwindling and in which Metropolitan publications such as Jean Jaurès’ *l’Humanité* (1906-present) circulated articles criticizing colonial practice (Ruscio). Colonial periodicals refer to a divergence between metropolitan and colonial ideologies, and some articles explicitly fault French metropolitan authors for failing to impress upon their French readership a sense of interest in the broad expanse of the French empire. In “A propos de la croisière noire” (“About the Black Cruise”), an author identified as A.S. praises the glorious results of colonial intervention and laments the indifference of metropolitan French to the colonizers’ efforts, ending with a condemnation of the French press:

Indifférence qui s’explique par le seul fait que l’histoire et la géographie coloniales n’occupent pas dans les programmes scolaires la place qui leur est logiquement due. D’autre part, la presse—cette voix si puissante—n’a pas toujours compris son rôle et l’a fort mal interprété.

Indifference which is explained by the fact that colonial history and geography do not hold in scholarly programs the place that they logically deserve. Moreover,

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1 As Edward Said has demonstrated, constructions of non-European women, variously identified as oriental, African, Arab, Muslim, converge in a nebulous *other* to the European woman. I use the term *counterpoint* with its sense both of contrast and of polyphonic harmony to encapsulate the multi-faceted relationship of European woman to her fluctuating other.
the press—such a powerful voice—has never understood its role or has very badly interpreted it.²

Colonial periodicals represent a self-conscious intervention in the hexagonal press, and constructions of colonized women play an integral role in these interventions.

In this article, I contrast constructions of colonized women in fiction and non-fiction taken from three different colonial periodicals: L’Afrique du nord illustrée: journal hebdomadaire d’actualités nord-africaines (1906-1938), TAM: Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc (1942-1948), and Aguedal (1936-1945).³ My argument is that whereas editorials express unbridled support for colonial enterprise and mobilize colonized woman women as a trope to substantiate the benefits of the mission civilisatrice, fictional texts express misgivings both about colonial enterprise and about the hexagonal society from which colonial society emanates. In contrast to editorials, which praise progress and affirm a hierarchical and historical disjuncture between France and her colonies, fictional texts express nostalgia for pre-industrial society as embodied in the figure of the native woman. Although constructed for divergent purposes, figures of the colonized woman converge in a comparable trope—the North African woman as a regressive version of the French woman, whether that regression be deemed positive or negative.

Non-Fiction: Women’s Fashion as Sign of Progress and of Distinction between France and Africa

Commentary on women’s dress in colonial periodicals demonstrates a direct link to renewed sensibilities about fashion in Metropolitan France. In his comprehensively researched study Presse féminine: la puissance frivole, Vincent Soulier documents a transition in discourse about dress in French women’s magazines. After the First World War, when women enjoyed more autonomy, women’s magazines began to promote simplified clothing as a means of self-emancipation:

A partir des années 1920, les femmes ayant goûté durant la guerre à une certaine forme de liberté en l’absence des hommes mobilés, la mode contribua à émanciper la femme…. Ils inventèrent un style où élégance et vie moderne pouvaient cohabiter, un style permettant à la femme d’allier le chic à la sobriété afin de mener une vie plus active, une vie en mouvement et non plus en représentation statuaire, plus sportive même…. (42)

As of the 1920s, after women had tasted during the war a certain form of liberty with the absence of men, fashion contributed to the emancipation of women…. They invented a style wherein elegance and modern life could cohabit, a style permitting women to combine chic and sober in order to lead a more active life, a life of movement instead of statuary representation, more athletic even….

² Throughout this article, unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
³ These dates of circulation are approximate because archival materials are incomplete and secondary sources (Souirau-Hoebrechts and Aouchar) do not provide consistent information about when colonial periodicals circulated.
Such re-interpellation of clothing as site of modern emancipation rather than ornate self-ornamentation finds echoes in the colonial press.

