HISTORICIZING COLONIAL NOSTALGIA

EUROPEAN WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF ALGERIA AND KENYA 1900-PRESENT

PATRICIA M.E. LORCIN

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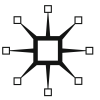

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For Oliver and Melissa with Love

I feel kind of homesick for those old times, although I never knew them.

Greg Francis a 30-year-old Anglo-Indian from Calcutta quoted in
The New York Times, International Sunday, August 15, 2010

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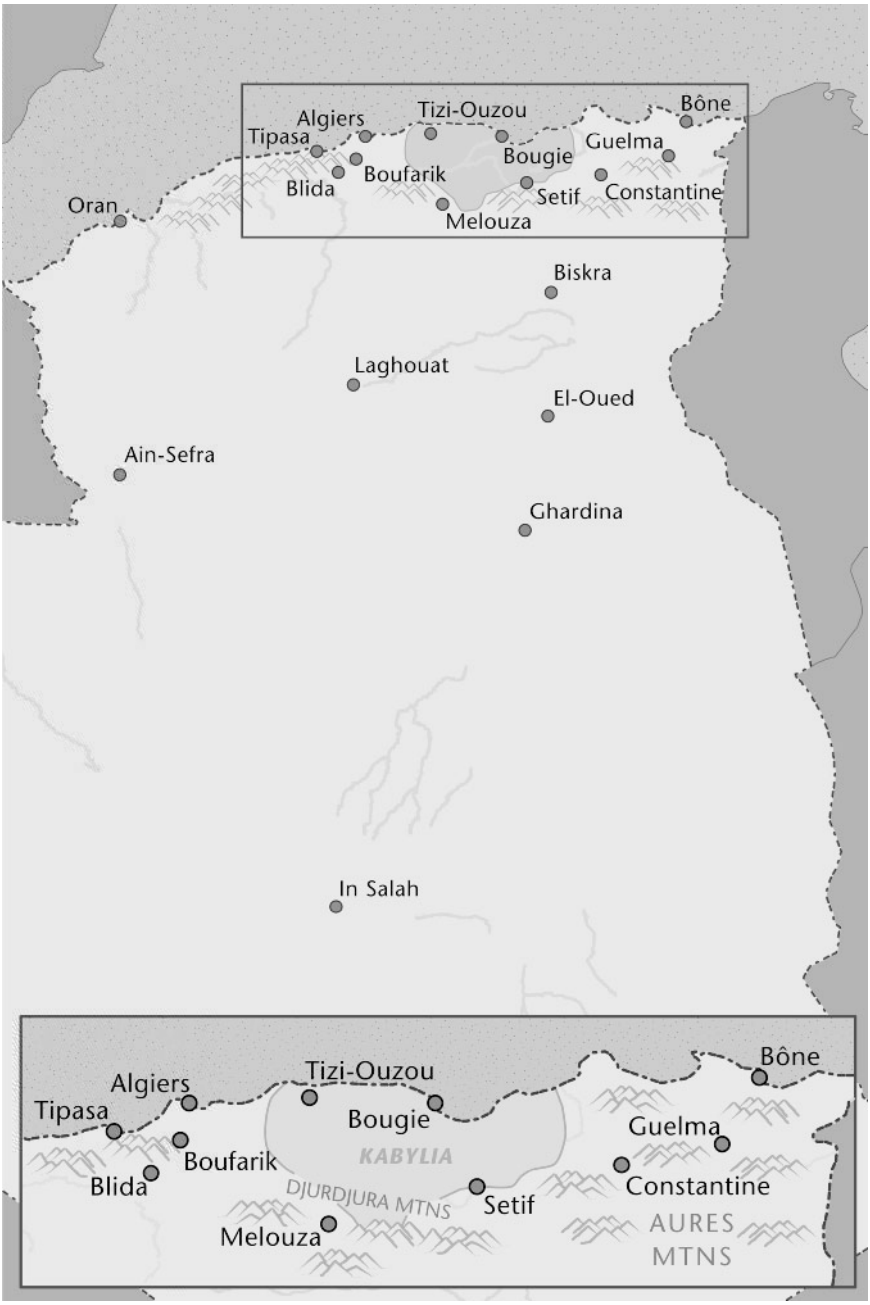
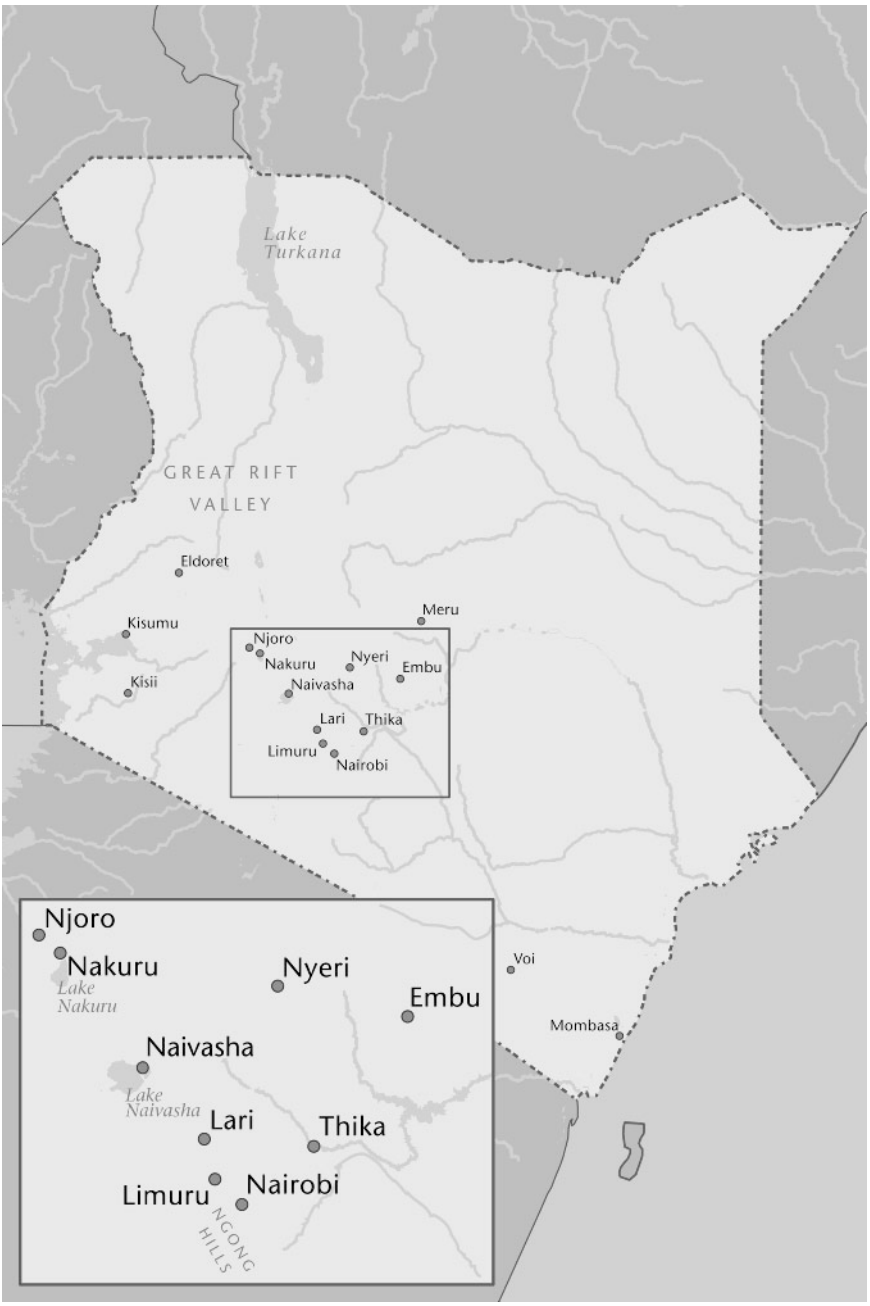


