

**DEMOCRATIC AND POPULAR REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**  
**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ABDELHAMID IBN BADIS \_ Mostaganem \_**  
**FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**  
**MASTERS DEGREE IN " LITERATURE AND CIVILISATION "**



**Women's Oppression and Resistance in Nathaniel  
Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) and Malika  
Mokeddem's L'Interdite (1993)**

**PRESENTED BY: Bouzouina Asmaa**

**SUPERVISOR : MRS. N. Abdelhadi**

**Jury Members:**

- MRS. Djaafri
- MRS. Aissat

**ACADEMIC YEAR 2016 / 2017**

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to send my sincere appreciation to my supervisor **Mrs Abdelhadi** for her support throughout this process and her effort to help me complete this research as well as her understanding, patience and optimistic attitudes.

I would like to thank all my teachers in the department of English.

## **Dedication**

I would like to thank my parents who encourage and support me through my many years of studying. I would like to thank my brothers and my sister who support me to accomplish this research.

Special thanks for my best friends Ahlem, Hafsa and Romaissa for their time, help and support through my research.

## **Abstract**

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Malika Mokkedem's *L'Interdite* are two novels written in two different periods of time. The former is in the early strict seventeenth century and the later in the violent backdrop of the civil war and the oppressive atmosphere created by the FIS in Algeria. The purpose of our dissertation is to study the ways the two female protagonists challenge in the two different patriarchal societies; both authors created powerful heroines that rebel in a society where women suffered from all kinds of harshness, suffering, as well as men dominance. It aims at proving that each of them struggle and resist against the society conducted by men. The textual framework is based on how Hester Prynne and Sultana Medjahed become totally different from the traditional women who were always obedient to the unfair rules enacted by men. The two heroines could hardly resist proving themselves as a strong women as well as having their own freedom and identity is their main objective.

To attain the goal we have set ourselves above, we have adopted a feminist literary theory exemplified in the works of Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Julia Kristeva's theory of —*Etrangés a nous-mêmes*—. This paper concludes that both Hester and Sultana are victimized by their societies; both of them are manipulated as their societies want. It also concludes that the Puritan and the Algerian societies are patriarchal. Thus, this approaches we have thought are the most appropriate and suitable theories likely to help us prove that both Hester Prynne and Sultana Medjahed struggle and resist under the two above patriarchal societies dominated by men.

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## **General introduction**

Throughout literary history, women have been the main topic of many works of fiction and have been portrayed in differing manners. Actually, women have not necessarily had the position and equality they have got today. Women were inferior compared to men. They lived in a male-dominated society that portrayed them as an inferior race. They were abused, neglected, deprived from their rights and maltreated by their parents, brothers and husbands. Unfortunately, they regarded them as their slaves and tool of pleasures. Despite of man's power and society restraints, women battled to maintain and resisted against all the obstructions. They fought for equality and struggled to get their privileges, get their place in society and prove themselves. Women's image and role in society depicted in a number of literary works.

On the one hand, the character role that women held in early American literature was nearly non-existent before 1800s. In the beginning, women were portrayed as a members of society who served the man as wife and continued to be silent influences to man's judgments.

Eventually, this portrayal advanced to woman of thought who want to rebel from this social norms. In later centuries, women grew from the backdrop and closer into the spotlight. They truly became more prominent supporting. In the beginning of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, womens' characters reached a new frontier in the American literature when they were continually used as main characters. At this time, an important change happened, not only for the reason that of women into main character roles, but also in the portrayal of women.

On the other hand, Colonialism, however, get an attractive role in the history and the presentations of Arab women. The difference between women in European countries and in the Orient were forgotten and focused on the western literature. Women of the Maghreb were thought in the classics of French literature and painting. Indeed, newspaper advertisements and the cinema were programs by which stereotypes of veiled Algerian women was diffused and portrayed. Women, then, were depicted as symbols of pleasure and sex without

recognition of their actual character. The role that Algerian women held was that of silent and obedient victims who had been repressed and imprisoned behind of powerlessness, oppressed by their patriarch culture and strict religion.

As the title indicates, this dissertation is concerned with the study of women's oppression and resistance in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Malika Mokkedem's *L'Interdite* (1993). The two novels do not belong to the same context. *The Scarlet Letter* is set in the seventeenth century New England while *L'Interdite* was set during the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s. Both of these literary masterpieces bring stories about two female protagonists; Hester Prynne and Sultana Medjahed. It analyses how these two heroines struggle and resist in their rigid patriarchal societies, the American Puritan society and The Algerian one, and finally to survive in such oppressive societies.

On the one hand, I will examine Hawthorne's depiction of the oppressed women during the Puritan society and their inferior placement. Through the 1850s, American women were conditioned to be submissive, obedient with their males' counterparts as wives and daughters. Thus, women were considered unwise and must be placed under men's control and guidance.

Hawthorne's female protagonist named Hester Prynne appears as a symbol of resistance and struggle in a rigid society where men appeared as a dominant force. Hawthorne portrays the fate of Hester Prynne, a woman who is condemned by the Puritan laws to wear the letter A on her bosom as a punishment of her adultery. The female heroine struggled against misery, poverty, loneliness, and finally could survive. Indeed, Hester Prynne seems an independent strong woman who could defeat her tough circumstances and talk about her daughter all alone.

She faces her trials with courage, strength, and humility, and proves to be a strong character, challenging the patriarchal power. Thus, Hester Prynne turns the meaning of the letter A from adulteress to able, challenging the harsh laws of the puritan society.

