In discussing decolonization in *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), Frantz Fanon argues that one of the challenges facing those movements seeking to dismantle colonialism is to provide for a new order which refuses to reproduce the old colonial system; this new order must avoid, he argues, the replacement of the colonizer by a national party that would merely caricature the old colonialism, and it should be equally suspicious of an uncritical nativism appealing to essentialized notions of precolonial identity. In Fanon’s account, old logics and social relations persist, particularly, through the ties of the national bourgeoisie to the colonial order. The assumption of power by the national bourgeoisie may do little to transform the configuration of social relations that existed under colonialism, leaving the economic relationship of the neocolonial society to the former colonial power only superficially altered. It is in this sense that Fanon warns against the forms of nationalism practiced by neocolonial governments. Even though Fanon argues that the development of a national culture is essential to the colonized people’s fight against cultural obliteration: “A national culture under colonial domination is a contested culture whose destruction is sought in systematic fashion”¹—he also warns that the rubric of nationalism can be easily distorted into racism, ter-


**YFS 82, Post/Colonial Conditions,** ed. Lionnet & Scharfman, © 1993 by Yale University.

43
territorialism, or ethnic dictatorships of one tribe or regional group over others. Ironically, he points out, these separatisms, or "micronationalisms," are themselves legacies of colonialism: "By its very structure, colonialism is regionalist and separatist. Colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces and separates them" (70). In other words, a nationalist politics of racial or tribal separatism may be quite congruent with the divide-and-conquer logics of colonial domination. Fanon's treatise links together the practices of a national bourgeoisie which assimilates colonialist thought and practice to nationalist practices that privilege one "native" group over others. Thus associating both bourgeois assimilation and bourgeois nationalism with the structure of cultural domination, Fanon calls for a third alternative—neither neocolonialism nor a nativist inversion—which would break with the old logic, structures, and narratives of colonialism, and would persist in collectively criticizing the institutions and apparatuses of rule. Subsequent discussions of nationalism by Benedict Anderson, David Lloyd, Mary Layoun, Homi Bhabha, and others—and the nation's double function as a fiction of unity for both the colonial power and the emergent population—resonate with Fanon's observation.2

Postcolonial Francophone literatures of North Africa and Southeast Asia are not only symptomatic sites of the struggles and contradictions analyzed by Fanon and others, but in certain cases, the literatures also offer narrative allegories of these struggles and contradictions. In the two particular novels I discuss—Pham Van Ky's Des femmes assises çà et là (1964) and Tahar Ben Jelloun's L'Enfant de sable (1985)—colonialist and nativist nationalisms are constituted as opposed sites which are visited and revisited; however, the notion that either of these topoi is fixed or authoritative is ultimately undermined both by the protagonists' fictionalized travel between and beyond them, and by narrative displacements of the categories themselves. By means of fictionalized travel and narrative techniques, each novel posits allegories of Fanon's third alternative: a strategic practice which neither reinforces the structure of colonial domination, nor appeals to

an essentialized precolonial order, but which—in the nomadic unset-
tling of the model of colonialism and nativism as polar opposites—
troubles the very logic of the binarism, and queries the notion of struc-
tured rule itself. Both novels make use of a central protagonist’s “jour-
ney”—his/her literal and figurative shuttling between places—to dra-
matize the contradictory formations of the postcolonial subject
between cultures; each protagonist is drawn to the fixed logics and
formations which articulate both the colonial French and the “native”
positions, yet remains truly ambivalent with regard to both. This wan-
dering is signified in both novels in terms of a drama of sexual am-
bivalence: in Des femmes assises ça et là, the male subject’s simul-
taneous desire for, and rejection of, cultural place is expressed in a
narrative in which “place” is figured in a choice between the pre-
colonial/maternal body and the colonial/eroticized female body; in 
L’Enfant de sable, the drama of a Muslim female child socialized as a
man, the transvestite’s ambivalent relationship to both male and
female identity becomes a central metaphor for the problems of
postcolonial emergence. I do not read the ultimate placelessness of ei-
ther protagonist as signifying the fluctuating indeterminacy of
postcolonial or postmodern cultures; nor do I read their postcolonial
placelessness romantically, as the poignant plight of the forever exiled.
Indeed, each of these novels could be read in these ways. Rather, I
interpret the nomadic movements of both narratives and their pro-
tagonists as suggesting strategies for imagining resistance to the logics
of cultural imperialism, logics which manage nativist reaction as
the binary complement to cultural domination.