Colonial Algeria. Created by the University of Minnesota Cartography Lab



Colonial Kenya. Created by the University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

Introduction

Although I did not realize it at the time, the seed for what follows was inadvertently sown as a result of a holiday I took in August 1994, while living in the Ivory Coast. On the recommendation of friends, I had journeyed to Sinématiali, in the North of the country, to stay with a French couple who had a farm nearby, where they received guests. Near Sinématiali, we turned off the main road and drove for several miles along a dusty track which appeared to be leading nowhere. The instructions we had been given seemed decidedly vague to our urban sensibilities referencing, as they did, baobab trees and clusters of huts as the relevant signposts that would head us in the right direction. Any doubts we had about finding the place were dispelled when we found ourselves on a eucalyptus lined dirt "avenue," which led us to the farm. *Vidalkaha, La ferme africaine,* as it was called, was in fact a mango plantation or at that time the early stages of one (it is now an export business) to which the owners had added accommodation for guests in the form of a collection of small wattle huts. We were shown to our accommodation and told that drinks were served at sundown on the veranda of the reception hut, which was set on a sharp incline overlooking the plantation below. We arrived before our hosts and after admiring the magnificent view over the valley below we wandered into the sitting room.

A few years earlier I had read Karen Blixen's *Letters from Africa* and was familiar with most of her fiction. Thanks to Judith Thurman, I was also familiar with her life story.[1] As I walked around the sitting room, looking at the pictures on the wall, the zebra skins on the floor and heard the roar of the lion (they had a pet lion), I had a feeling of déjà vu. At dinner, when our hostess appeared in an elegant long dress and we sat down to a table dressed with fine silver and multibranched candelabras, with dinner served

by an impeccably liveried African "boy" in white gloves, the parallels with Blixen's Africa came into focus. The next day when our hostess, dressed in jodhpurs and a straw hat shaped like a pith helmet, showed us around her farm and her "people" (Ivorians who lived on their land), I couldn't resist asking if she had ever read the works of Karen Blixen. She looked pleased. She told me that before moving to the North from Abidjan, where she had been living, she had spent some time in Paris recovering from a personal setback. An acquaintance had recommended the works of Blixen as a way of reconnecting to her temporarily shattered African life. She knew nothing of Blixen's works but by the time she had finished reading them, she had emerged from her doldrums and had decided what she wanted to do. She persuaded her husband to take an early retirement from his lucrative business in the Ivorian capital and invest in a plantation in the North. He would run the plantation and take guests trekking, hunting (game and photographic) in "the bush" and fishing on the nearby river, while she would provide an elegant end to the guests' day, a beguiling combination of the "primitive" and the "civilized." As I listened, what intrigued me the most was the starting point for our hostess' recreation as it was from a British colonial setting rather than a French one. Much later, when I started to think in a more structured way about the significance of nostalgia and the choices our hostess had made, I realized that the concept of nostalgia was not solely framed, as some scholars would have it, by the home or nation. The usual analysis of nostalgia as a longing to return home could be complicated by rethinking the concept in relation to notions of space and time and their use in women's personal strategies.

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This is a study of the writing and strategies of European women in two colonies, French Algeria and British Kenya, the aim of which is to historicize nostalgia. I make a distinction between imperial and colonial nostalgia, concentrating on the latter and arguing that women's writing made a singular contribution to its development. I differentiate colonial nostalgia and colonial myths: namely that the former was the embellishment of lived experience, whereas the latter was either the misinterpretation or incomprehension of the colonized territory and its people or the fabrication of a nonexistent dimension of colonial life.