On the Other hand, Mokkedem's most famous autobiographical novel *L'Interdite* is one of the first of Mokkedem's novels to appear in English. The novel shows the Algerian society for the extremely and ugliness of the sexism which cramps, hampers, and damages the lives of all its women during the Algerian's civil war. During that time, women's rights

remained severely limited by family codes, which were based on Sharia and Islamic laws.

They suffered the greatest terror during this decade. They quickly became both “targets and pawns in the power struggles between the Islamists and the government.” According to the The Islamic Salvation Front, women do not have the right to work outside the home, become political leaders, or even participating in sports. They should not wear makeup, perfume, fitted clothes, or mingle with men in public. Moreover, they had to put up the veil as well as their freedom was under the power of Islamist parties. Malika Mokeddem’s *L’Interdite* extremely pictures women's suffering and struggling to achieve self fulfillment as well as happiness. Mokeddem’s associates limitations on the freedoms of women exacted by fundamentalist interpretation of Islam in Algeria (The Islamic Salvation Front or the FIS). Most importantly, Mokeddem employs the female heroine named Sultana Medjahed who creates her own life in the exile returning back to her native country and suddenly finds herself maltreated by the Algerian society. In fact, the protagonist who is the narrator herself is a bitter, disappointed, and angry woman. She finds herself clashing between her origins and the westernized life. Thus, the maltreatment of the Algerian society towards Sultana pushes her to show details against the backdrop of the current events in Algeria.

From studying the two novels, we discovered many thematic links between them. Despite the difference of culture, time, and space both novels lift in the universal values concerning women’s oppression, resistance and struggle to uphold their principles against the suppressive, hegemonic, and dominating values or power in their particular societies. Thus, my work attempts to deal with bringing the background of women’s oppression and their resistance in their patriarchal societies.

Many critics consider the heroines Hester and Sultana as “Woman of struggle and resistance”, a woman whose life and freedom are ruined by her rebellion against the moral standards of society. *The Scarlet letter* is one of Nathaniel Hawthorne most celebrated works. The novel has received a considerable body of criticism. In fact, these contemporary scholars focus on the female heroine, Hester Prynne. Firstly, Nina Baym and Michael J. Colacurcio who have agreed that “Hester achieved at least partial self-fulfillment. Hester Prynne is an example of a self-determining individual, who resists the tyranny of the puritans, patriarchal social order. Though her power has been controlled, she remains strong and survives by being silent and performing typically charitable tasks: helping and taking care for

the sick. In the end, she gains wisdom but also loneliness.” The two critics have drawn attention to Hester Prynne’s strength of character, courage, and persistence in her desires and opinions in the face of oppression.

Michael J. Colacurcio touches on this by stating that “Hester challenges a whole community in an absolutely fundamental way”. Hester challenges everything that her society represents including religion, social hierarchies, and political structure. In the same way, Baym states in *The Scarlet Letter: A Reading*, “Hester is a heroine because she is deeply implicated in, and responsive to, the gender structure of her society.” Her evolving ideas about equality and oppression are beyond her time period, and cast Hester into the role of an independent, brave, and strong woman.

Another critic named Gary Scharnhorst says: “Hester character is of a strong mould, without being unwomanly; she is of far less effeminate texture than the man she loved so truly, and for whom she suffered so bravely. Under the hard Puritan treatment she somewhat hardens. The blazing brand upon her breast does not melt, but indurate her heart.”

Also, Quan Wang states that “Hester, all by herself, a lonely woman struggling independently for survival in a totally alien land, wins certain excusable sympathy toward her transgressive behavior from the reader.” In other words, Hester faces many challenges that force her to question her place within her society. She learns how to resist and what it means to be an independent woman and mother struggling within a society dominated by men. Through her trials as a persecuted sinner, Hester contemplates the future of society under a patriarchal rule, and what must be done in order for equality to be established.

Karen Todd says in one of her works about Hester Prynne that “your true character is revealed by the clarity of your convictions, the choices you make, and the promises you keep. Hold strongly to your principles and refuse to follow currents of convenience. What you do defines who you are, and who you are...you are forever.” Hester is defined with the author's help with a strong, powerful character, the one who bears up at the harsh proofs of life. She forces herself to be strong. She does her best to be a model for her daughter in this cruel life.

Malika Mokkedem’s novel *L’Interdite* also received a huge number of criticisms, Nadia

Setti asserts that in Mokkedem’s female protagonists, we find: “fréquemment l’acte ou le geste féministe d’émancipation et de revendication, le refus d’une féminité coincée dans une

représentation, masculine, patriarcale, qui engage donc une rupture épistémologique, historique et politique avec les représentations sociales et culturelles du féminin. » This assertion that Mokkedem's main preoccupation in her fictional work is to portray the predicament of women in postcolonial Algeria is similarly the focus of Belkheir Khaidia's short article in which she proclaims that: Elle [Mokeddem] transpose dans la fiction des situations vécues par de nombreuses femmes, dont elle-même, bousculant des traditions séculaires, refusant une tradition misogyne qui repose sur l'opposition binaire homme/femme allant jusqu'à priver les femmes du droit à la vie ». Another critic like Golley have read Arab Muslim literature and depict them as a positive and strong figures, knowledgeable about issues in their communities and world.”