In using the term “nomadic,” I take as a point of departure the very
literal sense in which nomadic practices are and were of central impor-
tance to the histories of Cochinchina and Vietnam, and of Morocco
and the Maghreb, the geographies associated with both of the texts
discussed in this essay. Milton Osborne comments upon the “migra-
tory theme of Vietnamese history” and the presence of floating popula-
tions living outside areas under the firm control of the government in
the period preceding the arrival of French colonialism in 1859.3
Moreover, one may argue, as Herman Rapaport does, that a history of
nomadism continued beyond the colonial period of Vietnam, into the
guerilla tactics with which the Viet Cong fought the American soldiers

during the Vietnam War. Nomadic tribes also comprised an important portion of the population in Morocco both before and after the imposition of French rule in 1912. Taking this literal history of nomadism as a point of departure, we may look first to Foucault's suggestive notion of heterotopia, and then to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomadic, in order to arrive at a metaphorized sense of the nomadic as strategic method. Foucault argues that in institutional and social practices certain spaces are coded as "public" and others as "private," some domains "legal" and others "illegal," some areas for "work" and others for "play." Heterotopia refers to the spaces disciplined by these social designations as other: the spaces of crisis, illiteracy, deviance, enslavement, or colonization. We can render Foucault's notion of heterotopia more complex by taking it out of its ultimately binary frame of oppositions between legitimate and illegitimate spaces; if we recast spatial difference in terms of multiple sites, it is ultimately more useful to the theorizing of resistance because its multiplicity exceeds the binary terms of colonialist discourse. This more developed sense of multiplied spatial heterogeneity is elaborated in Mille plateaux (1980), the second volume of Capitalisme et schizophrénie, in which Deleuze and Guattari both name and dramatize "nomad" thought as a collection of wanderings through a myriad network of intersecting plateaus, each a meditation on different instances of relation between the segmented and destratified, stasis and motion, the measured and the profuse. Deleuze and Guattari's subversive nomad thought celebrates heterogeneity rather than essentializing oppositions or identities; it is simultaneous rather than hierarchical, chronological, or proportioned. The space of nomad thought is smooth, not gridded like ruled or regulated spaces. From the smoothness of nomad space, one can travel to


5. The endangered status of the nomad tribes scattered throughout the western and central areas of southern Morocco, both Berber and Arab, is suggested by the rapid decline of nomad populations throughout the twentieth century; see Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, The Western Saharans (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 195; for a description of tribes in the region, see 309–23. For a historical study that addresses the situation of nomads in Morocco, see Edmund Burke, Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860–1912 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

6. See Michel Foucault's posthumously published text "Des Espaces autres," in Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité (October, 1984); Translated by Jay Miskowiec as "Of Other Spaces," in Diacritics 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986).
any other point, through a variety of routes, by a variety of means, its mode of operation is the nomos, extending forward in an open space, rather than the logos of entrenching in a closed, discrete space. They remind us further that “there are always passages from one to the other, transformations of one within the other, reversals” (602). In other words, nomadism is not a third space outside the organized antinomy of smooth and striated spaces, which would merely reproduce another antinomy of “organized” and “unorganized” spaces; rather, the nomadic suggestively designates a practice which traverses these settled distinctions, which shifts and displaces them, and ultimately resituates them as different loci.

In this sense, the notion of nomadism interrupts the persistently binary schemas which tend to condition the way in which we read and discuss not only postcolonial literature, but postcolonial situations in general. When we say that a text articulates either a model of national liberation, or that it subsumes the new nation to the cultural hegemony of the former colonial power, we may be imposing an absolute binary framework which relies too heavily upon a temporal logic of prior “colonialism” and subsequent “postcolonialism,” thereby limiting the imagination or practice of other forms of resistance which would not be linearly tied to colonial domination. Binary conceptions may be neither radical nor extravagant enough to account for the heterological sense in which social terrains are not monolithically determined by either colonizer or colonized, but are characterized by conditions of emergence, hybridity, and the coexistence of competing, yet uneven strata, of not only nation and race, but of gender, class, caste, and region.⁷ Thus, by proposing postcoloniality as a heterogeneous, nonbinary terrain—in a manner not unlike that of Edward Soja, who discusses postmodernity as a geography of simultaneous relations and meanings tied together by spatial rather than temporal logic⁸—we may make use of the temporally marked poles offered by a binary schema, but at the same time unsettle those static, fixed antinomies by traversing them, by displacing them with other positions and locations. In this sense, nomadism suggests to us another manner of reading and thinking postcoloniality, which explores not only the category

⁷ I have elaborated this notion of the discursive intersections of formations of gender, class, race and nation, elsewhere; see Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991].

of space, but a movement across spaces. Nomadism alludes to a critique of colonialism which would neither reproduce, nor be bound in binary logic to, cultural domination; as an emblem for perpetual renewal, flux, nonconservation, it is certainly conditional, strategic, and temporary. While appreciating the suggestiveness of the term, nomadism should not exclude the use of tactical, provisional oppositions in practical resistances to domination; and in this regard, I would always want to inscribe the theoretical discussion of nomadism within a framework which stresses that practical struggles against colonial domination necessarily occur through strategically fixed fronts, boundaries, and centers. However, by discussing the literary nomadics in two postcolonial novels, I mean to thematize in spatial terms the need to avert colonialism’s binary logic, which works to project and overdetermine certain forms of identity—nativist, nationalist, or fundamentalist—as the responses to colonialism.