My interest in the social history of ideas, in fiction as a historical source, and in the nature of women's roles in the colonies drew me to the subject. I became interested in the ideological aspects of colonial literature when I was writing my first book, a social history of French ideas on ethnicities in nineteenth-century Algeria. After writing a few articles on colonial literature from Algeria, I decided that I wanted to extend my field of vision beyond French North Africa and write a comparative study.[2] My first question was whether or not to make it gender specific. I opted for concentrating on women because, in the case of Algeria, a colony I wanted to use as one of

my case studies, works on colonial literature were weighted toward male writers.[3] The next question was which colonies? I considered comparing the writing of colonial women in different parts of the French empire, but the promise of a more intellectually rewarding enterprise stimulated me to consider women writers from different geographical areas of empire as well as from different empires. I knew that socio-economic and political dissimilarities in different parts of the French empire produced a literature shaped by the desires and mythologies of the people who settled there, people whose socio-economic background often determined the colonies they, or their forebears, chose to inhabit. Such differences might be even greater in considering the literatures of two competing empires, France and Britain. All the monographs on literature and empire focused on one empire (usually the British) or on one colony (India, Kenya, Algeria, Indochina).[4] Hardly any compared colonies from two different empires unless the focus was thematic, and even then there is not a great deal to chose from.[5] George Steinmetz has recently examined three German colonies in very different parts of the globe to provide "a corrective to hasty generalizations about colonialism per se"; my aim is to add to this corrective by focusing on two colonies from two different empires.[6]

Why Algeria? Why Kenya? Why This Particular Comparison?

The choice of Algeria and Kenya was not random. There were socio-political, cultural, and thematic reasons why these two colonies would make a good comparison. Both were important settler colonies in their respective empires, the decolonization of which in each case was violent. This suggested that the stakes in their loss were similar, that is to say a land that settlers considered their own. The similarity is deceptive, however. Historians now categorize French Algeria as a colony, but at the time the mainland French, the colonists and even a minority of Algerian *évolués* considered the territory to be part of France. In contrast, although British settlers laid claim to the Kenya highlands as "white man's country," it never became an administrative part of Britain in the manner of Algeria, nor indeed was Kenya ever considered an extension of the British mainland, even if some settlers imagined that it was. Furthermore, territorial expropriation was an essential feature of both and was contested, leading to conflict and uprisings, but the fact that land in Algeria was imagined as French and in Kenya as African but "empty," hence available, shaped colonial writing.

Socio-political differences were also connected to my chosen time frame. By 1900, the approximate starting point of my analysis, Algeria had been occupied by the French for 70 years. Kenya was part of what was then known as the British East African Protectorate. It was established in 1895, one year before work began on the Uganda railway, which eventually transformed the region.[7] Only in 1920 did Kenya acquire its name and officially became a colony. In Algeria the military administration was replaced by a civilian one

in 1871, and it was during the last three decades of the nineteenth century that the colony was transformed into a bona fide settler "state." The differences in the length of colonization meant that by 1900 Algeria had an urban culture, whereas, Kenya did not. Even before the French occupation there were important urban centers in the territory: Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Bone, Bougie. As settlement increased these centers were transformed, to a greater or lesser degree, into French towns.[8] In Kenya the only real town, Nairobi (or Nyrobe, from the Maasai *Engore Nyorobe),* was a twentieth-century creation. Its emergence was connected to the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway and its development into a true urban space was slow. In essence, therefore, Kenya was a rural settler culture, whereas Algeria was an urban one. The preoccupations of each, land in Kenya and cultural hegemony in Algeria, shaped the narratives and predominant literary themes and figures of speech of each.

Colonial theory and practice were also different. French colonial policies varied. The two theories were Assimilation and Association. Assimilation emerged from the revolutionary doctrine of the equality of man and the Utopian Socialist assumption of the superiority of European, and in particular French civilization with the concurrent desire to civilize and educate "lesser" civilizations. Assimilationists sought to absorb the colony into the French administrative and cultural framework, and socialize its inhabitants into becoming French men and women. By the early twentieth century, however, in many French territories colonial policy shifted to Association as assimilation of the "natives" was not longer considered to be feasible. Instead they were to be allowed to maintain their culture and develop at their own rate in tandem with the French. In either case direct rule was the structural framework. In Algeria there was never a watershed date separating Assimilation and Association, nor was there any coherence in the implementation of one policy or the other.[9] Colonial policy in Algeria had a haphazard, changeable quality to it, largely because it was considered to be a part of France and settler lobbies were strong. In Kenya, on the other hand, from the outset the policy was one of indirect rule, expressed definitively by Lord Lugard in his *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. In it he stated that Britain was responsible for promoting the social, political, and economic development of its African dependencies.[10] These differences in approach shaped the attitudes of the settlers to the inhabitants of their colony. This study seeks to address how these differences in colonial ideology and policy were written into women's fiction and nonfiction.

Literary differences were also noticeable. In contrast to Kenya, by the interwar period Algeria had developed a lively literary scene. The urban culture and greater size of the settler population in Algeria produced more women novelists than the rural culture of Kenya. A comparison of their respective novelists suggested a study predominantly about Algeria. A possible solution was to compare the novelists in both territories, using the limited output of colonial women in Kenya as a foil for those from Algeria. A more promising approach, however, was to enlarge the scope of women's writing to include

memoirs, letters, and various types of nonfictional writing. This redresses the imbalance and enables an assessment of how fiction and nonfiction converge to reinforce colonial themes within their respective territories or whether each genre responds differently to colonialism. Furthermore, memoir and letter writing are as much a cultural practice as is writing novels. If the former is, at the outset, a more private pursuit than the latter it is no less defining of a society. Examining why this was so can tell us as much about women's attitudes as it can about the society in which they functioned.

A final point of difference has to do with settler demographics. In both colonies the white settler population was a minority, but the similarity ends there. Not only was the settler population much larger in Algeria, but the majority was also of non-French origin, coming from the countries of the northern shores of the Mediterranean: principally Spain, Italy, and Malta. By 1900 most had been granted French citizenship, as had the Jews indigenous to Algeria. In Kenya, on the other hand, the majority of non-British settlers were Indian. Initially brought in to construct the railroad, their numbers had multiplied and they had established commercial roots. Indians were not granted full citizenship nor were they given the same rights as European settlers. These differences in demographics were mirrored in the ideological imaginings of the settlers and in the social hierarchies that emerged in each colony. Settler ideologues in Algeria looked to what they considered to be the Latin roots of Algeria and developed the concept of a melting pot of "Latins," which was producing a "virile, hardworking, hedonistic race" with the potential to "regenerate" France.[11] Kenyan settler mythologies were more closely connected to class and the pastimes of the settler "aristocracy," most famously the "Happy Valley Set," which in spite of the numerical (and actual) insignificance of its members became stereotypically associated with a certain white Kenyan lifestyle, overshadowing the reality of settler existence.

