Restor(y)ing the Postcolonial Algerian Na(rra)tion in the Fiction of Ahlam Mosteghanemi

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Contents

Abstract 5

Declaration.. 6

Copyright Statement.. 7

A Note on Translation and Transliteration 8

Acknowledgements 10

Introduction 11

Chapter One: Postcolonial Algeria between Origi/nation and Narration: Ahlam Mosteghanemi in (Con)text. 17

Chapter Two: '*We write to bring back what…has been stolen*': Nation, Identification and the Disruption of His-stories in *The Bridges of Constantine*. 41

Introduction 41

1. '*It thrusts the nation into my face*': (En)gendering Algeria in (Con)text 42

2. *'The other side of having one arm'*: On His-story as a Memory in the Flesh? 43

3. '*Woman in the guise of nation*': Women in His-stories of the Postcolonial Imagi/nation ………………………………………………………………………………………..46

4. Disrupting His-stories of Language: Arabic and French Restor(y)ed?........................... 68

5. '*We might also write to bury our dreams*': Writing Algeria as a Reconciliation of His-stories 79

Conclusion 86

Chapter Three: *'On the edge of the forbidden':* Sites/ Sights of Resistance and Transgression in *Chaos of the Senses*. 87

Introduction 87

1. ‘*The little words that change the course of a life’*: On the Implications of Transgression in Women’s Wor(l)ds 88

2. ‘*With a guillotine of language*’: A Language of Desire of a Woman’s Own? 94

3. ‘*Treading air when the line runs out’:* Transgressing the Mother/land’s Politics of Subordi/nation 107

Conclusion 123

Chapter Four: *‘It’s the game of masks in the carnival of life’*: The Postcolonial Na(rra)tion between Carnivalism, Masquerading and *Mask*ulinity in *The Dust of Promises.* 124

Introduction 124

1. *‘Everything is born upside down’*: A World with a Carnival Attitude? 126

2. *‘If the river Seine had a memory’*: On the Displeasures of Exile 134

3. ‘*An act of concealment*’: (Post)colonial Masquerades? 145

4. *‘They’re nothing but myths’:* The Malleability of Postcolonial Na(rra)tions 148

5. *‘A human ant’*: Of Mimicry, (Post)colonial *Mask*ulinity and Gender Masquerades 154

6. *‘Measuring my manhood in a different way’*: Women as a Site of (Re)covering 158

7. ‘*The woman wasn’t Hayat. She must be Nedjma*’: *Nedjma* Re-stor(y)ed? 165

Conclusion 171

Chapter Five: *‘Marwana… is not on the map of the Algerian cities*’: Remapping the Postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion in *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (Black Suits You). 173

Introduction 173

1. From Mapping to Remapping? 174

2. ‘*It is both small and invisible*’: On the Margins of the Nation and the Remapping of Algeria from within 177

3. From National Cartography to Transnational Choreography: Remapping the Nation from Outside 185

4. ‘*Marwana is a feminine name*’: A Map of a Woman’s Own 194

Conclusion 204

Conclusion: ‘*A story that was my own*’: An Afterword on Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Algeria’s Postcolonial Na(rra)tions as Unfinished. 205

Bibliography 221

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Abstract

This thesis examines Ahlam Mosteghanemi, the first acknowledged Arabophone woman novelist in Algeria, and her fiction from postcolonial, contextual and gender lenses. It situates the author within the (con)text of Algeria's postcolonial na(rra)tions, official or literary, which were both marked by episodes of subordination given Algeria's colonial history. It will show how the author adopted the tactics of disruption, transgression, masquerading and remapping to intervene in hegemonic na(rra)tions, by highlighting cracks in supposedly finished discourses on the postcolonial imagi/nation while skating over essentialisation. It concludes that the studied novels are direct restor(y)ings of the postcolonial na(rra)tion, imagined at both the official and literary levels of the na(rra)tion.

Declaration

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A Note on Translation and Transliteration

Arabic transliteration follows the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) transliteration system, briefly outlined below. Proper names of writers and common places are not transliterated and are written in the form commonly found in translation, for the sake of accessibility and ease of reading. English translations of Arabic and French texts are used, whenever available, in the interest of space. When unavailable, all translations are my own.

1: Consonants:

ʾ	ء
B	ب
T	ت
Th	ث
J	ج
ḥ	ح
Kh	خ
D	د
Dh	ذ
R	ر
Z	ز
S	س
Sh	ش
ṣ	ص

ḍ	ض
ṭ	ط
ẓ	ظ
ʿ	ع
gh	غ
f	ف
q	ق
k	ك
l	ل
m	م
n	ن
h	ه
wa	وَ
ya	يَ

2. Vowels:

Ā	آ
Ī	يِ
Ū	وُ

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Introduction

In 2015, I came across a newspaper article written in 2014 about a symposium organized by the Palestinian, Jordanian poet and novelist Mouna El-Sharafi Taym and her book *al-Jasad fī Marāyā al-Dhākira: al-Fan al-Riwāʾī fī Thulāthiyyat Aḥlām Mustaghānmī* (The body in the Memory's Mirrors: Fictional Art in the Trilogy of Ahlam Mosteghanemi), which scrutinized Ahlam Mosteghanemi and her trilogy. The trilogy, as the article presented based on Taym's talk, was marked by multiple instances of plagiarism and intertextuality with prominent Algerian and non-Algerian texts. As the article further presented, Algeria's first Arabophone woman novelist had, indeed, nothing new to offer.