DES FEMMES ASSISES ÇÀ ET LÀ

"... if I were to recover my past as alphabetical sounds, and not through ideogrammatic figures, what son would you reclaim, Mother? In what piece of your flesh would you recognize me?"

Des femmes assises çà et là (1964) is a stream-of-consciousness narrative written in the form of an interior monologue, recalling at times the existentialist themes of French fiction of the 1950s and 1960s. The style of the narrative, thus associated with the psychological, suggests a reading that privileges the male narrator/protagonist’s internal conflict, in which he is caught ambivalently between the forces of maternal and erotic love. However, to consider Des femmes assises within the terms of this French tradition is not only to misread it, and naively so, but also to suppress its “nomadic” content by reading for the hegemonic; in this sense, I suggest that Des femmes assises must be resituated within the historical context of its production, that is, read with an attention to the references made to the narrator’s position as an émigré and as a former subject of French colonialism in Viet-

Placing the psychological drama within this colonial frame, we may then appreciate the allegory of ambivalence as an allusion to nomadism used as a strategy for resisting colonial subjectification.

The protagonist/narrator of *Des femmes assises* is a Vietnamese man born in Quinhon, educated in French secondary school in Hanoi, who emigrates to Paris in 1939 to attend the Sorbonne and the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises. He has remained in Paris after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and at the time of the narrative he is a novelist there. Like many displaced postcolonial intellectuals whose origins are in the colonized cultures of Southeast Asia, North Africa, or the Caribbean, yet whose language is French and whose education has been administered by the French, the narrator is deeply disaffected with his life in the colonial metropolis, but nonetheless recognizes the impossibility of a simple return "home," a return as untenable as the hope that one might recover a precolonial culture uncontaminated by French influence. His memories of the Vietnam of his childhood are of a culture pervasively managed by French colonial and missionary authorities; his *récit* is punctuated with vivid flashbacks of his knuckles being rapped by the nuns at the collège in Quinhon, of struggles to understand Roman Catholic meanings and practices, of a humiliating misunderstanding concerning western food in a French restaurant in Hanoi. These memories are emblems of his "dis-orientation," signifiers of the context in which French policies in Indochina sought to deracinate colonized subjects not only from their customs, foods, rites, but most centrally, from their language. Indeed, French colonial administrators themselves repeatedly figured the success of rule in Vietnam in a debate over the question of language: would French or Vietnamese be taught in Vietnamese schools? Would newspapers be published with Chinese ideograms or in romanized *quoc-ngu*? That many of the debates in the nineteenth-century administrations concentrated on these questions of language illustrates the degree to which the colonial authorities who imposed French language upon the Vietnamese recognized the native language and Chinese ideograms as barriers to French influence, as well as their crucial roles in the native resistance to colonialism.


11. Milton Osborne, op. cit., characterizes the French colonial administration of Vietnam as divided between two approaches: assimilation (programs of gallicizing of
Thus inscribed by this construction of the French language as the predominant apparatus of colonial domination, the protagonist/narrator is a novelist who, at the time of the narrative, is in the process of writing a novel in French; choosing writing as his vocation, he attempts to master, and thereby rearticulate, the language of the colonizer. The narrator constitutes the "primal scene" of his colonial subjectification by recalling a childhood episode and assigning it a paradigmatic status: he describes a chest which was opened by maneuvering seven rings, each embossed with a letter of the alphabet, thus figuring French language as a cipher mediating between the colonial subject as child and the colonizer's world of paternal secrets. He refers to this lock as "my first alphabetic primer, my infidelity, if not my first betrayal, against the ideogram" (23). In this sense the narrator rewrites psychoanalysis's originary Oedipal drama in which the child imagines the mother to be castrated and identifies with the masculinity of the father over and against the femininity of the mother, and proposes this scene as the "origin story" of his colonial subjectification: lured by the powerful occidental secrets hidden in the chest, he foreswears the Chinese ideogram in favor of alphabetic romanization. The image of the alphabetic lock condenses not only the colonized subject's exclusion from occidental linguistic meanings, but to the degree that the narrator associates the seven-letter combination lock with the telephone numbers of his women friends, and the Catholics' seventh day of rest, it represents also his denied access to western sexual and religious systems of signification. In the episode of the alphabetic lock the narrator recreates his first encounter with the colonialist discourse that grants the French language authority—the holding of secrets, the production of pleasure, the revelation of hidden meaning. The prohibiting alphabetic lock signifies his initiation into desire for western meanings, and moreover, the splitting of the colonial subject upon his insertion into a western economy of signification and desire.12