Women, Gender, and Space/Place

In considering colonial women's activities in the colonies and their influence on the development of colonial society, feminist scholars have tended to focus on issues of gender, race, and sexuality.[12] Partially a response to the idea, prevalent until the 1970s but still evident as late as 1995, that women were the real source of racism in the colonies, these thematic categories were a convenient way of writing women back into the colonial power structures from which they had been excluded.[13] There has also been a tendency among scholars to divide women into types: travelers, missionaries, educators, medical personnel, etc.; typological categories that proved useful in recuperating women from the imperial limbo.[14] Whereas the categories of race, gender, and sexuality are valuable in analyzing the social structures of the colonies, the typological ones are useful in pinpointing the chronology and development of women's involvement in the Empire. How then does one tie these themes and categories together to recreate the theoretical and practical complexities of women's association with the colonies?

Listening to women's voices is one way of gauging what women feel and think or, more to the point, what they think listeners should know about what they do or do not feel and think. The writing of women travelers and missionaries (mostly British) has received considerable attention from historians, whereas colonial women novelists have been examined mainly by literary scholars. The approach is thematic and very often deconstructive, in the Derridaian sense; an approach that is excellent from a literary point of view but often falls short from a historical one. Subaltern and Francophone studies have concentrated on the writings of the "colonized" (men and women), in both the colonial and post-independence settings; colonial women have received less attention.[15] Yet an examination of all types of women's writing—fiction and nonfiction—offers the possibility of crossing categorical boundaries and typologies, whereas a historical rather than a literary analysis can demonstrate the impact of national and international politics and events.

In their recent theoretical analysis of the relevance of personal narratives to the social sciences, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett take issue with the way in which dominant theories and methods of the social sciences view individuals and their actions primarily through categories, arguing that by doing so individuals are reduced "to clusters of social variables that serve as proxies for persons" and human agency becomes defined in terms of social positions. An analysis of personal narratives, on the other hand, can provide "important insights into the history of the self and its variations," while potentially "enrich[ing] theories of social action and human agency."[16] The written narratives that are discussed and analyzed in the ensuing chapters are as important for understanding the personal and professional strategies of their writers as they are to situating their authors within the social, cultural, and political structures of the two colonies. Women had an ideological role to play in the colonies, whether it was consciously assumed or not. Personal narratives help us to understand just how important this role was.

The scholarship on European women in the colonies has expanded greatly in the past decade, enhancing our understanding of the dynamics of colonialism and their involvement in it. From its original recuperative stance this literature has become more nuanced as scholars have sought out and analyzed women's texts in an endeavor to understand exactly what that role was, the extent to which they were complicit with or resistant to the imperialism enterprise, and the way in which gender, race, and sexuality had an impact on the lives and interactions of colonial society.[17] Although much of the early scholarship in this vein focused on the British Empire, other European empires have now engaged scholars in much the same way.[18] Scholarship on colonial women's writing has, for the most part, either focused on travel writing, on the works of individual writers, or on the way in which literary tropes were used to colonial ends, whereas comparisons of women's writings in the colonies have tended to remain anchored to one empire.[19] Edited volumes on gender and empire, or women and empire, include articles from different European empires, and hence have a comparative dimension, but

there has been no history monograph that specifically and extensively compares colonial women's writing from the colonies of two different European empires.

An examination of women's writing raises the question of how the relationship between discourse and experience should be prioritized. To be sure, women's narratives must be contextualized by their colonial experience. It is not only women's colonial experiences that are relevant to what follows, however. As a historian rather than a literary scholar I am as interested in women's personal strategies and responses to given political and social situations as I am in their literary ends. Although discursive narratives are at the center of this study, arranging them thematically separates them from the chronological trajectory of women's experiences. Doing so can thus diminish the impact of women's colonial agency and overlook their personal and cultural ambitions. It can also obscure political, cultural, and social developments that framed their writings. The structure of this work is not therefore thematic, as a discourse-oriented literary study would necessarily be. My intention is to elucidate the way women mapped the patterns of colonial nostalgia by demonstrating how women writers used the colonial space to further their personal, intellectual, and political (in the broadest sense of the term) agendas, and how these changed over time; changes due not only to developments within the colony but also to political pressures from outside. My subsequent aim is to provide a better understanding of how their writing is situated within the colonial narratives and literary discourses of their day. It is not enough to highlight socio-political divergences from one colony to another for, within individual colonies, there were divergences over time. As discursive narratives were not neatly contained within chronological, or indeed geographical borders, but crossed over them, my comparisons are organized into three discrete yet overlapping sections: colonial women and their imagined selves (1900–1930); political realities and fictional representations (c.1920–1940); the end of empire and the reformulation of nostalgia (1940–present). By exploring women's (self) representations in this way, my aim is to throw light on what it was about the colonial context that made women write, and write the way they did, when they did.

Space, Nostalgia, and Modernity

When I embarked on this study, themes of gender and race were prevalent themes while examining colonial women. I was certainly interested in exploring the different ways in which gender and race shaped, or were shaped by, women's attitudes toward colonialism and I published a number of articles in this vein on Algeria.[20] As I progressed I became more absorbed by the concepts of space, nostalgia, and modernity and the way they impinged on, or were shaped by, the lives of colonial women. Colonies provided an important space for the personal and professional development of European women. Shirley Ardener has argued that space is an ordering principle of society. Like gender and race, to which it is often linked, it structures the lives of the men

and women who are associated with it. The social and political mapping of space in the patriarchal societies of the colonies depended on "ground rules" that created gender- or race-specific locations, where gender or race-related activities were carried out. Space can thus be associated with political and social power. Although these spaces were largely the domain of men, they were not impenetrable.[21] Women in the colonies transgressed boundaries of space in the colonies that, at the time, would have been difficult to do in the metropole. Colonial power structures, furthermore, were not binary, colonizer or colonized, even if some scholars have preferred to see it that way.[22] European women may not have been part of the ruling political elite until near the end of empire, and then in very small numbers, but they were part of the dominating culture from its inception. They were, therefore, in a paradoxical situation. A framework of separate spheres, problematic at best, is totally inappropriate in the colonial context, as the domestic or private space was also a political space when it came to the issue of race. Women who wrote could and did transgress spatial boundaries of gender, power, and patriarchy.