All the previous mentioned critics agree on the fact that both Hawthorne and Mokkedem's female protagonists are meant to be as the best examples of women who lived in harsh and oppressing societies dominated by men. Then, both of them have the strength to overcome the harshness of their rigid societies. In fact, the female protagonists Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* and Sultana Medjahed in *L'Interdite* find power to resist, struggle and improve themselves. In those times, it was difficult to grow by yourself unlike today, because there was no liberty, freedom, there were just strict rules that you had to follow. Both of them disobeyed but they knew the key to go on. However, all these critics have not *been* compared between these two female protagonists. Hence, it is for my research project to foreground this significant issue in both works by studying both protagonists' oppression and resistance in their rigid societies. More importantly, our attempt is to reach a better understanding of the present problematic which will be made within the framework of feminism, an approach which seeks to question and transform andocentric systems of thoughts which posit the male as the norm. Through the Feminist approach, we would like to answer questions like:

- How are the female heroines, Hester Prynne and Sultana Medjahed, portrayed in both novels?

- How do Hester Prynne and Sultana Medjahed rebel and resist against their societies and prove themselves?

- How do their societies perceive their struggle?

- How do their struggle contribute in changing the frame of women's role and status?

- Do the novels depict the historical evolution of women's role through time?

Since the topic of this present work is centered on the female protagonists and their

relation with their patriarchal societies and how they struggle in order to prove themselves; In this context, and from the feminist perspective, we will rely on the work of Simone De Beauvoir's theory of *The Second Sex* to examine the female heroine —Hester Prynne— in *The Scarlet Letter*. Moreover, it is crucial to rely on Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* as a theoretical paradigm to analyze the character of Sultana Medjahed in Malika Mokeddem's **L'Interdite**.

When looking at Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel **The Scarlet Letter** and Malika Mokkedem's novel **L'Interdite**, it is clear that a feminist reading of these works is necessary. Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Julia Kristeva's *Etrangés a nous-mêmes* theories will be especially interesting in studying the female characters in the two novels mentioned above. In fact, while these canonical novels have been analyzed from a feminist perspective previously, we have not found any research where they are compared using Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Julia Kristeva's *Etrangés a nous-mêmes* theory. When analyzing *The Scarlet Letter* and *L'Interdite*, we will demonstrate that Hester and Sultana are two feminist role models due to their strength and resistance.

## **Theoretical Approaches**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The process of women's oppression and resistance is explained from several perspectives, but the most influential ones are supported by feminist studies like those of Simon de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva. These feminist critics show how women are oppressed and get resisted in their rigid patriarchal societies. In fact, this research introduces theoretical approaches using Simon de Beauvoir theory *The Second Sex* and Julia Kristeva theory of otherness. They extremely bring notions about the problems of the oppressed women and how they are othered as a result of interrelated biological, sociological, and historical elements. Most importantly, the oppression and the resistance of the female heroines in *The Scarlet Letter* and *L'Interdite* will not be discussed in much detail here since they will be outlined in more detail in the methodology that follows and will be the subject of close scrutiny.

Firstly, the concept of patriarchy has been central to many feminist theorists. In fact, the term patriarchy defines woman as incomplete, dark, passive, irrational, and reduces her as the 'Other'. Indeed, it conditions women to be disguised and frightened of her own sexuality and surrender her body and individuality to the masculine order. Female body becomes a space colonized by a man and patriarchal values.

### **2.1 Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*:**

Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was first published in France in 1949 under the title *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Appearing almost midway of the two waves of feminism, the early 1900s and the late 1960s. It is a hugely influential book which laid the groundwork for second-wave feminism. Where first-wave feminism was concerned with women's suffrage and property rights, the second wave broadened these concerns to include sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, and so on. All that started with Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, where Beauvoir outlines the ways in which woman is perceived as 'other' in a patriarchal society, second to man, which is considered and treated as the 'first' or default sex. (De Beauvoir S. 1973.p :46).

Simone de Beauvoir analyses women's condition, treatment, status throughout history, investigating womanhood. She began to work on *The Second Sex* while French women were pressured by society, by the ambient and patriarchal system to become only wives and mothers. Beauvoir analyses women's situation naming them the absolute other. She encouraged intellectual, cultural and economical ascension of women. The famous statement of Simone de Beauvoir "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", She expresses in *The Second Sex* her idea about woman, her condition, her role:

"Woman is well placed to describe society, the world, the epoch to which she belongs, but only up to a certain point. Truly great works are those that put the world entirely in question. Now that woman doesn't do. She will critique, she will contest in detail; but to put the world completely into question one must feel oneself to be profoundly responsible for the world. Now she isn't to the extent that it's a world of men; she doesn't take charge in the way the great artist does. She doesn't radically contest the world, and this is why in the history of humanity there isn't a woman who has created a great religious or philosophical system, or even a truly great ideology; for that, what's necessary is in some sense to do away with everything that's given [faire table rase de tout le donné]—as Descartes did away with all knowledge—and to start afresh. Well, woman, by reason of her condition, isn't in a position to do that." (p:13)

De Beauvoir is fully questioned the role of woman in a patriarchal society. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Beauvoir examines the notion of women as 'Other' in patriarchal society. Her analysis focuses on the concept of the 'Other'. It is the social construction of women as the other that Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression. Women as 'Other' are oppressed. Men are thought to be the 'Self, the free being, self-determining agents who define their own existence, whereas women always remain the 'Other', the passive, object and the meaning of their existence is not defined by themselves. (De Beauvoir S.1949)

Simon de Beauvoir argues that men and women had never shared life equally and that if women lived under males' domination, it is only due to the inactive resistance and the will of some women to remain the other since they fail to change their conditions. For De Beauvoir, women's agitation and the way of claiming their rights was not strong and efficient enough to ensure and get rights beyond those that were offered to them. De Bouvoir explains that women's inability to react and their acceptance to keep on living as they are is due to the

fact that their being dependent upon males and their satisfaction to remain the other and to keep their emotional life.

