

Leila marouanes la jeune fille et la mere

Literature



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Examine the portrayal of independence, both personal and political and the role of education in Marouane's « La jeune fille et la mere» Leila Marouane's « La Jeune Fille et la Mere» is a thought provoking novel. Based on the author's own experiences as an Algerian-French national, the novel is history, autobiography and fiction all at once. It is also a post-colonial work, in that the young girl Djamila's dilemmas and conflicts are similar to her newly independent nation's own struggles with identity and choice.

One of the struggles for the mother is with male domination. Even in fundamental questions of choosing a partner or choosing sexual lifestyle, women have little choice in Algeria. Worse, they are sometimes forced into abusive sexual relations and even prostitution. Frequent unwanted pregnancies and abortions are not uncommon. If this blatant abuse of women's rights were to happen in France it would provoke an outrage. But in the patriarchal social milieu of Algeria, these events go on as a matter of routine. Author Marouane seems to be suggesting that nominal political freedom has no benign effects on the entrenched regressive attitudes of her native society. This is tragic because women were at the forefront of the liberation for freedom from French rule. They worked in ammunition factories and carried the local economy on their shoulders as their men were at the warfront.

In the novel, having suffered countless injustices in her own life, the mother is bent on providing Djamila with a better deal. Toward this end she educates her daughter and gives her many liberties. Yet, there are many hurdles to the young girl's full expression of her freedom. For example, when Djamila was found having sex with the cabinet maker, her father forces her to undergo a virginity test. This is notwithstanding the fact that she had long

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lost her human due to sexual abuse as a child. These dark realities go on to show how Djamila and her mother are both caught up in the vicious spiral of their native culture. For Djamila's mother, the disappointment is twofold, for neither she nor her daughter is able to liberate themselves from this hopelessness.

The mother witnesses how Djamila too is subject to the same social pressures that weighed her down. For example, even if she could send her daughter to a university and give her independence to choose her career, it is still expected of Algerian women to be a virgin at the time of marriage. Caught between these twin pulls of liberation and restriction, the mother reaches a state of mad desperation as the story unfolds. Marouane leaves it ambiguous whether this madness is real or feigned. One can understand why she would want to pretend madness, in which case, she could get some concessions from society that would otherwise not be bestowed.

The grand irony of the story is that even those women who valiantly fought occupying French forces during the war of liberation were being oppressed by their own society. It brings to question what significance do political independence hold to their personal lives. Marouane hints that these two are independent realms and do rub off of each other. After the independence had been won, the women of Algeria get disillusioned by the breaking of one promise after another. In the case of young Djamila, her suffering is twofold. On the one hand, despite being educated she is forced to submit to paternal authority just like her mother had to. On the other hand, she witnesses firsthand the kind of sacrifices her mother had made. But sadly, despite brave efforts on part of her mother, the young girl is not able to break the stranglehold of a regressive society.

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