In 1929, L’Afrique du nord illustrée mobilizes fashion as a differentiating mark between European and African women. Adopting the hexagonal ideology that French women should retain the mobile stance they had discovered for themselves during World War I, a multi-page spread of photos and text entitled “La Mode” juxtaposes French metropolitan clothing from 1909 with clothing from 1929, and the temporal contrast is emphasized to impress upon readers the importance of dress as a sign of modernity in Metropolitan France. The discursive direction then shifts in a section entitled “Evolution de la mode féminine,” wherein the editorial goes beyond contrasting France’s past and present to insert an assessment of African fashion.

Since, in Europe, the transition from passive to active was accompanied by a change in dress from ornate to simplified, L’Afrique du nord illustrée projects such a chronology onto North Africa, proposing that here too ornamented clothing should be read as a sign of passivity and of regression. In “Evolution de la mode féminine,” the author begins by reaffirming a radical historical disjunction between the present and the past of only twenty years beforehand:

Il n’est rien d’aussi amusant que de regarder à distance les vieux journaux de mode; il n’est rien aussi de plus favorable à nous faire mesurer l’évolution des mœurs et celle des esprits. Ridicules et grotesques, caricaturales nous apparaissent les anciens modèles….Autrefois, il y a seulement vingt ans…[o]n s’habillait pour faire joli, pour exercer une séduction quelconque…mettre en valeur des charmes particuliers, cela au hasard de l’inspiration, le caprice momentané, la fantaisie…. (11)

There is nothing more amusing than looking from a distance at old fashion newspapers; there is also nothing more conducive to measuring the evolution of mores and mentalities. Ridiculous and grotesque, caricature-like, the old models seem to us. Before, only 20 years ago, one dressed to be pretty, to be somewhat seductive, to emphasize particular charms, all this at the whim of inspiration, momentary caprice, fantasy….

The author proceeds to reshape this French temporal disjuncture into a civilizational disjuncture between Europe and Africa, proposing, on the basis of clothing, that African women are less progressed than their European counterparts. Continuing the critique of French fashions from twenty years previous, the author states that these antiquated French fashions represent a caprice that can be compared to

les nègres de l’Afrique quand ils entreprennent de se décorer et de faire concourir à leur beauté, la beauté d’un parasol, d’un collier de verroterie ou la rutilance d’étoffes hautes en couleurs. (“Evolution de la mode feminine,” 11)

the Negros of Africa when they set about decorating themselves or completing their beauty with the beauty of a parasol, of a glass necklace, or the shimmering of colorful fabrics.
Readers are invited to reformulate their understanding of evolution in French women’s dress into an interpretation of the contrast between French and nègre women’s dress. Where exactly North African women—more commonly referred to as berbère, arabe, musulmane or africaine—are situated in such a contrast between French women and nègres is ambiguous. In order to underscore the contrast between Metropole and colony, the author uses the term nègre, thereby drawing upon ethnographic imagery such as that circulated in André Gide’s 1927 publication, *Voyage au Congo*, a popular travelogue wherein the author dwells at length on what he considers the distasteful dress of African women.

This mapping of a temporal divide—French present versus French past—onto a civilizational divide—France versus Africa—functions here in two different ways. On the one hand, it is a marketing strategy. French women living in the colonies are encouraged to differentiate themselves from the backwards nègres by purchasing up-to-date models of French fashion. The African women with their excessive dress are mobilized as an antithetic counterpoint comparable to the harem in Montesquieu’s *Les lettres persanes*, an oppressed image against which French and colonial women must define themselves.

In addition to marketing, the confrontation established between African and European women on the basis of dress promotes colonization. Without the intervention of French colonizers, the periodical suggests, African women would continue to circumscribe themselves in a form of dress that denies them emancipation and prevents them from enjoying the fruits of modern fashion and its freedoms. In this way, discussion of fashion here dovetails with discussion of the veil in Algerian military documents, as analyzed by Lazreg. African women’s ornamentation, like the veil, is the sign of a society in which women dress to gratify men, rather than to enjoy mobility and personal freedom.