As de Beauvoir states, we can expect so much from the woman that got oppression and turns: La femme est vouée à l'immoralité parce que le morale consiste pour elle à incarner une inhumaine entité: la femme forte la mère aimable, l'honnête femme, etc. dès qu'elle pense, qu'elle rêve, qu'elle dort, qu'elle désire, qu'elle respire sans consigne, elle trahit l'idéal masculin<sup>15</sup>. Accordingly, the oppressed woman can not normally be involved in a rigid society and fully accomplish their full duties and rules. (De Beauvoir S.1949.p:15).

De Beauvoir also deals with the category of women who are regarded as prostitutes in chapter "Prostituées et hétaires". De Beauvoir sympathizes with prostitutes and considers them as the victim of society saying « La prostituée est un bouc émissaire; l'homme se délivre sur elle de la turpitude et il la renie. Qu'un statut légal la mette sous une surveillance policière ou qu'elle travaille dans la clandestinité, elle est en tout cas traitée en paria. » This means that the man exploits the woman and uses her to satisfy his sexual desire but at the end discharges all that hatred on her.(De Beauvoir S.1949.p:16).

De Beauvoir comes further so that she parallels the position of the so-called prostitute with that of the married woman. She justifies this by saying the sexual act for both prostitutes and wife is a —service“ and that the two live under the dominance of the male. The difference between the prostitute and the married woman is the question of motherhood as La maternité n'est respectée que chez la femme mariée; la fille mere demeure un objet de scandale et l'enfant est pour elle un lourd handicap. “The illegitimate child is in fact in many societies. (T. Clough (1994). TheSociologicalQuarterly. P:473 The Hybrid Criticism of Patriarchy: Rereading Kate Millett's "Sexual Politics")

“Un tel handicap social et économique pour la femme non mariée qu'on voit des jeunes filles se suicider quand elles se savent enceintes, et des filles-mères égorger le nouveau-né; un pareil risque constitue un frein sexuel assez puissant pour que beaucoup de jeunes filles observent la chasteté pré-nuptiale exigée par moeurs.“(TheSociologicalQuarterly.p:457)

Simone De Beauvoir ends by revealing that though women work to better their conditions and gain much attention, there still exist differences between males and females. As matter of fact, their weaknesses, inferiority, affections, eroticism are included to their innate characters which differentiate them from men. To summarize, though women cannot

be at the level of men due to the differences in their character, they can at least construct and establish brotherhood.

### **3.1 Julia Kristeva theory of *Etrangé a nous-mêmes***

In order to analyse and develop the above mentioned issue, we feel the need of the two critical ingredients: the primary source *L'Interdite* by Malika Mokeddem and a theory which will be the basic reference for our thoughts and analysis. We shall appeal to Julia Kristeva's theory of *Etrangé a nous-mêmes* in order to study the issue of women's oppression and resistance shedding light on the struggle and the resistance of the female protagonist in her patriarchal society.

Julia Kristeva theory of otherness '*Etrangé a nous-mêmes*' is built upon a study of the status of the foreigners in different societies in different period of times. Kristeva's theory is a theory of subversion, marginality, and strangeness. In *Stranger to Ourselves* Kristeva places strangeness as a synonymous to otherness. In other words, woman is considered as the other, foreign, and stranger.

In *Stranger to Ourselves*, Kristeva gives a definition of the foreigner: the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. *Stranger to Ourselves* is a reflection on foreignness and foreigners. It sympathizes with the problems and thoughts of the foreigner as well as those of people who live with foreigners and even with the troublesome discovery of finding the foreigner in oneself. The foreigner 'then is something hidden in ourselves, something with the potential to destroy home' and something that is beyond understanding 'or relations with each other.

Like Sultana Medjahed who is exiled to France, Julia Kristeva was born in Bulgaria and settled in France, she herself in some ways reflects the foreigner. She states that living with the other, stranger, faces us the possibility of being another'. Accepting the state of being the other is painful: Being alienated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that exquisite distance within which preserve pleasure begins, as well as the possibility of my

imagining and thinking' It is clear that through the process of alienating the self and discovering the stranger in oneself.

Kristeva states that living with the other '(stranger) faces us with the possibility of being another and being in his place means to imagine and make oneself to oneself 'Accepting the foreigner, the feeling of being a foreign can be simultaneously painful and generative: Being alienated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that exquisite distance within which perverse pleasure begins, as well as the possibility of my imagining and thinking'. Kristeva says that since the foreigner is within us; so, we are foreigners. As well as, Kristeva writes: The foreigner feels strengthened by the distance that detached him from the others as it does from himself and gives him the lofty sense not so much of holding the truth but of making it and himself relative while others fall victim to the ruts of monovalency having a valency of one (atoms). (Kristeva, Julia (1988), *Etrangéanos-mêmes*, London: Galimard, 1991.p:13-14).