---

12. On castration anxiety, see Freud, "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis [New York: Norton, 1965]. On the process of oedipalization and the division of the subject in language, see Lacan, "The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud," in Ecrits, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: Norton, 1977]. I am arguing here that if the process of oedipalization is seen as an instrument of colonization, the degree to which oedipalization does not function in the case of the colonized subject is one illustration of the contradictions inherent in colonialism.
This narrative recollection of the colonial subject, and his confrontation with western systems of interpellation (sexual, religious, and linguistic), thus introduces the narrator's dilemma, and it is through this recollection that we must read the contemporary drama of his "choice." The narrator receives a telegram from his mother demanding that he return to Vietnam to attend her while she is dying: "I await you in order to die." The narrator—who remains characteristically unnamed, unfixed, throughout the novel—poses his dilemma as one in which he both desires to remain faithful to his home country and language, embodied in his dying mother and her telegrams calling him to her deathbed, and to come to terms with his partial, yet undeniable, assimilation into Parisian culture, embodied in the attachments he has to three French women in his contemporary life: Orla, Solange, and a young woman named Eliane, of whom he is most fond, who dies of leukemia during the course of the novel. The durée of the novel consists of the narrator's vacillation among a variety of cultural choices figured through the female object-choices; the dying mother is conflated with an imaginary, precolonial Vietnam, predating even the narrator's childhood there, while Paris, and his three French women friends come to represent the coercions and seductions of the colonizing culture. Moreover, the dying mother and the dying French woman Eliane are constituted as polar opposites; the narrator remains undecided between the demanding obligations of filial obedience and romantic love, the pulls of nativism and the prevailing temptations of assimilation.

In the narrator's thoughts, his mother is conflated with the "mother" country, Vietnam. His memories of his mother are essentialized as physical sensations, both absolutely compelling and entirely uncomfortable: "I had pieces of Mother in my hands, in my memory. . . . It was her maternal shadow which alternated with my own, a shadow which became more ephemeral each morning, each evening becoming a smaller part of my past" (9). The narrator's ties to his mother become a metaphor for the intense, yet ambivalent, longing he feels for traditional Vietnam, not simply the already colonized site of his childhood, but the image of a pure, "original" Vietnam before the French. He feels deep filial obligation, but he cannot return there; he is haunted by shame at his lack of piety, but he resents his mother for

demanding the impossible. In asking "But who in Europe could un-fasten the son that Asia had tied to his mother?" (11), the narrator expresses a complex configuration in which the son occupies the contradictory position of the postcolonial subject. For the postcolonial there is no direct access to a native, precolonial culture, although the precolonial topoi figures prominently in postcolonial nationalism; likewise, the already oedipalized son can only reinvent the imaginary bonds between mother and child, but indeed, finds the allusion to these bonds both disturbing and poignant. At the same time that the narrator feels ambivalence towards his mother, he is equally unable to involve himself fully or continuously in a love relationship with any of the three French women with whom he spends time. Solange offers herself to the narrator in an overture which provocatively condenses the valences of culture, language, and sexuality, all of which had been previously condensed in the image of the alphabetic lock: "I would love to be your Occident, the place where you are at home. . . . And this language, which is ours, which is half yours, I could teach it to you in quite another way" (64). However, not only does he refuse Solange, but the narrator also repeatedly avoids Orla's telephone calls, visits Eliane sporadically but then avoids her during her last days before she dies of leukemia, and finally alienates Eliane's family by refusing to attend her funeral. In the end, the narrator ultimately chooses not to choose between the apparent opposites of maternal and erotic love, his nomadic oscillation continues even after the two significant deaths—his mother's, which makes the trip to Vietnam unnecessary, and Eliane's, which forecloses the realization of any erotic relationship between them.

However, interpreting Des femmes assises as a tale of male ambivalence with regard to female object-choices would be to further "oedipalize" and "colonize" the narrating subject. Rather, since the entire narrative occurs under the sign of the recalled alphabetic lock, I believe the novel asks that we should consider the tale of the narrator's ambivalence in the context of the split subject's relationship to colonial subjection. By ambivalence I do not mean the narrower Freudian ambivalence of the male subject gripped by castration anxiety; rather, I mean here the subject's maintenance of a cultural opposition in which affirmation and negation of entire cultural systems are simultaneous and inseparable. The entry of the subject into the colonizer's language and social order drives the unnamed, repressed desires of the subject underground. The subject is both interpellated and split;
a named subject-position is inserted into the French colonial chain of
signification while other unnamed drives are silenced, marginalized.
Hence the colonial subject remains ambivalent in this latter sense,
being simultaneously the site of contradictory and competing dis-
courses of cultural and national identity.