One could argue, on more legitimate bases, that African women lacked access to some of the technological advances offered women in 1920s Europe. And yet, this fashion article provides no such substantive analysis. Rather, it presupposes that because ornamented clothing in Europe is part of an ethos of passive, un-evolved women, then in Africa too women’s ornamented clothing can be read as sign that African women are passive and regressive. Women as ornamented passive dolls for men’s gaze is, however, a particularly European upper-class phenomenon. As Soulier points out in his study of the feminine press, the drive for simplified women’s clothing as a form of emancipation represents a particular interpretation of clothing as a response to specific historical developments in European societies. Women in many societies, including French and African, continue to be active while wearing ornate clothing that might seem impractical or constrictive to post-World War I French sensibilities.

The strategic nature of such a civilizational confrontation expressed through dress comes into sharper focus in *TAM: Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc*, in an editorial about the Moroccan King’s daughter, Aicha, printed in 1947 by Réné Janon. As nationalist movements in the colonized territories gained momentum, colonial writers promoted prolonging colonization by discrediting the efforts of those seeking independence. Like public removals of the veil orchestrated by the French military in Algeria to impress upon Metropolitan readers that colonization was liberating Algerian women, Janon focuses upon dress as a sign of emancipation and implies that
Colonization is to credit for modernizing Moroccan women to the point that they can exercise political agency. Janon’s caustic attitude towards Aïcha’s nationalist speech as she wears western clothes is embodied in the large letters of the headline: “Visage découvert, vêtue à l’européenne une princesse marocaine fait un discours en français sur l’émancipation des musulmanes” “Face uncovered, in European dress, a Moroccan princess gives a speech in French on the emancipation of Muslim women” (9). Janon’s report affirms the understanding that French dress affords emancipation to colonized women.

The two articles above analyzed exemplify the depiction of colonized women in non-fictional contributions to colonial periodicals. Reaffirming a qualitative differentiation between French and African women serves commercial interests such as the sale of French fashions, to be sure. At a more fundamental level, however, such evolutionary differentiation, here highlighted in dress, promotes the colonial ideology of the mission civilisatrice. Colonial periodicals seek to promote the sympathies of French women for colonial enterprise by proposing that colonization facilitates the spread of women’s emancipation globally. As Soulier points out, the French women’s movement from its inception demonstrated its global aspirations through the international circulation of women’s periodicals. Establishing colonization as a vector of women’s emancipation to gain the support of the French women’s movement for continued colonial enterprise can be seen as a goal underlying the treatment of women’s dress in colonial periodicals.

**Fiction: Colonized Woman as Counterpoint for Critique of French Mores**

In general, whereas non-fictional contributions to colonial periodicals tend to be adamant in their support of colonial enterprise, fictional contributions tend to be ambivalent, and representations of women in stories exemplify this ambivalence. The three stories to be analyzed below represent three different versions of indigenous femininity: in L’Afrique du nord illustrée, readers find an a-civilized woman who exhibits super-human strengths and, ultimately, a primordial sense of maternal nurturing that overpowers the violent imperialism of the European general she confronts. In Aguedal, readers discover assimilated women, exotic, hypersexual, and playfully complicit in their sexual objectification to gratify the gaze of European men. In TAM, readers are introduced to an educated Muslim woman who is subsequently reincarnated as a materialistic, liberated woman modeled upon modern French women.

Although these three representational modes diverge significantly from one another, the theme underlying all three of them is distaste with French civilization. Whether through her maternal instincts and power, her sexual compliance, or her steadfast piety, the malleable trope of the North African woman offers a polyphonic counterpoint to disrupt the mores of French modern society, depicted as violent, frigid, or dissipate by the colonial author. Manifestations of French modernity praised in non-fictional contributions—such as fashion, secularism, or women’s emancipation—here become targets of condemnation through fanciful portrayals of North African women as the embodied antitheses of modern French practices.