### **3.1 Conclusion**

Although the two theories belong to different backgrounds, Simone de Beauvoir's theory of *The Second Sex* and Julia Kristeva's theory of *Etrangéanos-mêmes*. To be more explicit, the two theories are a detailed study of feminism, all the factors, and causes that lead to the degradation of the place of women. On one hand, Julia Kristeva explores how the question of the foreigner has been considered throughout the history of religious, political, and social thoughts. On other hand, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* demonstrates the position and the place of women in society and their perception by the opposite sex. We found that both Julia Kristeva and Simone de Beauvoir have dealt with the oppressed woman within the patriarchal society. As well as, we find out that amongst the subject that attracted their attentions and which greatly dealt with in their novels is the miserable situation of woman within their rigid societies.

## **The Scarlet letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850)**

### **2.1.1. Hester Prynne's Oppression and Resistance**

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a classic novel written in the 19th century American literature. The novel is essentially a story of crime, sin and punishment. It tells the ignominy or humiliation of a sinful woman who has broken scriptural and statutory law of the Puritan patriarchal society. Hester Prynne, the female protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, is one of those people whose fate conducts her toward committing adultery. Hester puts herself against her society; she is obliged to wear a scarlet letter 'A' on her bosom as a stigma showing her as an 'adulteress'. She gets punished and exiled from the society where she struggles and resists hard proving herself. She has evolved from the shame to a well respected individual in the Puritan community. Thus, the aim of this part is to analyze the character of the female heroine's struggle and resistance.

For our theoretical approach, we will apply Simon De Beauvoir's the Second Sex to analyze Hester's oppression and resistance within the Puritan patriarchal society. Contrary to women of the Puritan society who were subjected to discrimination, humiliation, physical abuse and maltreatment by men, Hester is a woman of strength and resistance. Despite punishment of committing adultery, she would never let the Puritan society trace her destiny.

It is pivotal to provide a background of the Puritan society and its rigid laws which are considered as the main causes that sentence Hester to the damnation. Firstly, the Puritan society of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is dark, harsh, and painful. The more severe it is, the more it prevents the individuals from exerting their desires, leading them eventually to lose their identity. If someone breaks the enforced laws, he/she will certainly face a severe punishment. Thus, he/she will either accept the punishment or surrender to the society's rigid laws or refuses, rebels, and struggles to defend himself. Puritans viewed sin as wrong in all instances. There was never an acceptable reason for sinning. According to Deborah Madsen "The Scarlet Letter embodies Hawthorne's best-known representation of the stern and gloomy Puritans that characterize the colonial New England" (21 Madsen, Deborah L. Feminist Theory and Literary Practice. London: Pluto Press, 2000.)

Hawthorne's heroine Hester is a poor female sinner. She is punished and alienated from her society. Her daughter suffers also from the society's effects because of her mother's adultery. Hester is also brought introduced to the pitiless domain of the Puritan religion.

Being a new member of New England and her state of being a married woman increase the condemnation of people towards her. For the puritans, Hester is a shame and she deserves the hardest punishment because she destroys the pious image of the puritan woman.

The miserable story of Hester Prynne begins when she travels from Old England to New England with the agreement of her husband, Roger Chillingworth, who pursues her later on. In fact, Hester's life is changed completely. In New England, Hester is forced to follow the Puritanical codes meanwhile she is a lonely woman who must follow the rules of a new society in order to survive. However, Hester violates the rules of her society and betrays her husband. Consequently, Hester is forced to wear the scarlet letter *A* on her bosom as a sign of her sin as an adulterer.

In fact, people of New England had to follow the values, codes, and traditions of their Puritan society. If someone infringed the latter, he or she will certainly receive the hardest punishment then gets alienated. Precisely, women were obliged to believe and to submit to those rules. Hester Prynne does not follow the rules of the puritans and draws a new way with her lover. Because she dares to trust herself to believe in the possibility of a new morality in the new world, she achieves spiritual greatness in spite of her own human weakness, in spite of the prejudices of her Puritan society, . . . in spite of the prejudices of her creator himself." (P. Sherman, "Hawthorne: A Puritan Critic of Puritans," *Americans* 1922, p. 148.)

In the seventeenth century, a Good Wife of the Puritan society was considered to be spiritually and mentally weak. Unlike the Puritan women, Hester embodies the male ideal of mental strength and assertiveness. In fact, Hawthorne compares her to men of the sword casting away "the fragments of a broken chain", reinforcing the strength that she shows throughout the novel. Her strength and assertiveness are seen from the very opening scene when she is exposed as a sinner in front of the inhabitants of the Puritans. Hester refuses to play the role of dependent, weak woman. (Hill Lindley, *Susan A History of Women and Religion in America*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox P17, 1996.)

There are some critics who agree with the view that Hester is a "strong woman" and do not consider her as weak like other puritan women. This is shown when Hester is asked to

reveal the name of her fellow sinner, Roger Chillingworth, she remains silent. She uses silence as the powerful weapon to show her strength and resistance against the Puritans. In the same way, she endures her punishment alone. As Leland S. Person in his article "Hester's Revenge: The Power of Silence in *The Scarlet Letter*" studies her silence in the context of feminine criticism that, "It is both fitting and ironic that Hester's revenge should take a "silent" form: fitting because of Dimondale's own silence; ironic because, as feminist critics have argued, women are customarily "silenced" in male-authored texts in order to be rendered powerless". In fact, Hester states "and would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!". By refusing to name her fellow sinner, she has to bear the burden of their sin alone. Standing exposed in the market place is a test. However, she is able "to convert the scene into a kind of lurid triumph" and she stands tall and calm. The Puritans intend to break Hester down calling her malefactors, a female criminal followed with public humiliation, criticism, and shaming words. Hester strongly uses silence as a powerful weapon to assert her resistance against her rigid society and the Puritans' cruel and merciless actions. (Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. 1850, 2009.)