With this expanded notion of ambivalence in mind, we realize that
the discourse which structures the narrator's choice in Des femmes
assises in terms of desire for either the mother or other female object-
choices is precisely the western Oedipal discourse. In this sense the
narrator's persistent refusal to submit to either pole in the constructed
opposition is more broadly a revelation of the ideological construction
of the opposition, and an expression of active resistance to oedipaliza-
tion as a schema of socialization which specifically privileges the colo-
nialist, masculinist, and European positions. Just as Fanon's treatise
reveals that nativism and colonialism may be aspects of the same logic,
so, too, is the constructed choice between maternal and erotic love an
essential component of the western psychoanalytic discourse of mas-
culinity, essential to the gendering of male subjects. In other words,
not returning home does not necessarily represent a rejection of his
mother country, Vietnam, or even male ambivalence with respect to
maternal femininity; rather the refusal to choose at all (which is, in
this sense, also a refusal to refuse the mother, as necessitated by ana-
clisis) exposes the construction of the choice as itself arbitrary, ideolog-
ical, colonizing. 14 Des femmes assises portrays ambi-valence; the nar-
rator wanders from location to location, visiting Orla, then Solange,
then his apartment; he oscillates in his thoughts between the sites
represented by his mother's deathbed and Eliane's hospital bed; he

14. That resisting gendering and oedipalization suggests in some form a resistance
to the apparatuses of colonialism is also implied by the antioedipal project outlined in
Deleuze and Guattari's L'anti-Oedipe (Paris: Minuit, 1972), in which they argue that
the Oedipus story serves capitalism, and that extra-Oedipal activity disrupts the ei-
ther/or formations of man or woman, same or different, body or machine, family or
social field.

There is also a feminist dimension of the antioedipal project; to the extent that the
Oedipal schema overdetermines the organization of male and female genders as phallic
and lacking, desiring subject and site of desire, etc., the resistance to oedipalization can
constitute a "front" for feminist resistance. Kaja Silverman's work is suggestive in this
regard; see, The Acoustic Mirror: the Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema
(Urbana: Indiana University Press, 1988). In a different manner, Jessica Benjamin argues
for a rewriting of the Oedipal story and its construction of sexual difference and hetero-
sexuality; see "A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective
Space," in Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Urbana: Indiana
University Press, 1986).
refuses to submit to the "choice," which would be tantamount to accepting socialization as a male colonial subject.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{L'\textsc{e}N\textsc{f}\textsc{a}n\textsc{t} \textsc{d}e \textsc{s}\textsc{a}b\textsc{l}e}

"I knew that the return to myself would take time, that I had to reeducate my emotions and reject old habits. My retirement was not enough; that is why I decided to make this body face adventure, on the roads, in other towns, in other places."\textsuperscript{16}

Although entirely different in its means and methods of figuration, Tahar Ben Jelloun's \textit{L'\textsc{e}n\textsc{f}\textsc{a}nt \textsc{d}e \textsc{s}\textsc{a}ble} (1985) is also a novel which allegorizes problems of colonial domination, nativist reaction, and nomadic resistance in the protagonist's ambivalent relationship to sexuality and gender roles. \textit{L'\textsc{e}n\textsc{f}\textsc{a}nt} is also structured in terms of a protagonist's "choice" between two polar options, a choice which is not resolved or concluded, and whose resolution is repeatedly displaced and undermined throughout the course of the novel. The novel, which has multiple narrators, concerns the life of a female child born into a Muslim family of eight girls, whose father, in his desperate desire for a son, decides that the female child will be disguised and raised as a male child named "Ahmed." The father dissembles a circumcision by pricking his own thumb to produce blood; Ahmed's adolescent breasts are bound; she is brought to the men's baths; and ultimately, she is married to a woman. The French colonial subjuga-

15. The narrative itself is nomadic as well, embracing paradox and disallowing narrative closure. The novel ends by creating an effect that Roland Barthes discusses in \textit{La Chambre claire} (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, Seuil, 1980) as the \textit{punctum}. The \textit{punctum} is defined as an inexplicable element, stating both the presence and absence of the photographed subject, which triggers a powerful contradiction in the viewer, resulting in a constellation of memories, desires, and mourning. \textit{Des Femmes assises} ends with just such a textual \textit{punctum}, consisting of letters from Eliane, deceased for several months, in which she expresses her love for the narrator. The same ambiguity characterizes the death of the protagonist's mother; her presence is conjured up by the inclusion in the narrative of her telegrams to the protagonist: the telegraphic message "I await you in order to die" emerges persistently in the narrator's train of thought after she has died.