In L’Afrique du nord illustrée, published in 1929, Claude Farrère’s story “Les trois gouttes de lait” (“The Three Drops of Milk”) stages a confrontation between a colonizer-protagonist and a native woman. As the story unfolds, the woman is shown to be more powerful
and more civilized than the colonizer because she uses the maternal capacities of her body to protect her family, and the colonizer, in contrast, is shown to be weak and stripped of civic ties. Farrère’s story is essentially a Voltairean conte philosophique in which the colonizer-protagonist is a straw man whose utility is to ridicule the ideas he expresses. Paradoxically, the character’s ideas are similar to, although an exaggerated form of, those expressed in the same periodical in the editorial “A propos de la croisière noire” cited above, wherein “A.S.” rebukes the French population for being indifferent to their imperial identity. Like A.S., who shows a marked preference for an earlier époque of French history and conquest, Farrère’s military protagonist is nostalgic for a lost period of aggressive imperial conquest, and he chides the French public not simply for its disinterest but for its fastidious distaste with colonial enterprise: “Le mode est aujourd’hui d’avoir, en France, honte de nos victoires, comme jadis nous avions honte de nos défaites” “The trend now is to be ashamed of our victories as in the past we were ashamed of our defeats.” The pride in military conquest promulgated in non-fictional contributions to L’Afrique du nord illustrée is condemned in the story.

As Farrère’s plot progresses, the dominant narrative voice of the straw man protagonist cedes its place to the real hero of the story: the native woman who stops the protagonist’s carnage with the force of her mammary glands. In fulfilling his mission of quelling violent resistance in the territory, the protagonist-general indifferently slaughters large numbers of men and women. His killing spree is brought to an end in a highly charged scene when he spares a household because one of the women shoots him on his lips with breast milk. As the mammary milk touches the protagonist, he defers to the woman as a maternal figure and suddenly recognizes himself in sharp contrast as a killer.

Sur mes lèvres sèches, sur mes lèvres de soldat en train de tuer, je crus sentir le goût de ce lait maternel, de ce lait jeté vers moi comme une supplication suprême de maman... (12).

On my dry lips, the lips of a soldier in the act of killing, I believed that I was tasting this maternal milk, this milk thrown at me as a supreme intercession of mommy....

The colonized woman, here cast almost as a superhuman deity, overpowers the forces of civilization and conquest with her highly carnal presence. Rather than viewing her as an inassimilable other, the soldier recognizes in her the figure of mother, a figure that transcends any one particular civilization and recalls in him a sense of moral obligation towards other human beings.

The trope of the native woman wielding exaggerated physical prowess is not uncommon in orientalist literature. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Sander Gilman, among others, have pointed out that in European literature African women are predominantly represented as highly sexual, fertile beings, and that this literature thus emphasizes their carnal as opposed to their intellectual capacities. Malek Alloula and Edward Said have charted similar sexualizing iconography in French representations of Arab women. Frantz Fanon in Peau noire masques blancs argues that over-fixation in French culture on the reproductive organs of Arabs and Africans is a way to deny their intellectual capacities (133-145). Despite its indictment of
colonial violence, Farrère’s story depicting a female character capable of projecting breast milk through the air inscribes itself into an iconographic tradition that minimizes the intellectual abilities of the colonized by emphasizing their reproductive functions. Farrère’s text is thus marked by what Ali Behdad terms an “ideological split.” Farrère indicts colonization by highlighting its violence, and he simultaneously reinforces colonial imagery by using an animalistic female construction as the hook of his story. Had the woman outwitted or outfought the protagonist, the story would be less titillating. Thus, even as he challenges the practices of colonization, Farrère, for increased literary effect, reinforces the representation of colonized women as carnal rather than intellectual, a construction that is itself one of the tenets of the mission civilisatrice.

The trope of native women as hyper-carnal appears also in Aguedal, in Jules Borély’s “Ahmed et Zohra” printed in 1933. In contrast to “Les trois gouttes de lait,” wherein there is violent confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized, and the authorial voice sides with the colonized in “Ahmed et Zohra” colonizer and colonized are complicit, and the harem, far from a metaphor of tyranny to be condemned, becomes a site of immeasurable pleasure for the European man. “Ahmed,” a male intermediary who grants the European man access to a group of local women, is a figure comparable to the emasculated harem-keeper eunuch popular in French literature since the translation of Thousand and One Nights. Ahmed collaborates with the colonizer by granting him access to local women and intervening so that the women welcome the colonizer into their henna application ritual. The French protagonist-colonizer narrates:

...venant avec Ahmed, je m’approche de la chambre, basse et sans fenêtres, où Zohra se tient avec ses amies. La porte est voilée d’un rideau de mousseline qui suffit à les cacher. / Nous tendons l’oreille.../ Soudain, partent brusquement des éclats de rire. On voit, du dedans, à travers le voile; elles nous ont aperçus. / Zohra m’invite à entrer. / Ahmed pousse le rideau. (39)

...coming with Ahmed, I approached the bedroom, low and windowless, where Zohra was with her girlfriends. The door was veiled with a muslin curtain that was sufficient to hide them. / We perked up our ears.... / Suddenly bursts of laughter broke out. They could see from inside through the veil; they had perceived us. / Zohra invited me to enter. / Ahmed pushed aside the curtain.