Hester is a character who marks a wave, the feminist wave. Hawthorne's heroine is able to demonstrate to the world that although she is a woman she could do. In this way, although she wears the mark of sin, she deserves to be respected because of her getting through. At each step there is something that spurs in her a kind of repulse, that no one deserves or wants her near or in that town. People humiliate her, try to banish her, because she is considered the devil. She does not care about the voices around; she only knows that she has a daughter to rise and that she must go on and survives.

In addition, sin, with the weakening power it has, in the hands of Hawthorne, gives strength to Hester. It is through sin that Hester reaches experience just to enter the state of organized innocence where she can experience love and the one life running through all. Meanwhile, Hester does not regret what she has done, for the best come out of it and could change her life completely: Pearl; "in giving her [Pearl] existence, a great law had been broken". Hester knows and morally accepts her sinful act and the judgment that follows showing no resentments or challenges to the power holders. (Leland S. Person, Jr. "Hester's Revenge: The Power of Silence in *The Scarlet Letter*".)

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, declares that "[o]ur societies are patriarchal and a woman must break the bonds in order to be herself as a human being". Drawing on

Beauvoir's view, Hester challenges the rigid puritan society, she is disobedient to her husband, she disobeys the patriarchy and her minister when she courageously prevents the authorities from taking Pearl away from her. She defiantly says to the Governor and Arthur: "[...] Ye shall not take her! I will die first!" and "[...] Look thou to it! I will not lose the child! Look to it!". (Leland S. Person, Jr. "Hester's Revenge: The Power of Silence in the Scarlet Letter".)

Hester stands up for herself and strongly argues her case against the powerful patriarch, and wins. In other words, Hester Prynne does not conform to the expected female of the puritan patriarchal society. As one critic states, "Good wives were supposed to be obedient and not challenge male authorities such as husbands and ministers".

Hester is independent; her strong personality was shown when she struggle alone in her life without the help of any man. In fact, her independence also contributes to her refusal to be dominated by her society and its judgment. Her illegitimate daughter suffers also from the puritan patriarchal society. Even though needlework is seen as a female art form, "then as now, almost the only one within a woman's grasp", it is this very art that gives Hester her independence. She refuses to run away; instead she stays in the community and bears her "shame" with dignity. Another scene where her independence can be seen is when she meets Arthur in the woods. He pleads with her: "Think for me, Hester! Thou art strong. Resolve for me!". Hester resists by herself by making plans for them to run away together and start a new life, she takes control over the situation and decides what they shall do next. (Barreca, Regina. "Afterword." *The Scarlet Letter*. Ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York: New American Library, 2009.)

The symbol of domination that Hester wears in her bosom changes the meaning of this scarlet letter "A" through her strong and helpful behavior. She lives independently with her daughter, never complains and does not commit any more sins. Barreca claims that Hester defines the letter "rather than letting it define her". Moreover, by being so helpful, the society where she lives sees her in a new light: "Such helpfulness was found in her – so much power to do and power to sympathize that many people refused to interpret the scarlet 'A' by its original signification. They said that it meant "Able" (the scarlet letter p. 152.)

“Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment?”

This quotation essentially proves that Hester has the courage to challenge her patriarchal society as well as the words godly magistrates and worthy gentlemen show the matrons’ respect and admiration of the patriarchy and by contrast their lack of respect for Hester, an ordinary, though sinful, woman. Hester’s resistance is seen when she makes Pearl’s welfare as the centre of the universe. All day long, wherever Hester has to go, Pearl was with her. They are not separated even for a second. Hester is lonely from many points of view and Pearl feels this even she is just a little child. Both of them are inseparable, even when Pearl is a girl, she is always near her mother. The image of Hester and Pearl walking in the central square is like an old picture which depicts a strong, honorable woman near her daughter.

“Nothing was more remarkable than the instinct, as it seemed, with which the child comprehended her loneliness: the destiny that had drawn an inviolable circle round about her: the whole peculiarity, in short, of her position in respect to other children. Never, since her release from prison, had Hester met the public gaze without her. In all her walks about the town, Pearl too, was there: first as the babe in arms, and afterwards as the little girl, small companion of her mother holding a forefinger with her whole grasp, and tripping along the rate of three or four footsteps to one of Hester’s” (The Scarlet Letter. Ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York: New American Library, 2009.)

## **2.2 Conclusion**

To sum up, Hester Prynne is powerful and peculiar person. She is the character who slowly becomes a model showing the world that no woman is second to man. In Simone de Beauvoir’s words a woman is not the second sex; she is a different one, a distinct individual with rights, strengths and pursuits. Neither her harsh fate nor social stigma prevents her from being a powerful woman. People humiliate her, try to banish her, because she is considered the devil. She does not care about the voices around; she only knows that she has a daughter to rise and that she must go on and survives.