In thinking about colonial women and space, one should be mindful of the fact that expatriation for settler women was comparable to self-imposed exile. Unlike true expatriates, who left their homelands for a limited period of time, for most settler women expatriation, like exile, was permanent. The perception of permanence was more pronounced in colonies that were furthest from the homeland (Kenya as opposed to Algeria) particularly in the early stages of colonization when travel was complicated and the voyage home was long. The voyage from Mombasa to Tilbury, for example, took six weeks. Socioeconomic factors were also relevant as travel was expensive and trips back "home" could be infrequent. More importantly, when settlers did return home they did so in a time warp as the metropole had evolved socially, politically, and culturally at a different pace from the colony. Whatever settlers may have thought of their homeland, it was the colony that became their new home—socially, politically, and culturally. A culturally hybrid home, to be sure but home nonetheless. As Peter Fritzsche has said in another context: "exiles at once mapped the center at which they had once stood and the margins to which they had been displaced."[23] In such circumstances, space and its gendering become linked in various ways to nostalgia. There was, nonetheless, an important difference between the colonial situation and that of exiled or diasporic communities. Whereas the latter adapted their minority culture to the majority culture of their new home, in the colonial situation the culture of the minority was imposed on the majority. Thus, space and its gendering become allied to nostalgia in altogether different ways. By reinventing and remapping the spaces of the colonies in their texts, colonial women sowed the seeds of post-independence colonial nostalgia.

COLONIAL NOSTALGIA BUT NOT IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA

When associated with European imperialism, nostalgia brings to mind a rose-colored reminiscence of lost empire, understood as a response to a

diminished global position. It is a regressive sentiment that circumvents the real issues of colonialism and obscures the extent of its violence. Like the gendered tropes associated with the discourse of imperialism, this type of nostalgia is often gendered in that an imagined or regretted past is associated with female or male representations or protagonists. Films such as *Indochine* or *Chocolat*, have central characters personifying France as benevolent and magnanimous, as in the case of Eliane in *Indochine*, or even as innocent as in the case of France in *Chocolat*.[24] Symbolism of this sort is a recurring theme in postcolonial representation, whether through film, in novels or other depictions of the colonial or postcolonial situation.[25] But, such nostalgia is not restricted to the retrospective daydreams of the colonizing powers, as scholars such as William Bissell have shown.[26] Bissell, who examines nostalgia for the colonial past among Africans of Zanzibar, suggests that it is part of a social imaginary triggered by economic, political, and social instability. As he rightly points out, nostalgia is "an irreducibly plural phenomenon, [which] takes on very different forms and dimensions, engaging an array of social agents, interest, forces and locations."[27]

As the above paragraph suggests the concepts of imperial and colonial nostalgia are often elided. I distinguish between the two. Imperial nostalgia, I argue, is associated with loss of empire; colonial nostalgia with the loss of socio-cultural standing. The former is connected to power politics exemplified by events such as the 1982 Falklands and the 1986 Operation Epérvier to shield Chad from Libyan invasion, which echoed notions of former British and French imperial grandeur; the latter to colonial lifestyle, illustrated by films, such as those mentioned above. Women's role in constructing colonial nostalgia is an important one for, as numerous scholars have pointed out, colonial women were vital to the development of the social and domestic structures of colonial society and were, therefore intimately involved in creating the colonial lifestyle. Colonial nostalgia, furthermore, is not a monolithic concept, but one whose parameters are defined by the particular lifestyles of specific colonies. This study focuses on these differences and their development over time.

The term nostalgia, a combination of the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain), was coined by Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century (c. 1688) to describe an affliction of Swiss mercenaries serving outside their native land. Those suffering from the ailment grew despondent, sickened, wasted away and in some cases died or committed suicide. From the outset, therefore, nostalgia has been associated with dislocation. In the culture of capitalism the concept of nostalgia splintered into multiple forms associated with class, power, and the displacements engendered by a capitalist economy. Or as Kathleen Stewart has put it, capitalism created "nostalgias of hegemony or resistance."[28] Nostalgia in this light is the resistance of tradition to modernity. In the context of the colonies, however, the oppositional poles of nostalgia and modernity, past and present, were often transgressed or elided. Linked to collective or personal identity, nostalgia as a symptom of social, political, or economic angst can therefore mean different things to different people(s).

Janelle Wilson has rightly pointed out that nostalgia is both a cultural phenomenon and a personally subjective experience.[29] Wilson argues that the shift from personal to cultural is largely due to commercialization. In other words, nostalgia sells. Writing a quarter of a century before Wilson, Fred Davis also made the distinction between private and collective nostalgia stating that the former is shaped by the images and illusions relevant to a person's biography, whereas the latter is associated to symbols and objects of a "highly public, widely shared, and familiar character."[30] For Davis nostalgia is a deeply social emotion. Using this analysis in the colonial context one can, therefore argue that a letter or an unpublished memoir forms part of the private archive of nostalgia but a novel or memoir, once published, enters the public domain and, therefore becomes part of the collective archive of nostalgia. But what if the two "archives" have the same themes, figures of speech, and patterns? What if those themes, figures of speech, and patterns are not only an essential part of the creation of settler women's identity, but also form part of the post-independence nostalgia for a lifestyle that has disappeared? I argue that colonial women played an important part in the creations of the themes, tropes, and patterns of a colonial lifestyle that became a part of colonial (as opposed to imperial) nostalgia. What follows is an attempt to historicize colonial nostalgia.