In this passage, the space of the cloistered women’s quarters becomes a theatrical stage, covered by curtains that are then opened by the male collaborator. The complicity between colonized women, colonized man, and colonial gazer is symbolized in the bursts of laughter, and this conviviality creates the light-hearted seduction of the piece. No longer dramatic scenes of battle in which women defend themselves with hyper-fertile maternal milk, in this story, the opposition between colonizer and colonized is transformed into a salon game, and the colonial setting is assimilated to a French court with its romantic intrigues.

After the colonial narrator is granted access, the next several paragraphs present a detailed description of the women, of which I present only the climactic passages:

On reste confus de l’ampleur royale de son postérieur. Quelle majesté!
Sa poitrine a l’opulence des courges. / Son visage est bourbonien. De grands yeux de bovidé cernés de kohl sous les cils. Un gros nez gourmand. / J’avoue que le plus sucré des sourires frise cette chair. (40)

One remains confused by the royal expanse of her posterior. What majesty! Her chest has the opulence of squashes. / Her face is like the Bourbons. Big oxen eyes outlined in kohl below the lashes. A big gourmand nose. / I admit that the most sugary of smiles brushes that flesh.

That each of these sentences stands alone as a paragraph encourages readers to slow their reading pace and savor each gastronomic image fully before moving to the next. From highly fertile and combative animal-like beings, women are here transformed metaphorically into food for the consumption of French men through the facilitation of colonized men. Edward Said’s observation about orientalist representations of women is particularly apt to describe Borély’s female constructions: “They express unlimited sensuality. They are more or less stupid, and above all, they are willing” (207). In stark contrast to the confrontational, if non-intellectual, woman in “Les trois gouttes de lait,” Zohra and her girlfriends are complicit and docile.

Such representations of colonized women as laughing objects of pleasure must be understood in the context of a France that is grappling with an increasingly vocal women’s movement. Borély, rather than praising the modernism and emancipation embodied in French women’s dress, evokes the colonized woman as a site of nostalgia for women who delight in being the object of male desire. Like Farrère, Borély exploits the trope of oriental woman as hyper-carnal, using it not to condemn colonial practice but to present the colonial terrain as a space where French men can satisfy their sexual desires with women not yet tainted by modern feminist sensibilities. The confrontation between colonizer and colonized is depicted only to dissolve it and enrich the illicit sexual gratification promised by the story. One could certainly read this story as an ironic critique of orientalist images. Explicit reference to the French monarchy might suggest that Borély recognizes the extent to which the literary trope of the exotic harem is modeled upon nostalgic desire for a bygone era of French monarchy. Authorial intent aside, however, the constructions of women in the story rely upon and reinforce a form of male desire that prefers women as sexual objects rather than independent subjects.

A different construction of North African women can be found in François Bonjean’s recurring rubric in TAM: Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc. Bonjean represents a distinct approach because he studied Arabic and Islam and recognized in North Africa the presence of a civilization that predated colonization. This sensitivity is evident even in the title of his recurring rubric—“Maghreb.” Maghreb is the transliteration of the Arabic name for Morocco, and it means “western region.” Although Maghreb has been codified into the French language as a term designating the region comprised of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, the term rarely appears in periodicals from the colonial era. L’Afrique du nord is the term commonly used. By adopting a transliterated Arabic term rarely used in the French language, Bonjean demonstrates his interest in the language and terminology of the civilization that predated colonial enterprise. Abdeljalil Lahjomri in Le Marco des heures françaises interprets Bonjean’s affinity for eastern civilizations thus:
…[e]n poursuivant jusque dans les plus intimes secrets, une âme et un monde, qui leur étaient étrangers…ils poursuivaient une image d’eux-mêmes que leur propre civilisation ne leur renvoyait plus. C’est pour échapper à cette perte d’identité, que François Bonjean recherchait, loin et hors de l’Occident, une atmosphère plus propice pour faire s’épanouir un tempérament impétueux et une sensibilité aiguë.