My coming across the article coincided, in fact, with Mosteghanemi being in London for the 'Arab Women of the Year Awards' to receive 'The Lifetime Achievement Award'. The event went viral on social media, following Mosteghanemi's appearance in a *qaṭīfa,* an Algerian traditional dress worn especially in Constantine and other Eastern parts of Algeria. The tweets and Facebook posts celebrated Mosteghanemi, her achievement and appearance in the traditional dress as an act to preserve both Arabic language and Algeria's *turāth* (heritage).

At that time, the celebration was fueled, in fact, by a rampant, heated ideological debate about Algeria's newly-elected Minister of Education, Nouria Benghabrit, for her non mastery of Arabic language, along with her proposal to use the Algerian colloquial dialect in teaching during the early phases of primary education. Whilst linguistic debates and issues relating to the questions of national identity in Algeria were not uncommon prior to 2015, talks about Algeria's first Arabophone woman novelist, on social media or in the article about Taym's symposium, were quite striking for a supposedly Arabophone country which, at that

time, celebrated the passing of fifty three years of official independence from French colonialism.

Hence, between Mosteghanemi’s popularity as Algeria’s first Arabophone woman novelist and Taym’s plagiarism accusations, there grew a personal curiosity that increased steadily about the author and Algeria at large, the result of which is this PhD thesis. In this vein and given Algeria’s French, colonial history that impacted Arabic language and its understandings, postcolonial Algerian literature emerged with a dividing cut between Francophone, liberal versus Arabophone, conservative literatures. Within the framework of this very conservatism, Arabophone literature emerged as especially cut from the emerging Algeria, mainly with regard to its own treatment of Arabic language, women and men that were all largely de-realised, an issue that lies, indeed, at the very heart of Mosteghanemi’s literary project. This study contends that, contrary to Taym’s plagiarism accusations, Mosteghanemi’s novels and intertexualities are purposeful restor(y)ings of the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion, both at the pedagogical, official and performative, literary levels.

The questions that the study attempts to address are as follows: How is the Algerian na(rra)tion contested, for the first time in Arabic, from the site of exile, by a woman writer? How do the novels engage in narrating, recreating and conceptualising the nation in ways that challenge both the official and literary na(rra)tions and through what paradigms? Given the etymology of the word nation *natus* ‘to be born’, to what extent can Mosteghanemi’s restor(y)ing(s) of the na(rra)tion(s) give birth to an interruptive imagi/nation that functions as a site of productive difference from dominant na(rra)tions?

This thesis is divided into five main chapters, each dealing with a separate aspect of analysis and a conclusion. Chapter One, ‘Postcolonial Algeria between Origi/nation and Narration: Ahlam Mosteghanemi in (Con)text’, will set the context of the study by situating

Ahlam Mosteghanemi within the contemporary Algerian postcolonial tradition and demonstrating in theory the study's gap and major issues of analysis. It will show that contrary to the plagiarism accusations, Mosteghanemi's intertextualities and/or novels are conscious, purposeful restor(y)ings of the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion, both at the pedagogical, official and performative, literary levels of the imagi/nation.

Chapter Two, 'We write to bring back what has been stolen: Nation, Identification and the Disruption of His-story in The Bridges of Constantine', will show how the author adopted the technique of disruption to mark a hiatus in Algeria's na(rra)tions with regard to the issue of both language and women. It will show how the author adopted the male voice of Khaled to replicate the very site upon which women and language emerged as bridges of the (post)colonial official and literary na(rra)tions, and then by deconstructing and/or reconciling the narrator's very dominant presuppositions.

Chapter Three, 'On the edge of the forbidden: Sites/ Sights of Resistance, Dis-identification and Transgression in Her-stories in Chaos of the Senses', will show how the second novel in the trilogy employs transgression as the second act of discursive resistance against official and/or literary narrations. It will show how the female voice of Hayat/Ahlam gives an averse account of identification with the imagi/nation that transgresses the unbreachable boundaries of masculinist na(rra)tions, mainly vis-à-vis women and language, throwing an element of chaos into the dominant understandings of the imagi/nation. In so doing, it will show how the novel complicates the national space, time, history, along with the very understandings of Arabic language and women.

Chapter Four, 'It's the game of masks in the carnival of life: The Postcolonial Na(rra)tion between Carnivalism, Masquerading and *Mask*ulinity in The Dust of Promises', will show how the novel employed the carnivalesque and the masquerade as more techniques

of intervention to demythify the very bridges of the postcolonial na(rra)tion, first by turning dominant imagi/nations upside down and then by utilising the trope of the mask and/or the masquerade to signal further instances of instability in the na(rra)tions, literary and official. It will then disinter the very paradigms of *Mask*ulinity in (post)colonial Algeria that led to women's subordination in the imagi/nation, through unweaving the narratives of the castrated man, along with his acts of masking and compensating which were all laid over women. In so doing, it will show how the na(rra)tion of subordinated masculinities becomes, in its turn, an act of restor(y)ing the dominant imagi/nations of the national combatant hero not only at the official but also the Arabophone, literary field.

Chapter Five, 'Marwana…is not on the map of the Algerian cities: (Re)mapping the Postcolonial Algerian Na(rra)tion(s) in al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki (Black Suits You)', will show how the novel employs remapping as a new tool of discursive resistance against the nation and its narration(s). It will show how the novel draws on the motif of the map in an attempt at the restor(y)ing of the fixed, closed imagi/nation both from within and outside, first by focusing on the Marginal city of Marwana, and then by testifying to the challenges causing fractures to Algeria's space and language, among others, from outside in today's global and/or transnational world. It will then move to show how the novel remaps a nation of a woman's own, first by drawing on the feminist figure of *al-Kāhina* as an alternative to the masculinist imagi/nation, and then by blurring all gender lines and setting them as contestable. Remapping the official na(rra)tion as such, the chapter will proceed to show how the novel remaps the symbolic image of women in the literary na(rra)tion to one of (r)evolution in the transnational world, creating, thereby, a map that operates as a zone of slippage interrupting the dominant official and literary na(rra)tions.