16. Tahar Ben Jelloun, \textit{L'\textsc{e}n\textsc{f}\textsc{a}nt \textsc{d}e \textsc{s}\textsc{a}ble} (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 112; \textit{The Sand Child} trans. Alan Sheridan (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).
tion of Morocco is allegorized in the figure of the girl-child raised as a male son. This correspondence between the child and the new nation is literalized at the point of the child’s birth when the protagonist’s father buys a half-page announcement in the national newspaper declaring: “This birth will bring fertility to the land, peace and prosperity for the country. Long live Ahmed! Long live Morocco!” Just as French rule forced diverse Moroccan groups—including Arab Muslims, Berbers, Jews—to deny their native practices and languages in order to assimilate to a French order, the father likewise socializes the girl-child into a male system which demands that she disavow her female body and desires, that she think and act as a man. Ahmed narrates the discovery of her first menstruation:

One morning blood stained my sheets. Imprints of a fact about my body, rolled up in white linen, to shake the tiny certainty or give the lie to the architecture of appearance...It was certainly blood. The resistance of the body to the name—the splash from a belated circumcision. A reminder, a grimace of some buried memory, the memory of a life that I had not known and which could not be mine. [46]

In discovering menstrual blood on her sheets, Ahmed disavows its significance, interpreting the blood as a delayed sign of circumcision rather than as the commencement of female fertility. In this scene Ahmed rewrites the traditional Freudian concept of “disavowal”: Freud described disavowal as the operation in which the child believes that he or she does see a penis in the mother’s genitals, a fantasy which in adult behavior leads to fetishism or the simultaneous denial and acknowledgement of female castration.17 In this case, Ahmed disavows not female castration, but female menstruation. In a parody of the structure of fetishism, Ahmed’s interpretation substitutes the explanation of delayed circumcision for the fact of menstruation, simultaneously registering two contrary beliefs—it insists on the blood as a sign of masculinity at the same time that it recognizes blood as a possible trace of femininity that needs to be displaced (“A reminder, a grimace of some buried memory”); in this sense, Ahmed’s substi-

17. For a discussion of disavowal in the adult as fetishism, see Freud, An Outline of Psycho-analysis [1949], 60. It seems that the text “rewrites” fetishism as an allegory for colonial subjectification, that is, Ahmed’s “fetishistic” belief in her simultaneous male and female sexuality, refers to the splitting of the subject under colonialism, and the coexistence of contrary currents of ego-formation which correspond to entirely different cultural systems.
tion expresses the coexistence of both male and female sexuality within his/her person. This is not to suggest that Ahmed's behavior can be explained in terms of western psychoanalysis, but rather that we might consider the text's "rewritten" fetishism as an allegory for colonial subjectification. That is, Ahmed's "fetishistic" belief in her/his simultaneous male and female sexuality, not merely in this instance but at other moments throughout the novel, refers allegorically to the splitting of the subject under colonialism, and to the coexistence of contrary currents of personality which correspond to entirely different cultural systems.

However, as s/he grows older, the disjunction between Ahmed's womanly body and his/her thoroughly male social identity grows, precipitating a crisis in which an overwhelming desire to live as a woman leads her/him to leave the family home and to break with the transvestism ordered by the father. Ahmed joins a circus which travels from town to town; the circus manager's description of the circus people as "nomads" situates their wandering on the ambiguous terrain between truth and falsehood, revelation and disguise, transvestism: "We are nomads, there's something exciting about our life. . . . Everything is false, and that's what we're about. We don't hide it" (121). Ahmed begins working for the circus as a female-impersonator named "Zahra"; Zahra first appears on stage as a man pretending to be a woman; but Zahra improvises, and by the end of the act, the man pretending to be a woman then ultimately reveals herself to be a woman. In this sense, Ahmed/Zahra devises an alternative transvestism, one which does not comply with the father's enforced transvestism which expressed the power of men over women under patriarchy, but which is rather a representation of cross-dressing which both exhibits this logic of forced transvestism, and ultimately makes use of further cross-dressing to deride the patriarchal logic. In the novel's allegory, which figures colonialism, nativism, and nomadism in the register of sexuality, the topos of forced transvestism corresponds to the cultural topos of French colonial domination of Morocco, while the possibility of realizing an "authentic" female identity, which preoccupies a number of the narrators, corresponds to an idealized return to precolonial nativism. In this sense the protagonist's nomadic vacillation between the positions of male identity, female identity, male-as-female and female-as-male, suggests an analogous irresolution for the struggles of the Moroccan nation: the social tensions and antagonisms among groups in Morocco did not end with
Moroccan independence from France in 1956, and the establishment of monarchical rule in the face of leftist opposition suggests that there exists for postcolonial Morocco no path of unproblematic "return" to a precolonial nativism. Thus, the protagonist's nomadic cross-dressing suggests a relationship to sexuality in which there are no stable, essentialized gender sites, in which the undetermined wandering from identity to identity, and desire to desire, is a strategy for resisting the fixed formations of either fixed masculine or feminine subjectivities, and allegorically, the overdetermined opposition of colonial rule and nativist reaction.