(20)

…by pursuing to its most intimate secrets a soul and a world that was foreign to them….they pursued an image of themselves that their own civilization no longer reflected back to them. It was to escape a loss of identity that François Bonjean sought, far beyond the Occident, an atmosphere more conducive for an impetuous temperament and acute sensitivity to blossom.

Given his interest in self-reinvention through an alternate mode of being, Bonjean’s fictional contributions demonstrate a level of attention to cultural difference that is not found in other texts. That said, like Borély, Bonjean represents the colonized terrain to facilitate his commentary on French civilization more so than to promote understanding of the Muslim civilizations he evidently respects.

Bonjean’s “Contes de Lalla Touria: histoire du coeur qui parle au coeur” (“Tales of Lalla Touira: Story of the Heart that Speaks to the Heart”) printed in 1948 depicts a Muslim woman as an explicit counterpoint to materialistic and independent French women. The protagonist, Lalla Touria, is a pious and educated Muslim woman with a loving husband but a life full of suffering. From its start, the story destabilizes certain popular constructions of native women: Lalla Touria is not uneducated, and her husband is not a tyrant. The heroine commits suicide to escape a life fated from its start to be difficult. After her death she is revived by a man who “ne pensait qu’au plaisir” “thought only of pleasure” and she immediately demonstrates an opposite character: “Pour la première fois de sa vie, elle but du vin….La malheureuse, en effet, s’était reveillée une autre” “For the first time in her life, she drank some wine….The unlucky one, in effect, had been awoken as someone else.” The new woman that Lalla Touria has become—the antithesis to the pious and educated woman she had been—is a woman who prizes her liberty. “Elle mena dès lors, la vie de certaines femmes veuves ou divorcées, qui tiennent avant tout à ce qu’elles appellent leur liberté” “She led, after that, the life of certain widowed or divorced women, who insist above all on what they call their liberty” (8). The liberated Lalla Touria is ultimately reduced to begging after living a dissipate life.

The contrast between the pious, dutiful Lalla Touria and the dissipate, independent Lalla Touria offers a critique of modernism and women’s emancipation, whether in France or in the colonies. Whereas articles on fashion in L’Afrique du nord illustée and an editorial on the Moroccan princess Lalla Aicha in TAM reflect a preference for modernization and emancipation as embodied in French women, Bonjean demonstrates a preference for women who deflect such aspirations. The death of Lalla Touria and her revival can be read as a metaphor for colonization and the gradual assimilation of colonized women to a French version of modern, secular, liberated womanhood that Bonjean finds distasteful. Despite variance between them, fictional constructions of colonized women dovetail in the understanding that France is the space of
modern women and the colonial territory the space of non-modern women, this latter condition often preferred to the former.

In conclusion, constructions of the colonized woman in colonial periodicals affirm the trope of African/eastern woman as an antithetic counterpoint to modernity. Whereas editorialists are adamant and unambiguous in their preference for modernism as defined in Europe and envisioned as emanating outwards to the colonies, fiction writers express discomfort with both colonial practice and modern French society. French women’s emancipation is a central theme for colonial writers—whether as a pretext for continued colonization as a means to emancipate oppressed women in the colonies, or as a facet of modernity from which the colonial terrain promises escape. Even though fiction writers often criticize colonial practice, the colonial territory is nonetheless upheld because it represents a refuge where French men can find a version of woman—devoted mother, sexual object, or pious wife—that is judged extinct in hexagonal France. Colonial writers cannot ultimately condemn the colonial enterprise to which they are inextricably linked. Despite differing ideologies and differing assessments of progress, fictional and non-fictional contributions printed in colonial periodicals converge in their construction of the colonized woman as counterpoint to the modern French woman.

Works Cited