## **L'Interdite by Malika Mokeddem (1993)**

### **3.1 Sultana Medjahed's Oppression and Resistance**

L'Interdite (1993) is one of Malika Mokeddem's best works that were written and set during the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s. The novel holds an image of the Algerian society precisely women, with its role that is shaped to a large extent by religious doctrine. In fact, Arab Muslim women are frequently presented as veiled victims in a society dominated by male and rigid Islamic religion. According to western discourses, Islam is inherently oppressive to women's freedoms. This attitude is reflected in rhetoric of those like French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who says that veils oppress women. Throughout L'Interdite; Malika Mokeddem brought a picture of a woman that breaks the traditional feminized inferior place in a patriarchal society and religious fundamentalism. (Sarkozy orders bill on banning full Islamic veils," BBC News, 21 April, 2010, n.p)

First and foremost, Julia Kristeva theory of "Otherness" is a suitable paradigm when analyzing Sultana Medjahed's oppression and resistance through her bitter experience in her native country, Algeria. In describing the persistence of features associated with patriarchal gender systems, researchers of Muslim societies often point out that the features in question are prominent across the entire so-called "belt of classic patriarchy." During that time, the civil war of the 1990s, the question of women's status and roles in Muslim cultures and societies was profoundly neglected. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of women and girls were the victims of terrorists who denied not just their womanhood but also their humanity. (John C. Caldwell, Theory of Fertility Decline (London: Academic Press, 1982.n.p)

The case of women's struggle and resistance in Algeria during that time became the subject of many intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon. "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the woman, we must

go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves, and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.” Algeria at time was a spot of fear and violence. The terrorists stepped up their activities, establishing roadblocks and killing everyone ambushed in this way. They massacred women, men, and children. They also kidnapped young girls and women, forcing them to serve as cooks and cleaners in their forest camps and to provide sex when demanded. (Fanon, F. (1965) *Dying Colonialism*. New York, Weidenfeld, 1965. p. 39.)

It is worth saying that Malika Mokeddem’s autobiographical novel shows a bitter truth where society neglected and marginalized women. She writes her novel to denounce the social injustice towards the Algerian women. In fact, Mokeddem left for Paris to complete her studies away from the increasingly oppressive atmosphere in Algeria at the time, which was compounded by the project of Islamisation and its restrictions on violence towards women. As she explains in her own words,

« J’ai eu besoin d’aller finir mes études ailleurs, de respirer un air ailleurs, d’être plus libre. Face à ce constat et sous le coup d’un sentiment d’échec, j’ai refusé une bourse pour ne rien devoir à cet état-là et de me débrouiller par mes propres moyens »

Malika Mokeddem refused all kinds of violence; she wants to gain her own freedom saying:

« Quitter, rompre, pour moi, c’est reprendre un rêve d’amour ignoré, bafoué ou altéré et, aller le faire chanter, danser ailleurs. C’est le refus de l’oppression, de la médiocrité et de la résignation ».

Mokeddem felt that the violent backdrop of the civil war and the oppressive atmosphere created by the FIS and other Islamist groups were threatened her life as well as her freedom. She wants to make sense of her existence in her society which forced her into exile. Consequently, Malika Mokeddem’s painful experience in Algeria lets her writing her autobiographical novel *L’Interdite* under the female protagonist named Sultana Medjahed. (CHAULET ACHOUR Christiane. *Noûn*. Paris, 1999, p.148.)

The female heroine “Sultana Medjahed” realizes that it is only after confronting and subsequently persevering over violent political conflicts, exile, and feelings of solitude and marginalization that she is able to reach a place of true self-knowledge. Sultana lives as a foreigner in exile as well as after her arrival to Algeria. This foreignness often throws feminine characters into a new reality that is marginalized, exiled, and full of despair. Julia

Kristeva underscores the fact that "liberty" as well as "solitude" fashions a double-edged sword that comes from writing in the margins of established norms. Etrangete is a means of resistance, a price that has been paid for crossing over boundaries to foster communication in a public space of active agency. "In crossing a border," Kristeva remarks, "the etranger has changed [her] discomforts into a base of resistance, a citadel of life.... Without a home, [she] disseminates ..., multiplying masks and false selves." (Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers a nous-memes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 23.)

Malika Mokeddem positions her female heroine Sultana between two words; the exile in France where she has adopted her professional career as a doctor and lived freely as a woman; and one Algerian, representing a past full of tormented memories, her lost love, religious fundamentalism, and death. "No it is not a tragedy to be foreign, it is a tormented richness". (Julia Kristeva. p 253.)

Sultana realizes that it is only after confronting and subsequently persevering over violent political conflicts, exile, and feelings of solitude and marginalization that she is able to reach a place of true self-knowledge. The miserable position of the female heroine in her patriarchal society is not only due to her father foreignness, the outsider because of his foreign tribe, but also to the Islamic party or the Front Islamic du Salut (FIS) existed in Algeria and which poses a constant threat from the first hours of her arrival. In fact, during that time women were forced to do things out of their desires preventing them from their rights as well as they should not wear makeup, perfume, fitted clothes, or mingle with men in public; they should wear the Hijab. Thus, women like Sultana Medjahed felt oppressed and forced to do things out of her control.