The *topos* of nomadic wandering is expressed in the novel's dispersed modes of narration, as well. *L'Enfant de sable* is multiply narrated, from various locations and from different points in time. The novel is begun first by a storyteller who recreates Ahmed/Zahra's story from found fragments of Ahmed/Zahra's journal and letters. This storyteller's authority is punctuated by listeners' interjections and doubts, and furthermore, the authenticity of the journal is later challenged by the brother of Ahmed's wife, who declares the previous stories to be false. In this sense there is no coherent, consistent narrator who presents a stable chronology of events; rather, the narrative of *L'Enfant de sable* is continually interrupted and problematized. Finally, towards the end of the novel three storytellers step forward to resume the tale, each offering a very different account of the end of Ahmed/Zahra's life. None of these three narrative endings is privileged as more authentic than another, and their relative equality further accentuates the undecidability of any singular notion of a gendered or colonized subject.

The different conclusions to Ahmed/Zahra's life narrated by the first two storytellers allegorize the opposed poles of colonialism and nativism. The first storyteller, Salem, continues Zahra's life from the point of her involvement with the circus. Salem's story renders the circus world as one filled with sadism and victimization: the circus manager Abbas, who had been beaten by his mother, turns this violence on the circus performers; he abuses the circus boys, and repeatedly rapes Zahra. In the ending to Salem's story, Zahra kills Abbas in an episode of sexual violence which simultaneously brings about her sui-

cide. Salem, the son of a slave brought from Senegal who has known suffering at the hands of the powerful, depicts Zahra’s ending in a binary world in which there is only domination and subordination; this world of repeated physical and sexual violation allegorizes the worst extreme of colonial domination, and implies that resistance to colonialism is as ill-fated as Zahra’s violent end. On the other hand, the second storyteller Amar imagines a completely different end for the protagonist, imagining him as a man who chooses seclusion from society and ultimate peace in religious study: “He let himself die there, surrounded by old Arabic and Persian manuscripts. . . . I think he succeeded in the last stage of his life, when he reached the highest degree of contemplation” [159]. Amar’s vision of Ahmed’s end is also based upon a binary division, one which opposes the worldly to the transcendent. In his story, Ahmed realizes “the error that was his life”; he renounces his transvestism, and finds peace and redemption through the contemplation of traditional religious texts. The two endings offered by Salem and Amar may be said to correspond to “colonialist” and “nativist” logics, the first graphically depicting the physical struggle and subjugation of one party to another, the second describing a state without worldly conflict, a return to a precolonial ideal.

The third storyteller, Fatouma, offers an alternative to the apparently opposed worlds described in the stories of Salem and Amar. Fatouma’s story is told in the first person, narrated as if she were Ahmed/Zahra. She describes herself as an eternal traveller: “I come from far away, very far; I have tramped endless roads. . . . Countries and centuries have passed before my eyes. My feet still remember them” [163]. Through her extensive travels, she has moved away from her past dilemma of ambivalent gender and sexuality; she is also no longer confined to colonial or native territories, and describes her freedom to dwell in any site she wishes. She visits Mecca, “more out of curiosity than faith”; for her, Mecca is simply another site, not a holy origin. She wanders, but remains unsatisfied to the extent that her travels have isolated her; she is separated from people, without community. Finally, she describes coming upon a village which is in the midst of revolting against the French police; in taking up their struggles, she conceives of her role as traveller in a new way:

I had to rid myself of what I was, enter into oblivion and remove all traces. The opportunity came to me through the kids, all those kids in the shantytowns, thrown out of the schools, without work, without roofs over their heads, without a future, without hope. They had gone
out into the streets, first with empty hands, then carrying stones, demanding bread. Yelling any slogan that came into their heads. They could no longer contain their violence. Women and men who were out of work joined them. I was in the street, not knowing what to think. I had no reason to demonstrate with them; I had never known hunger. As the army fired into the crowd, I happened to find myself with the kids, almost by chance, confronting the forces of order. That day I knew fear and hatred. Everything changed. [169]