The concluding chapter, 'A story that was my own: An Afterword on Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Algeria's Postcolonial Na(rra)tions as Unfinished', will draw conclusions

on how Mosteghanemi's novels become sites of interlude that expose the nation as an unfinished community. More importantly and of central importance to the study, it will show how the novels become sites that interrupt the dominant postcolonial literary na(rra)tions which were marked by episodes of unequal power relations. It will also show how the tactics of disruption, transgression, masquerading and remapping unchained the author from the corset of the dominant na(rra)tions in Algeria whilst eluding essentialisation.

The study will provide a reading of the fiction of the author from gender, contextual and postcolonial lenses to call into question the gendered, monolithic, fixed and essentialist na(rra)tions, which, in the context of Algeria and of the studied author, grow out, and are the offshoot of, a largely (post)colonial imagi/nation. The concept of nation, although it continues to face fierce criticism for its flaws, is used alongside the contention that the nation, as a concept, cannot be rejected once and for all, in spite of its limitations which I fully acknowledge. The concept of nation used in this study is used loosely to refer to Algeria, defined as it was/is as a politically independent state. As rightly clarified by Arslane, 'the word for nation in Arabic is *ummah*, but it also […] translates as *watan* [...] a place where one resides […] Algerians call it *leblad*, literally meaning the country, a word that connotes a shared space of living and belonging'.[1]

The term 'restor(y)ing' was used in Brand's *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* to refer to the resilience of national narratives.[2] In this study, it is used to invoke both the possibility of the retelling of the na(rra)tion, which, being an imagined community, can also be re-imagined, and a restoring of the *non-dit* (non-said) to

[1] Ghazouane Arslane, 'What is Universal about the Algerian National Hirak', Africa is a Country, 2019 <https://africasacountry.com/2019/07/what-is-universal-about-the-algerian-national-hirak> [accessed 25 April 2020].

[2] Laurie Brand, *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 1.

‘bring back what has been stolen’, in the author’s words.[3] This restor(y)ing, however, does by no means intend to replace one story by another, but to hint at the fractures in the official na(rra)tion which, seeming to be at its most finished, is rather an unfinished entity.

[3]Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges of Constantine*, trans. by Raphael Cohen (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. 73.

Chapter One: Postcolonial Algeria between Origi/nation and Narration: Ahlam Mosteghanemi in (Con)text.

There is nothing post in this brave new world.[4]

Commenting on Algeria's decision to alter its second language policy and substitute French for English in the aftermath of the 2019 *ḥirāk* (movement) for political change, Ahlam Mosteghanemi wrote on her Twitter feed: 'A brave historical decision. Kateb Yacine used to say that French was "a war booty" for Algerians but, in fact, it was a booty for France, as its tongue conquered our economy, inner selves and destinies'.[5] As voiced by Mosteghanemi (1953–), the first acknowledged Arabophone woman novelist to mark a break in the Francophone literary narration, and following a long French presence of more than a century (1830–1962), the Algerian postcolonial na(rra)tion is still left with deep scars on its political, cultural, linguistic and social fabrics. Following over five decades of decolonisation, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion continues to be confronted and/or battered today by its troubled postcolonial imagi/nation which has continuously been (re)stor(y)ing and reconciling itself.

Maybe this legacy manifested itself best in the linguistic drama and in the belated appearance of the Arabophone Algerian novel, mainly the female-authored one. Although the postcolonial nation imagined and narrated itself as Arab, and although the Arabophone novel emerged in 1935 with Mohamed El Abed El Djilali and Ahmed Reda Houhou who were the first to have a novel published in Arabic, postcolonial literature in post-independent Algeria was French-language dominated. Arabic literature was especially scarce and confined to a

[4] John C. Hawley, 'Voice or Voices in Post-Colonial Discourse?', in *Writing the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination*, ed. by John C. Hawley (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), p. ixi.

[5] Ahlam Mosteghanemi (@AhlamMostghanmi, 30 July 2019).

number of poems and short stories. The first novel to be written in Arabic emerged in the 1971, when Abdelhamid Benhedouga published *Rīḥ al-Janūb* (Wind from the South).

In addition to its late appearance, Arabophone novel writing was a male preserve as the first acknowledged Arabophone novel by a woman emerged even later with the publication of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (The Bridges of Constantine) in 1993.[6] While prior to Mosteghanemi there was an attempt at Arabophone novel writing by the publication of Zhor Wanisi's 1979 *Min Yawmiyyāt Mudarrisa Ḫurra* (The Diaries of a Free Woman Teacher), the work is not usually classified as a novel because it crosses into the genre of autobiography and/or memoir, as will be discussed later.[7] Added to that, her works were largely limited by conservatism and simplification, were 'not remarkable for their freshness of either form or content' and were 'still bound to the traditional social climate, the nationalist struggle and the ideals that constituted the frames of reference for North African women', as argued by Berreda. [8]

Born to a Francophone father, who encouraged her to learn Arabic and who became ever since a major and a lasting influence on her along with her writings, and one of the first alumna of the Arabised curriculum in Algeria, Mosteghanemi became the first acknowledged woman novelist to constitute a hiatus to the Francophone novel in Algeria. With four novels published between 1993 and 2012, entitled as *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (The Bridges of Constantine), *Fawḍā al-Ḥawās* (Chaos of the Senses), *ʿĀbir Sarīr* (The Dust of Promises),

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[6] *Dhākirat al-Jasad* was first published in 1985, Algeria and was then re-published in 1993 by Dar al-Adab, Beirut. The Arabic title of the novel *Dhākirat al-Jasad* means memory in the flesh and was first translated as such (Memory in the Flesh) by Baria Ahmar Sreih. It was then retranslated as (The Bridges of Constantine) by Raphael Cohen. For the two translations see: Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, trans. by Baria Ahmar Sreih (Cairo: American University Press, 1999); Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges of Constantine*, trans. by Raphael Cohen (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[7] See: pp. 102-103-104.