In her sensitive analysis of the significance and dynamics of longing, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia has two manifestations: restorative and reflective. The former is associated with *nostos*, the home, and a desire to reconstruct it; the latter with *algia,* the pain of loss and the wistfulness of memory. Nostalgia, therefore, is not just about the past; it is also about the future. It is both prospective and retrospective.[31] Nor is nostalgia only about loss and displacement, it is also about "a romance with one's own fantasy"[32] It appears in times of upheaval and rapid changes of lifestyle and is not a flight from modernity but is coeval with it. Fantasies of the past are defined by the necessities of the present.[33] To this I would add that in settler colonies such fantasies were also a way of preparing for the future, by creating a community where the reinvention of metropole tradition, to paraphrase Hobsbawm and Ranger, became rooted to the colonial land in space-specific ways.[34] As Roxanne Panchasi has pointed out in another context, "[n]ostalgia is generated in advance of loss as well as in its wake."[35] In the colonial context, the possibility of loss—of power, of territory, of the upper hand—was an ever-present, if subliminal, anxiety. Nostalgia, therefore, was inherent to the settler psyche and colonial nostalgia was built into the settler system from its outset.

The questions of exile and nostalgia, a yearning for a lost past or a past that never was, have interested a number of scholars concerned with diaspora and migration, in particular when related to a postcolonial situation.[36] In the latter context, Shaden Tageldin elaborates on Boym's argument by demonstrating that the specificity of the postcolonial migrant's nostalgia "is not that it yearns for a futurized past (or an anteriorized future), but why and how it does so."[37] In the chapters that follow it is the why and the how that I shall develop.

In *Yesterday's Self,* Andreea Decíu Rítívoí's study of nostalgia and immigrant identity, Rítívoí states that "[n]ostalgia prompts questions regarding the . . . distinctions between escapist fantasy and the imagination as repository of ideals, considerations of identity as a self-sufficient entity or as a culture- and context bound entity." In short, it functions "as a potent interpretive stance, a comparison and analysis."[38] For Rítívoí, then, nostalgia in the context of the immigrant is about adjustment to new surroundings, the success of which depends on building bridges between the past and the present. It is a narrative of identity that is part of self-preservation in an alien culture or environment. I shall build on her thesis by arguing that the bridges settler women built between their metropole past (nostalgia) and their colonial present (imposing "modernity") formed the repertoire, to borrow Charles Tilly's concept, of post-independence nostalgia. Colonial women's writing became a significant repository for this repertoire.

Nostalgia inherently occludes the less desirable and highlights what is desired. The language and narratives of nostalgia therefore include, to quote, Michael Dorland in another context, "figures of speech or acts of figuration [that] give shape to, form, or stylize what is being said or written so that it will say, or attempt to say, *this* as opposed to *that*. Figuration is precisely the point of contact between a writer and the world outside the writer's mind . . ."[39] In other words the occlusions of narrative of the colonial period, the *this* as opposed to the *that,* formed the basis of colonial nostalgia. If my basic argument is that women's writing developed the themes and figures of speech that made up colonial nostalgia, what endowed their writing with such power? In the processes of colonization it is colonial men rather than colonial women, who are associated with the active role in the brutality of colonization (warfare, land-grabbing, repression), an erroneous perception perhaps but a significant one all the same. The nature of women's role in colonization was of course no less active nor less powerful, as scholars such as Ann Stoler, Antoinette Burton and many others have shown. It was just different. Furthermore, the social construction of European women during much of the colonial period was formulated around a gendered ideal of helpmate and do-gooder, who instructed her children in the niceties of civilized behavior, knew how to keep her house in order—in both the metaphorical and literal senses—and when appropriate involved herself in philanthropic activities. Women's power lay in the very fact they were perceived as the more benign partners in the colonial process. As Glenda Riley, paraphrasing Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, put it in the context of her comparison between pioneer women in Kenya and the American West, "Whereas most men excelled in colonizing the body, most women [were] especially adept at colonizing the mind."[40] Women as educators, as role models, as guardians of national cultural and social traditions—this provided the colonial project with a familial and more compassionate dimension, the dimension in which colonial nostalgia is anchored.

Linking modernity to the concept of nostalgia helps to complicate the picture. In her book *Modernity and Nostalgia, art and politics in France*

between the wars, Romy Golan demonstrates that in spite of the fact France was considered to be in the forefront of the avant-garde a retrenchment took place after World War I. This led to reactionary responses such as the return to the soil, anti-urbanism and the questioning of technology with ideological corollaries of agrarianism, regionalism, and corporatism, which exercised a profound influence on French modernism.[41] The intersection of modernity and nostalgia was an equally important feature in the colonies of Kenya and Algeria, as will be demonstrated below.

The connection of modernity to empire has received considerable attention from scholars. Antoinette Burton, for example, argues that modernity developed through colonialism. Dipesh Chakrabarty, on the other hand, suggests that imperialism shaped both modern European national cultures and the way in which Western history was written. The essays in Howard J. Booth's and Nigel Rigby's volume on modernism and empire deal with their connection and their relevance to the theory and literature of British territories, whereas Phyllis Lassner looks at the way British women writing about the colonies were central to the postcolonial debates rooted in the "racial modernities" that emerged as a result of World War II. These works have greatly helped me to develop my own ideas, but unlike them my focus is on the different ways in which the concept of modernity was used and performed in the two colonies, while intersecting with nostalgia and women's role in creating the colonial link between the two.[42] The construction of nostalgia, I argue, was not an ex post-facto development but was embedded in the colonial period and, especially in the lives and experiences of colonial women, who, as numerous scholars have shown, were essential to creating and maintaining the identity and lifestyle of a given settler colony.

Equally important to this study, is the way in which modernity was linked to women. The "new woman" of the Edwardian period and the "modern woman" of the interwar period were defined by their independence and enterprising spirit. As Whitney Chadwick and Tirza Latimer have pointed out in the context of interwar France, popular representations of the "modern woman" in the media in France often focused on the expatriate phenomenon.[43] Women who chose to go to the colonies were also seen in this light. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, whether colonial women were actually "modern" or not did not much matter. They were held up as exemplars of modernity to the local population of the colonies in which they lived.