The description of participation in the revolt provides a third alternative, another mode of subjectification which, contrary to the narratives offered by the other storytellers, articulates a subject produced by collective engagement, a subject who is not closed and individualized, but multiple, processual, and born of struggle against domination. Fatouma’s tale reframes the importance of Ahmed/Zahra’s choice between male or female sexual identity by situating Ahmed/Zahra’s individual struggle within the context of a community struggle against colonialism. In this sense, Fatouma’s story provides a narrative position from which to resist the other narratives in L’Enfant, which suggest that Ahmed/Zahra must choose between “masculinity” and “femininity,” and allegorically, which imply that postcolonial struggles must either reproduce colonialism or take the form of nativist nationalism. In Fatouma’s narrative, nomadism is finally more than a simple wandering from site to site; it names a practice of active and collective resistance to structures, logics, and narratives of domination. It does not reproduce the binary spaces narrated by Salem and Amar; instead, its articulation nomadically displaces, shifts, and recasts these two narrative sites.

... AU MÉPRIS DES INTÉRÊTS DE LA BOURGEOISIE

In concluding, I would like to bring the discussion of literary nomadics back to Fanon’s argument, with which we initially began: that change in the social order must originate with the “wretched of the earth” rather than with the bourgeoisie. Fanon contends that because of its cultural and economic ties with France, the national bourgeoisie is not able to generate practices which disrupt, rather than reproduce, colonialism; it will simply replace the colonial administration, and continue anew the nation’s dependency on the former colonizer: “This is why we must understand that African unity can only be achieved through the upward thrust of the people, and under the leadership of the people,
that is to say, in defiance of the interests of the bourgeoisie" (124). Fanon’s analysis suggests that the social sites, or classes, from which interventions originate are of utmost importance; the new order must be initiated and executed by the people—the hungry, the disenfranchised, the nomadic vagrant—and not the compromised bourgeoisie.

Holding his class analysis of bourgeois collaboration in mind, we may remember that Fanon was also a psychiatrist who wrote specifically in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) of the black man’s identification with the white man and his internalization of the colonizer’s superiority, as well as of the white man’s view of the colonized man as the image of his alienated self, or other. Both colonizing and colonized subjects are split, Fanon argued, and reciprocally bound to one another by the colonial condition. Thus Fanon required, too, a psychoanalytic explanation of colonialism—a located dynamic of resistance within the subject himself or herself—and prescribed strategies for defying colonialist formations of subjectivity. In reading Ky and Ben Jelloun’s novels as sexual allegories of postcolonialism, I do not mean to reduce the matter of popular resistance to subjective individualist practices, but rather want to query the ways in which both novels venture links between the two domains of Fanon’s discussions: of social structure and the individual subject. Furthermore, I wish to suggest that the deployment of *allegory* in both texts, representing psychic ambivalence as social opposition, alludes to the ways in which the social and the psychic simultaneously refer to one another, and yet finally are not analogous, do not correspond. In this sense, *allegory*—itself a divided rhetorical figure, which depicts the literal, yet signifies beyond to other simultaneous structures of meaning—pronounces the gap between the psychic and the social by marking and traversing this gap. *Allegory* is emblematic of narrative attempts to cross and suture the incommensurability of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, between the idealized, fantastic, or inadmissible on the one hand, and the social means of representation on the other.

The allegories in *Des femmes assises* and *L’Enfant* move not only from subjective to social, but they trace a reverse movement as well; a socially stratified model of revolutionary change, of the kind suggested by Fanon in *Les Damnés de la terre*, is extended to generate a psychic model of colonial subjectivity, and hence possible strategies of resistance within the subject. Neither novel discounts the necessity of social movements led by “the people;” indeed, Fatouma’s tale in *L’En*
fant de sable narrates precisely the necessity of a dialectic between the subject and collective struggle. It is rather that both novels thematize the colonized subject as an important site of cultural and political contestation by translating the revolt which Fanon would describe as being “in defiance of the interests of the bourgeoisie” into the terms of the subject’s refusals of oedipalization. If we consider the Oedipal discourse as a powerful instrument of colonialism and bourgeoisification, then the protagonists’ subversions of this gendering apparatus—denying the fixity of either male or female roles, pursuing at once “male” and “female” desires—circumscribe one domain of resistance, although certainly not the only one, to colonial subjectification. To this end, both novels refigure and displace privileged psychoanalytic explanations of gender acquisition, including castration anxiety, disavowal, and fetishism, and therefore suggest the importance of our attendance to the various sites of splitting in the colonized subject as one part of theorizing colonial and postcolonial resistances to domination.