[8] Mohammed Berreda, 'Arab North Africa', in *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*, ed. by Radwa Ashour and others (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 248.

published as a trilogy and later followed by *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (Black Suits You), she engaged in restor(y)ing a nation of a woman's own, for the first time in Arabic.

Upon the publication of *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, Mosteghanemi's first attempt at narrating a novel, it was accused in the Arab press of having been written by a man, specifically by the poets Nizar Qabani and Saadi Yusuf for its poetic style and for being narrated by a male voice. This kind of accusation was described by Mehrez as a cultural war caused by the misogyny that continues to plague the Arab World and Arab women writers.[9] As stated by Mosteghanemi herself, after the accusations, it took her five lawyers and three years to prove the novel was hers.[10]

Decades after official independence and amidst the prevalent linguistic and gender asymmetries, among others, there was, thus, nothing post in the brave new world of the postcolonial na(rra)tion. Although talks about the end of the postcolonial in the Arab World were started by Dabashi and others following the 2011 wave of uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, known collectively as the Arab Spring, the postcolonial, seems yet to continue to haunt Algeria.[11] Although succeeding in eluding the so-called Arab Spring, Algeria is being faced today with the *ḥirāk* for change, known alternatively as the 'smile revolution'. The *ḥirāk* for change, although developing over seven years following the Arab Spring, seems yet to testify to 'the past and its omnipresence'.[12]

Although talks about the end of the nation are also rampant in today's age, the Algerian nation manifests itself as being a nation that is yet in the making. Left with an embedded confusion, cracks and fault-lines on its text(ure), it is a postcolonial nation where

[9] Samia Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[10] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Shahiyyan Kafirāq* [As Lovely as Farewell] (Beirut: Hachette Antoine, 2018), p. 110.

[11] Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012), p. 2.

[12] Giulia Fabbiano, 'Le temps Long du Hirak: Le Passé et ses Présences' [The Long Time of the Hirak: The Past and its Omnipresence], *L'Année du Maghreb*, 21 (2019), 117-130.

nothing is 'post' at its finest. It is a nation of 'enduring legacies', of 'ongoing struggle' and of continued 'dissidences', in Jonathan and Kacimi's words respectively.[13] In so being, it testifies to the so many pitfalls of postcolonial nationalism(s) in the newly emerging imagined communities.

As famously argued by Anderson, Bhabha and Said, nations are constructed by means of imagination and narration.[14] Similarly, the origin/nation of today's Algerian na(rra)tion, of the linguistic and gender asymmetries, finds its roots in French colonialism and its imagination of *l'Algérie Française* (French Algeria). Taking over the ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse Ottoman Algeria (1515–1830), where there were no clear-cut dyads between Arabs and Berbers, natives and outsiders or Muslims and Jews, among others, France had it narrated as, and moulded to, *l'Algérie Française* through decades long policies of alienation, of Frenchification, of divide and rule and of *keshf* (exposure) which refashioned the core of Ottoman Algeria's space, culture, religion, gender and ethnicities, among others.[15]

In this very context, given 'the laws of the psychology of colonisation' that dictate that 'the plans of the occupier [...] determine the centres of resistance around which a people's will to survive become organised', and ever since the rise of anti-colonial resistance led by Emir Abdelkader, there has emerged a rigorous system of French-Algerian

[13] Jonathan Hill, *Identity in Algerian Politics: The Legacy of Colonial Rule* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), pp. 7-167; Mohamed Kacimi, *Dissidences: Chronique du Hirak* [Dissidences: Hirak Chronicals] (Tizi Ouzou: Frantz Fanon Editions, 2019).

[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd edn (London: Verso books, 2006); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Digital, 2014); *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990).

[15] For a background on Ottoman Algeria, see: James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 43. For a detailed background on the rise of nationalism in France, see: *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race,* ed. by Tyler Edward Stovall and Georges Van den (New York: Lexington Books, 2003). Policies of *keshf* will be discussed in the next chapter. See: p. 65.

dichotomies and of counter-na(rra)tions.[16] The narration of *l'Algérie Française* where Frenchness, Berbers and non-Muslims constituted the pillars of the imagi/nation and which operated along lines of division and *keshf* was soon restor(y)ed as an Arab, Muslim imagi/nation partitioned along antithetical frames of holism and seclusion. Amidst this seclusion, women and Arabic language emerged as especially sacralised.