Modernity can mean many things: liberalism, secularism, democracy, progress—economic, political, or social. It is associated with rationality, efficiency and change and contrasted with a traditionalism that connotes fatalism, superstition, and lack of scientific or technological sophistication. Modernity can be a theory or a practice. Its meaning can be precise or imprecise and, as such, the concept can be manipulated and, of course, it can also be associated with violence.[44] At the end of the nineteenth century European concepts of modernity were teleological and linear. In the colonial context the concept of modernity became a tool of control in so far as

the British and the French colonizers saw themselves as harbingers of progress and improvement, whether that improvement was moral, economic, or political. The "white man's burden" was the "onerous duty" to enlighten the "black man"; the *mission civilisatrice* was the didactic desire to bring French enlightenment to the "benighted." The purported aim may have been the same, but the means were different. Modernity was performed differently in the two colonies, both in discourse and in practice. Gertrude Himmelfarb, in her study of the French, British, and American Enlightenments, has suggested that the paths to modernity were nuanced according to a nation's ideological and political concerns.[45] In the colonies, where the colonizing power was deemed not only to symbolize modernity but also to introduce and advance it, economic, cultural, racial, and political concerns in the two colonies created dissimilar patterns by which modernity was performed. Women's colonial experiences and their narratives were inevitably shaped by these patterns, which were then picked up, consciously or sub-consciously, in women's writing.

Jo Burr Margadant has rightly pointed out that, "No one 'invents' a self apart from cultural notions available to them in a particular historical setting."[46] In the case of women in the colonies, however, the cultural and social markers were those of the metropole they had left behind **and** of the colony in which they had chosen to settle. In this paradoxical situation nostalgia and modernity were conflated. Nostalgia was inherently written into their daily lives in the sense that women reproduced metropole patterns of behavior in an altogether different environment, whether they actually longed for the absent metropole or not. This type of nostalgia was masked by the activities of modernity. Whether it was the "civilizing mission" or the *mise en value* of the French or the "white man's burden" and the introduction to capitalism of the British, the underlying message was one of bringing progress to backward civilizations or primitive peoples; of showing them how to live the civilized (hence modern) way. In the colonies, therefore, nostalgia and modernity were not just about the antithesis between the past and the present, between the traditional and the modern, they were closely linked. It is the ambiguity of this situation that is explored below.

Novels, Memoirs, and Letters

Novels, memoirs and letters—three distinctive genres that can each be used as historical sources in their own right—highlight the role of the authors in society, and lead to an understanding of the society's social and cultural framework. As Diana Holmes has pointed out, the novel is "one of the cultural forms through which a society shapes its sense of reality."[47] Seen from this perspective, an examination of colonial women's novels in Algeria and Kenya will illustrate the differences in the shared meaning of each colony. Among the scholarly preoccupations with regard to women's writing has been its relationship to, or its subversion of, the patriarchal order.[48] In the period covered by this study, with very few exceptions, women writers were

considered to be subordinate to their male counterparts. As a response to the patriarchal situation in which they found themselves, at different times and in different places, women have used a variety of strategies to reconcile "the female self as 'other' with the female self as author."[49] In the colonies these strategies were complicated by the presence of the colonized peoples who served (metaphorically and literally) as foils for women writers in their quest to achieve their ends. In the pages that follow, I shall identify the different ways in which this relationship was played out.

During the colonial period covered in this study, virtually no published works by colonized women existed. In Algeria there were one or two exceptions; in Kenya there was none.[50] This was due to the fact that for most of the colonial period colonized women in these colonies did not have a Western education, if they had an education at all. In Algeria there certainly were literate women among the elite, but Arabic was the foundation of their literacy, not French. It was only by the late 1930s that a limited number of colonized women had acquired the sort of French education that would have permitted them to write for a metropole audience and even then publishing was a major hurdle and could only be achieved through sponsorship.[51] In Kenya the process to acquire publishing literacy was even slower.[52] In both colonies, however, a strong oral tradition of songs, poems, and epics existed among the colonized peoples and women were essential to their propagation. Their respective oral traditions helped to reinforce their identities at a time of social and political disruption and if on occasion it was threaded through with nostalgia for a precolonial time, it did not contribute to the type of nostalgia discussed in this study. Their voices are, therefore, silent in this study but in spite of this silence their contribution is not negligible. The significance of colonized women to colonial nostalgia was not through their voices, oral or written, but rather in the way in which settler women interacted with Algerian or Kenyan women in what the settlers considered to be their philanthropic activities, or in the way in which settler women envisaged their every day exchanges with the women they colonized, or in the manner in which they wrote them into (or out of) their novels. Colonized women could therefore be emblematic of the "feel good" dimension of colonial nostalgia, or in the case of their occlusion from colonial novels, suggestive of the power structures of the colony. In what follows, therefore, wherever appropriate I analyze the implications of the representations of colonized women if and when they appear in novels.[53]

If novels are a form of self-construction and performance that elucidate the workings of a society and its culture, so too are memoirs and letters. Like novels they are sites of reconstructed memory; an immediate past (letters), an intermediate or distant past (memoirs), all selectively recreated. Each of the three genres conflates the facts and fictions of a particular time and place in a singular way, but taken together they contribute to the makeup of the colony's collective identity. Scholars have focused extensively on the inextricable nature of individual and collective memory and the way in which each constructs a reality.[54] Although the connection between these two types of

memory and their respective realities is a component of the writings of colonial women, the three genres are all odysseys of sorts in which imagination is the vehicle of self-creation. It is the way in which the imagination is used in each that I would like to stress. Whereas the fiction of the novel can mask the "reality" of society, the "reality" of the memoir can mask society's fictions. As for the letters, they take the reader on an odyssey through the daily life of the writer, a writer who makes deliberate choices of what to include and not include. Analyzing these choices sheds light on both the way the reader views the writer and the way the writer sees herself. Unfortunately, with rare exceptions, few complete collections of the letters of individual women from the colonies have survived.[55] Most have been lost or destroyed during the peregrinations of the writers or at decolonization when families left, often in haste. The letters that are examined in this volume were all written by articulate women who prided themselves on their style, both literary and cultural. They are, therefore, cultural artifacts representative of a certain class. The writing under consideration was nearly all penned by women whose origins were middle or upper class. It was this class that set the cultural and social tone of colonial society and it was the women who stabilized the colonial structure of society. A few women writers came from less privileged backgrounds but profited socially and culturally from their colonial experience. Although there was a pecking order among settlers, whatever their original background and whatever their position in settler society, in relation to the metropole a settler's social standing was always enhanced due to the dominant position that the racial framework of the colony ensured. The distinction achieved by colonial women, whose work was published, consolidated (or improved) their social position in the colony. The way in which this distinction was experienced in the colony and the metropole differed. I shall analyze these differences whenever relevant.