Mokeddem's female protagonist lives outside the voice of the Arab Muslim women where they are voiceless and oppressive. She left her country because of the oppressive traditions as well as she got the opportunity to carry on her studies far away from her native country. In fact, she has been exposed to different cultures, values, and backgrounds. Moreover, Sultana's returning to her native country caused a felling of hatred towards Algeria. This Algerian heroine has the purpose to defend the marginalized status of women, having the desire of freedom and healing of social ills stating;

“ Si l'Algérie s'était véritablement engagée dans la voie du progrès, si les dirigeants s'étaient attelés à faire évoluer les mentalités, je me serais sans doute apaisée. L'oubli me serait venu peu à peu. Mais l'actualité du pays et le sort des femmes, ici, me replongent sans

cesse dans mes drames passés, m'enchaînent à toutes celles qu'on tyrannise. Les persécutions et les humiliations qu'elles endurent m'atteignent, ravivent mes plaies. L'éloignement n'n'atténue rien. La douleur est le plus fort lien entre les humains. Plus fort que toutes les rancœurs. » (Julia Kristeva.p 228)

Algeria at that time was damaged by terrorism and fear. In fact, Sultana Medjahed received all kinds of harsh treatment and violent words which correspond to the violent socio-political Algeria during the 1990th. Sultana was shocked with the use of the vulgar language by the Algerian people. Moreover, this heroine shows her anger and dissatisfaction with regard to the menacing reality of Algeria of the 1990s. Through expressions such as « Je sursaute. Putain!' Plus que l'image navrante de la rue, plus que la vue du désert, ce mot plante en moi l'Algérie comme un couteau » (I start. 'Whore!' More than the sorrow spectacle of the desert, more than the view of the desert, this drives Algeria into me like a knife). (Julia Kristeva.p.47)

Sultana's returning to her native country forces her to confront her painful childhood memories because of the death of her former lover, Yacine. A doctor in the village. In fact, Yacine's death offers a window to her past and provides a means of closing the gap between the memories of her native village and her new life in France, which she defines as "a privileged corner of exile" Most importantly, Sultana did not keep silent however she defends her anger and rage by attacking Bakkar, the fundamentalist mayor, through a coarse, trivial expression:

“Regardez-moi bien, je vous emmerde! Et je reviendrai vous le redire un jour. Oui, tu as dit ça et même tu as répété « je vous emmerde ». Ensuite, tu es montée en voiture et vous êtes partis. » (Julia Kristeva.p.12)

In the italicized phrases, Sultana expresses her freedom, her anger, and her desire to drop whatever falls within the backward mentalities of the village. Note that the aggressiveness of this expression remains anchored in the memory of women who have never forgotten the little Sultana who defied Bakkar without fear.

### **3.2 Conclusion**

To conclude, Sultana's oppression and resistance within her patriarchal society pushes her to leave her village not willingly but she is forced to do so in order to escape from this painful world hoping to gain her own freedom, belonging, and identity. Her resistance was shown when she stands against those who want to humiliate her as a woman. Sultana's predestined life of nomadism leads to the realization that her multiple identities is really made up of her Algerian history, French schooling, and the present bonds she shares with the village women. Although she is eventually forced to leave by members of the FIS ruling the village, Sultana takes with her the knowledge that now she is not alone. The heroine has formed links of feminine connections that will all contribute to the continuation of feminine solidarity and to the struggle against oppression in favor of human rights: "Tell the women, even from far away, I'll be with them," Sultana cries out. Mokeddem's novel attests to the new political agendas to which francophone women authors are devoting themselves as they confront a new era of feminine writing that is liberating on a personal level, yet potentially dangerous when met with opposition at home.

## General Conclusion

To bring this dissertation to a conclusion, we may say that the two protagonists of the two works Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Malika Mokkedem's *L'Interdite* are two models of brave women that succeeded to escape from society constraints. To do so, the study has based on two intersected theories that are concerned on the position of women in patriarchal societies and her state of being the other: Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Julia Kristeva's *Etrangés a nous-mêmes*. With the help of these two theories; this dissertation has reached the supposed assumption of the problematic. It has arrived at the point that both Hester and Sultana are represented as significant turning points in the perception of patriarchy and the status of women. Both of them struggle, resist, and exhibit powerful, dominant women who are intellectually and morally overwhelming their male counterparts. These women maintain their own dignity and self-respect without denying imperfect humanity.

A well-known fact is that the Puritan and the Algerian societies were patriarchal and restricted women to domesticity as they were expected to endorse and preserve the good qualities and virtues. They were expected to be pure in order not to be despised by society. However, Hawthorne and Mokkedem created women different from the stereotyped women who were different and seem strong till the end despite the society constraints.

On one hand, Hawthorne creates a dominant female heroine who influences the whole nature of the novel. Hester Prynne experiences harsh punishment, public humiliation, and painful alienation from her oppressive patriarchal society. She is an example of how woman can move from a life of oppression and society rigid rules to freedom and self fulfillment. She defies many social conventions. She struggles alone in a society filled with social inequality to have her own freedom. In fact, she is courageous, aware, and strong when confronting her personal experience. She stands against society's judgment using her silence. Although the harsh conditions she faces, she strongly succeeds to overcome her difficulties and achieves a position of her belonging to herself and her illegitimate infant daughter, Pearl.

On other hand, Mokeddem has tried to depict the world where she lived; describing the miserable position of woman in the Algerian society during the civil war of 1990<sup>th</sup> in the eyes of other women lived in the same conditions and the same environment. Mokeddem models her female protagonist as the powerful woman that rejects all kinds of violence committing towards women. Sultana searches for an identity and self belonging in France that she could not find in her society. In fact, Sultana is educated, brave, and strong. The portrayal of this

powerful woman's search for a new female identity is filled with realizations. Sultana succeeded to behave as a brave woman expressing her anger and rage towards the oppressive atmosphere of her patriarchal society.

To conclude, both novels introduce various challenges towards patriarchal society while they produce strong women, whose struggles cast doubts on the proclaimed just and appropriate structure of patriarchal societies. Hester and Sultana could finally become the part of patriarchal system, because they are strong enough to maintain their freedom and individuality and transform the strict rule of patriarchy

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