However and given the impossibility of an 'uncontaminated' identity in any postcolonial na(rra)tion, to borrow Hutcheon's words, the dichotomy failed from the beginning to account for the emerging Algeria.[17] Hence, with the rise and development of nationalism (1919–1954) in Algeria, while the imagi/nation of Arab, Muslim Algeria was being cemented for some nationalists, *l'Algérie Française* was being internalised for some others. With the growing of the nationalist movement following the events of 8 May 1945 and with the rise of the Algerian war of independence on the 1st of November, 1954, at the hands of the OS (l'Organisation Speciale: The Special Organisation), known later as CRUA (Comité Revolutionnaire d'Unite et d'Action: Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action) and then the FLN (Front de Liberation Nationale: The National Liberation Front), the essentialist, all-encompassing imagi/nation of Arab, Muslim Algeria dominated the nationalist movement.[18]

Following the seven-year war that forced the French to negotiate Algeria's independence along with the referendum held on the 1st of July, 1962, that declared Algeria independent, the imagi/nation not only persisted but shifted from a na(rra)tion of anti-colonial

[16] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. by Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), p. 50.

[17] Linda Hutcheon, 'Circling the Downspout of Empire: Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature,* 20.4 (1989), 149-175, p. 171.

[18] This goes without saying that tensions were not nonexistant, see, p. 188. For more, see: Mostefa Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: Nation et Société* [Algeria: Nation and Society] (Paris: Maspero, 1965).

resistance to one of legitimacy for the FLN. Thus, with the formal independence, this essentialist, fixed and all-encompassing na(rra)tion was reified by the 1964 *Charte d'Alger* (The Algiers Charter) and by all succeeding presidents -Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumediene and Chadli Benjedid- who forged a na(rra)tion based on those very lynchpins of Islam, Arabism and Socialism.[19]

Central to this holistic Arab, Muslim imagi/nation was an ingredient of seclusion, which, as previously mentioned, countered France's policies of *keshf* and which construed women and Arabic language as sacralised. While Arabic was vigorously defined as the language of the Quran in the official na(rra)tion, no pillar bore the burden of seclusion as did that of women. While mid-twentieth century was a watershed period in the history of Algerian women, and while the impossibility of an 'uncontaminated identity' was not only confined to the impossibility of overcoming the emerging ethnic, religious and linguistic differences but also the impossibility of restoring uncontaminated gender roles, women continued to carry the weight of an untainted Algeria in the masculinist na(rra)tion.

Given its inability to account for the emerging Algeria, there was, thus, a quick shift from nationalism as resistance-to-resistance to nationalism.[20] Narrated monolithically as Arab, and Muslim through masculinist voices, imagi/nations and memories, the na(rra)tion alienated the Berbers, Christians, Jews, women and youth altogether from the national imagi/nation. Although discord over the narration of Algeria was not uncommon prior to the 1980s, best epitomised by the 1940s Berber crisis, the late 1980s was a period of economic recession that resulted in the total collapse of the weathering pillars holding up the imagi/nation.

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[19] Brand, p. 79.

[20] The idea of the shift from nationalism as resistance to resistance to nationalism was discussed in Christopher L. Miller's article on nationalism. See, Christopher L. Miller, 'Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in the Literature of Francophone Africa', *Yale French Studies,* 82 (1993), 62-100.

Following the pressure exerted by those who happened to fall outside the bounds of the na(rra)tion, resistance to nationalism was best epitomised by the rise of the Berber Spring and Islamism by the 1980s which altogether resisted the monolithic imagi/nation. While the Islamists manifested a takeover of the official imagi/nation, their take was far more extreme and way too reductionist. Adopting a retrogressive interpretation of Islam, the ingredient of seclusion was invigorated, with language and women being especially sacralised. While Arabic was vigorously narrated as the language of the Quran, women, marginalised in the gendered na(rra)tion and understood to be a pillar of an uncontaminated Algeria, were further subject to a retrogressive, a-historic imagination that emphasised their symbolic role in the na(rra)tion.

Although Bouteflika's term(s) 1999–2019 ushered in decades of relative socio-political stability following the 1999 Civil Concord Law, which brought an end to the the ten-year long power struggle (1990-2000) spured by the FIS, infasmously refered to as the Black Decade, more pressure on the na(rra)tion was being exerted on the nation. Whilst the memory of the Black Decade in Algeria deterred any violent reaction, resistance was not uncommon and was maintained following Tunisia's 2010 uprisings with the 2011 *zīt wa-sukkar* (oil and sugar) protests. This was even more the case with the 2019 *ḥirāk* for political change, which is witnessing different linguistic confrontations, ethnic antagonisms and demands for a more inclusive na(rra)tion, among others. The post-revolutionary generation is, thus, still following an ethos and pathos of contestation, testifying as such to the limitations of the official na(rra)tion which decades after decolonisation, is still prone to exhibit fractures in its texture.

The postcolonial Algerian nation was, thus, not insensitive to the pillars around which its imagination was placed. Manifesting an uncomfortable takeover of the nation-state model, first making the scene in 19th century Europe and oftentimes attributed to the degeneration of the religious dynasties and to the conditions of modernity at large, among others, it attempted

similarly to reify a holistic, imagined political community in ways that ruptured the French colonial imagi(nation). It so doing, it imagined a holistic past and present, invented a set of traditions, made a nation through the creation of strangers and claimed legitimacy from historic, collective memory.[21]

In this way, the Algerian na(rra)tion testified to the so many philosophical flaws of the concept of the postcolonial nation. Supposed to be liberating, it remained, however, entrapped in the colonial clutches it was attempting to discard. The postcolonial Algerian origin/nation fell into the trap of a nation that 'steps into the shoes of the former European settlement' and which 'puts on a masque of neo-colonialism', in the famous words of Fanon who forewarned both of certain venal paths to decolonisation throughout Latin America where nationalists did nothing but replace the colonial bourgeoisie and of the fragility of newly adopted forms of political order.[22] It also reflects Chatterjee's denouncement of the postcolonial model that is 'imitative in that it accepts the value of the standards set by the alien culture' and that it 'remains a prisoner of the prevalent European intellectual fashions'.[23] Replicating the French colonial mechanisms of centralisation, exclusion and division, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion also bespoke Terdiman's contestation of the postcolonial national model that does 'resemble colonial discourse as a narrative in which the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a recognised totality'.[24]

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[21] *The Invention of Tradition,* ed. by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa*, ed. by Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammett and Paul Nugent (Boston: Brill, 2007); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[22] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 122.