But Where Are the Men?

Colonial nostalgia was not, of course, the prerogative of women. Men were as engaged in its production as women. A study combining both men and women's contribution to colonial nostalgia in two colonies structured along the lines of what follows would have required two volumes. Besides, a considerable literature already exists on men's direct or indirect contribution to colonial nostalgia, although most is limited either to one colony or to one empire.[56] Nostalgia was not, of course, just reproduced in European writing as the work of scholars such as Gwendolyn Wright, Zeynep Çelik, Felix Driver, and David Gilbert have demonstrated.[57] Architectural design and the way in which cities were designed or redesigned in the colonies, formed part of the restorative element of nostalgia that accompanies the creation of an identity away from "home." If the architects and urban designers sought to recreate Paris or London in Africa or Asia it was not only to impose modernity on "backward" nations, even if that was the rationale. It was also to alleviate the culture shock and the desire to recreate familiar architectural

surroundings and public space in which they could function more comfortably, the *nostos* of nostalgia that so often accompanies permanent expatriation, exile and in the colonial case, conquest. Women's involvement was, perhaps, less flamboyant but it was nonetheless equally important. If women in the colonies were able to contribute more readily to the public space than they were in the metropole, they still were the essential element in the reconstruction of the private space. They also played an important role in socializing their children, and defining the way in which colonial society developed, as scholars like Stoler, Gouda, Strobel and others have shown. By helping to structure the colonial lifestyle they laid the groundwork for the development of colonial nostalgia. It is in their letters, memoirs, and novels that this groundwork can best be read.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Themes and chronology are equally important in analyzing narratives from a historical point of view. Whereas themes make up the substance of the work, chronology situates the narratives in relation to national and international events, and the way in which they were played out in the colony. Had what follows been a literary analysis, my organizational choice would have been thematic. But I am more interested in the way in which women's lives were shaped by the colonial space and how they responded to events and circumstances over time. A thematic approach would privilege discourse and obscure the importance of event and circumstance in shaping their writing. Without knowledge of the experience one cannot truly understand the discourse; nor can one separate what is subjective from what is objective in a particular narrative. My preference for an essentially chronological framework is geared to move away from the standard analyses of women's writing, which is so often thematic, in order to highlight the paradoxical experiences of colonial women's lives over time and space, and to demonstrate how they transformed these experiences through writing.[58]

The first chapter is an overview of the development of settler society and its female presence in Algeria and Kenya. The second chapter focuses on the lives and African writing of two women, Isabelle Eberhardt in Algeria and Karen Blixen in Kenya. I demonstrate the importance of the colonial space as a source of their creativity and what it was about their personal strategies that shaped their images for posterity. I argue that Eberhardt and Blixen became personifications of colonial nostalgia and I show that it was the way they lived their lives—or *performed* their colonial experience—that established their iconic status. Just how their strategies set them apart from other colonial women writers will become clearer in ensuing chapters. It is also in this chapter that I introduce the idea of nostalgia as a continuum, that is to say the formulation of romanticized fantasies, which persist beyond the colonial period as post-independence signifiers of expatriation and adventure. It introduces some of the patterns and themes of nostalgia-in-the-making that appear and are elaborated in the ensuing chapters. Part I, therefore, sets the

stage for what follows. The three chapters of Part II cover women's writing in the interwar period. Whereas, overall the chapters demonstrate the way in which women's narratives responded to the politics and events both in the colonies and in the respective metropoles, each focuses on a different component of women's writing. Chapter 3 looks at letters, memoirs, fiction and nonfiction and is concerned with the way women performed and thought modernity and nostalgia. Chapter 4 concentrates on the fictional works of four authors: Elissa Rhaïs and Magali Boisnard, writing about Algeria, and Florence Riddell and Nora K. Strange writing about Kenya. In this chapter, I examine and analyze the development of narratives of nostalgia and modernity in the fiction of the two colonies. Chapter 5 is concerned with women's responses to the national and international political developments of the thirties. Issues of governance and inter-racial relations were the main colonial preoccupations, but the Depression and the rise of fascism also featured in women's writing, particularly in Kenya. The political turbulence of the period created a "realist" response to the colonial situation and an enforcement of the nostalgic patterns of settler identity. Part III comprises two chapters that cover the period of decolonization. Chapter 6 explores the differences in the way the two colonies were decolonized, women's responses to decolonization, and the fracturing of their identity. Chapter 7 highlights the way the nostalgia narratives of the colonial period were picked up and reshaped as an identity mechanism for women whose family roots were in the colony of Algeria or Kenya.

Finally, a word about terminology: in Algeria the settlers viewed themselves as *Algériens* and referred to the local population (comprised largely of ethnic Arabs and Berbers) as *indigènes* or *musulmans*. This, of course, suggested that the settlers were the "real" Algerians, whereas the population native was "other." I prefer to use settler, *pied-noir* or *colon* and Algerian for the Arabs and Berbers unless I want to refer specifically to one of these two ethnicities. In quotes from settler literature the word *Algérien* is a self-reference. In Kenya, the situation was slightly different due to the presence of an imported Indian population. I therefore use African or Kenyan for the inhabitants native to Kenya and only refer to specific ethnicities such as the Kikuyu, Maasi, or Somali if they appear as such in women's texts or if the ethnicity is relevant to my discussion. Although the Indian population was a settler population, I refer to them as Indian and use the term settler to refer to the British and Europeans, who were the politically dominant group. As this study is not a literary analysis, in the interest of uniformity and unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are mine.