[23] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 2-10.

[24] Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 156.

Inheriting the colonial 'structural contradiction' where 'the colonially created nation is required to be both legitimate and subordinate', it was a postcolonial 'happy slave'.[25] The postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion proved, hence, to be more neo-colonial than postcolonial.

Being more neo-colonial than postcolonial, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion proved also to be monolithic. In projecting an image of totality and holism, it denied the 'cultural differences and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense cultural locations'.[26] However, not only was the nation monolithic and, hence, exclusionist of differences, but also of outside voices, of 'exiles and emigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of "foreign" cultures'.[27] It was a na(rra)tion that, in Said's words, 'affirm(ed) the home created by a community of language, culture and customs and, by so doing, it fend(ed) off exile'.[28]

The postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion bore also witness to contradictions inherent in the concept of nation. Alienating women, youth, non-Muslims and Berbers, it was an entity that 'binds', but also 'does unbind'.[29] Imagined as fixed, rounded and closed, the na(rra)tion is being especially contradictory in today's world given people's uprooting/migration and the rise of the global and/or transnational world, among others. More contradictions to the Algerian na(rra)tion manifested themselves in its troubled relation with time. Reliant on both modernity and tradition, on the past and the present in its imagi/nation, it proved to be an entity that 'presents itself as both a modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities and as a reflection of authentic cultural values culled

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[25] Tamim Al-Barghouti, *The Umma and the Dawla*: *The Nation-State and the Arab Middle East* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 2.

[26] Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 299.

[27] Ibid., p. 291.

[28] Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (London: Granta, 2012), p. 139.

[29] Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull, 2007), p. 4.

from the depths of a presumed communal past', in Kandiyoti's words.[30] In so doing, it was emblematic of the classic binary of the 'Janus-faced discourse of the nation', looking back to the past and ahead to modernity at once.[31]

Added to this temporal contradiction, it was also spatially divided between the material/outside versus the spiritual/inside, as famously discerned by Chatterjee.[32] In the outer material world, the na(rra)tion assented to the modernisation introduced by colonialism through the adoption of its models of science, technology and economy, among others, whereas in the inner spiritual world, they tended to maintain their traditional/cultural identity which was epitomised by language, religion, women and family practices. Although such a model also entailed women's access to modernity on equal parity with men, the split between the inside and outside worlds remained gendered.[33]

In the clash between the past and the present, between modernity and tradition, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion happened to settle its philosophical embarrassment around the axis of women. Being neo-colonial, exclusionist and contradictory, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion proved hence to be a gendered entity where women had a very shadowy place. Very much like most nationalism(s), the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion was 'a tale of one gender […] written by men for men and about men'.[34] In this tale, women happened to

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[30] Kandiyoti Deniz, 'Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation', *Millennium,* 20.3 (1991), 429-443 (p.431). For more on the issue, see: *Algeria: the Challenge of Modernity*, ed. by Ali El-Kenz (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1991).

[31] Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 3.

[32] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, *Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 5.

[33] Ibid., pp. 237-239.

[34] Joane Nagel, 'Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations', *Ethnic and racial studies*, 21 (1998), 242-269 (p. 243).

be 'treated more as symbols than as active participants', in Enloe's famous formulation.[35] It was a horizontal 'fraternity' that relied heavily on the structure of the patriarchal family.[36]

However, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion proved not only to proceed along lines of defined women's roles but also of men's. It was a tale written by men for men and about men, but it was also a tale where the nationalist hero was also the leader, the combatant and/or the soldier. It was a tale built on 'normative' and/or 'hegemonic masculinity', in Mosse and Connell words, respectively, which emphasised the manly virtues of courage, honour, strength and virility…and excluded 'subordinated forms of masculinity'.[37]

Given these philosophical cracks, among so many others, it is no surprise that the Algerian postcolonial na(rra)tion has also long been restor(y)ed at the performative level of the nation, mainly the literary which manifested itself in a paradigm shift from nationalism as resistance to resistance to nationalism. Against the official essentialist, exclusionist and gendered na(rra)tion, postcolonial writers have from the very onset engaged in the restor(y)ing of what Khatibi termed a *pensée autre* (different thought or alternative mode of thinking) and/or a *pensée pluriel* (plural thought), which manifests a difference that contests reduction and essentialisation.[38] Born in El Jadida and living between Marrakech, Casablanca and later Paris, he was influenced by his hybrid background and described himself as 'a stranger' whose thinking was 'an exercise of cosmopolitan alterity, able to move across

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[35] Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Senses of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 42.

[36] Anderson, p. 36; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 58.

[37] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 12; Raewyn W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 186.

[38] Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Maghreb Pluriel* [Plural Maghreb] (Paris: Denoël, 1983).

differences'.[39] Accordingly, he put forth an alternative model of imagining the Maghreb that reconciles its plural, multilingual and relational nature.[40] Influenced by their hybrid backgrounds, postcolonial writers in Algeria engaged similarly in restor(y)ing a *pensée autre*, setting as such the postcolonial na(rra)tion, which seemed to be at its most finished in the official imagi/nation, as a rather contested entity.

This *pensée autre* and/or shift from nationalism as resistance to resistance to nationalism was perhaps best addressed by Bensmaïa, who pinpointed three broad fictional trends in the history of Maghrebi literary narration: a period of 'acculturation and mimetism', of 'self-affirmation and combat' and, of most importance to the study, of 'myth interruption'.[41] As shown by Bensmaïa, while with the pre-war phase of acculturation and mimetism the literary na(rra)tion was mostly a native's chronicle on French Algeria and/or Algeria as a French colony constituting what became referred to as *le roman indigène* (the indigenous novel), the second phase of self-affirmation and combat emerged in the utopian aura of early nationalism and was one of national myth. Writers of this phase, positing much belief in the nation's inevitable independence and manifesting a total rupture with French Algeria, laid claim to a mythical, unified nation along with a people-as-one image. Being mythical, and although a potent tool in the early national struggle against the French, the na(rra)tion of self-affirmation and combat, failing to account for the emerging Algeria, soon collapsed to usher in the third phase of demythification or myth interruption.

[39] Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Figures de L'étranger dans la Littérature Française* [Figures of the Stranger in French Literature] (Paris: Denoël, 1987), p. 211.

[40] His ideas were put into practice in his novels. See: Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Tattooed Memory*, Trans. by Peter Thompson (Paris: L' Harmattan, 2016); *Love in Two Languages*, trans. by Richard Howard (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

[41] Réda Bensmaïa, *Experimental Nations, or, The Invention of The Maghreb*, trans. by Alyson Waters (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 22-23.

Marked with 'a radical questioning of the transparency and the validity of the myth', this phase no longer gives voice to a holistic, mythical nation but, rather, to an 'an experimental nation' and/or 'unfinished community' which, as denoted by its name, is fragile, open and yet in the making.[42] The phase has constituted as such a caesura in Algeria's previous na(rra)tions and has since been the prevalent tradition in literary na(rra)tions given Algeria's continued troubled relationship with its own imagi/nation. With the national myth demythified, what remains of the na(rra)tion 'would not be a single, unified nation or the communion [...] but the division [*partage*] itself'.[43] This *partage* becomes most commensurate with the emerging Algeria, rife as it was/is with divisions, fractures, differences and multiplicities; Algeria as a nation of unfinished revolution(s), transition(s), gender(s), ethnicity(s), religion(s), memory(s), space(s) and language(s).

Perhaps, nowhere did Algeria emerge most as unfinished as it did in the issue of language and, even more, in the issue of language and gender. While the official discourse apostrophised French as a second, foreign language, French was, for decades, the language of literary expression par excellence in postcolonial Algeria, as previously mentioned. This very condition itself was not unanimous. While, for some writers, French was 'a war booty', a language with which Algerians established 'a passionate relationship' or even 'a vacated property' that Algerians were free to adopt or to dismiss, in Kateb Yacine, Rachid Boudjedra and Kamel Daoud's words, respectively, it was for some others more of an 'exile' as was the case with Malek Haddad who had to quit writing once and for all given his inability to master Arabic.[44] While the official na(rra)tion defined Arabic as the language of the nation, postcolonial Arabo-Algerian literature, but mostly Arabophone novel-writing, was late to

[42] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[43] Ibid., p. 26.

[44] Rachid Boudjedra, *Lettres Algériennes* [Algerian Letters] (Paris: Grasset, 2014), p. 30; Kamel Daoud, *Meursault, Contre-Enquête* [The Meursault Investigation] (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014), p. 12.

make the scene, and when it did, it was a male preserve for over a decade. Arabic was, thus, 'a dream' for writers like Haddad and 'a secret song' for others, like Sebbar.[45]

But there is even more to the story of Algeria's unfinished postcolonial literary na(rra)tions against the woman question, once again. Francophone or Arabophone, male-authored literary na(rra)tions tended to dimythify the official na(rra)tion and to offer a social critique of issues relating to language, religion and politics, among others, except when it comes to the issue of women where they tended, rather, to conform, reproducing stereotypes prevalent in the state discourse and/or in society. Ever since Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, the first postcolonial Francophone novel in Algeria, male writers have established a retrogressive link between the idea of the nation and that of women in their imagination of the postcolonial nation.

As shown in a number of studies of key Francophone novels by Kateb Yacine, Malek Haddad, Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, among others, several critics have pointed to the perceived marginalisation and objectification of women in their respective narrations. A telling example might be Woodhull's study on Maghrebi literature, which showed how women figured in images of *'la femme sauvage'* with 'negative, wild femininity', as 'ambiguous figures' and as being of a 'destructive potency'.[46]

Along similar lines, Cook showed how, in 'the stories the men wrote', Algerian novelists 'wrote not so much of admiration as of dread'. In Yacine's *Nedjma,* the heroine who represents the new, modern woman produced by the liberation war is oft described by the men in her life as 'uncomfortably modern', as the 'seductively dangerous woman', as the

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[45] Leïla Sebbar, *Arabic as a Secret Song,* trans. by Skyler Artes (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

[46] Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 56-63.

‘*femme sauvage*’ and, also, as ‘cruel’.[47] Similarly, women figure in Mohamed Dib’s fiction either as ‘social victims always acted upon and never acting’, as confined mothers and ‘gentle life givers’ or as ‘threats’.[48] As she further argues, this trend is also rampant in Malek Hadded’s works where women are imagined either as ‘prostitutes’ or as emblems of Algeria itself. [49] Contemporary novelists in Algeria, as stated by Lazreg, ‘have yet to transcend what might be termed the women problematic’.[50]

Although the Arabophone Algerian novel received very little, if any, criticism, especially in English literature on postcolonialism, in comparison with Algerian Francophone works, which have been enjoying an undivided consideration, a parallel trend manifests itself in studies on the male-authored Arabophone writings.[51] For instance, Cox’s study showed how a few foundational Arabic novels manifested a critique towards the state ideology in issues related to language, history, religion and politics, except when it came to the issue of women, where they tended, rather, to conform. Against the state’s tendency to sacralise the Arabic language as the language of the Quran, for instance, writers showed little restraint tackling taboo issues, like sexuality, in Arabic. In their engagement with other issues like history, they have further attempted to provide different versions of notions of revolution and of people by shedding light on cracks in the official na(rra)tion.

However, such tendency pales in issues relating to the woman question for these same writers happen rather to replicate the state discourse of marginalisation, showing a far less

[47] Miriam Cook, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 129-132.

[48] Ibid., pp. 134-137.

[49] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

[50] Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 188.

[51] Nadia Ghanem, *Women’s Writing in Arabic*: *The State of Translations to Spanish*, *French, Greek* (August, 2020),
< https://arablit.org/2020/08/13/arab-womens-writing-the-state-of-translations-to-spanish-french-greek/ >
[Accessed August 2020].

subversive portrayal. With tropes of women as nation and women as a site of authenticity, women are assigned accessorial roles in the masculinists' imagi/nations of the postcolonial na(rra)tion. In her discussion of Tahar Wattar's *al-Lāz* (The Ace) for instance, Cox pinpointed four processes through which women were conceived of: 'symbolic silencing' where women's experiences were concealed, 'equating femininity with physicality/sexuality and masculinity with humanity/culture', 'figuring the father-son relationship as central', thus upholding and endorsing familial patriarchal relationships, and more importantly, 'denying women the possibility of redemption'.[52] His subsequent works *al-Zilzāl* (*The* Earthquake), *al-Ḥawwāt wa-al Qaṣr* (*The* Fisherman and the Palace and *ʿUrs Baghl* (The Wedding of a Mule) respectively are no exception for they showed a similar imagination of women.

Cox, thus, concluded that this very condition points to the fact that the woman question is 'separate and different from politics and political engagement. By association women are deemed to be other, and are not seen as part of a politicised understanding of the people for whom the revolution is waged'.[53] While the imagi/nation of women was liberated in the Francophone novel with writings of Assia Djebar, Aicha Lemsine, Malika Mokeddem, Yamina Mechakra, Leila Sebbar and Maissa Bey, among others, who were inserting na(rra)tions of women's own, the Arabophone novel was a male preserve and emerged, rather, as gendered.

Starting her literary career first as a poet, Mosteghanemi laments: 'when we lose a love one writes a poem, when we lose our homeland one writes a novel'.[54] The loss of homeland was for Mosteghanemi not only attributed to the language drama in Algeria but

[52] Debbie Cox, *Politics, Language, and Gender in the Algerian Arabic Novel* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 109.

[53] Ibid., pp. 126-127.

[54] Mourad Mosteghanemi, Biography [n.d.], <https://www.ahlammosteghanemi.com/about-english> [accessed 21 May 2017].

also to her attempt at narration which was anything but easy. Starting as a poet and working as a radio presenter of a romantic poetry show known as *hamasāt* (whispers) in the reserved context of the 1970s, she was denied admission to a Master's degree program in Algeria, given her non-conformity in the conservative imagi/nation. Receiving her first degree from the University of Algiers, she pursued further studies in France at the Sorbonne University, where she obtained a doctoral degree in sociology with a thesis on the issue of the representation of women in both Arabic and Francophone literature, written by men and women in Algeria, which was later published as *Algérie*: *Femme et Écritures* [Algeria: Woman and Writings] in 1985.

This very struggle in narration was especially exacerbated in the context of the Black Decade and the rising Islamic tides of the 1980s, when women and language were, more than any time, conceived as emblems of cultural authenticity and pillars of the postcolonial imagined community. Embracing the pen amidst this very context, Mosteghanemi stated that 'the more they take us by surprise with their knives, the more they make our blood one with our ink'.[55] Freeing herself from these socio-political clutches, she later found herself in the face of a fierce backlash and plagiarism accusations, as mentioned above.

Winning the 1998 Naguib Mahfouz Prize for *The Bridges*, Mosteghanemi became a centre of academic attention. Given Mosteghanemi's story with the postcolonial na(rra)tion, it is no surprise for literature on the author to be marked by two main trends; it tends either to decipher the male voice of Khaled that caused the novel to be seen as written by a man or to address the implications of language in relation to its choice and/or gender given Algeria's drama with language, as mentioned above.

[55] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *To Colleagues of Pen*, trans. by Ferial J. Ghazoul (1998), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/409/cu1.htm> [accessed 11 May 2017].

As to the male voice and as counter to the plagiarism accusations, many critics argued that the choice of Khaled as a narrator is intended to reflect on the many ways in which the (post)colonial impaired men's memory, sense of self and, hence, imagi/nation.[56] In this very context, many critics pointed to the ways in which Khaled engenders the imagi/nation as a substitution for his impairment. As argued by Youssef, Khaled 'projects his feelings of exile and loss onto Ahlam and tries to fashion her into a replacement for his mother and his homeland simultaneously'.[57] Along very similar lines, Stampfl argued that the novel attempts to show how 'the loss of the mother results in an identification of the homeland with motherhood; the motherland becomes a substitute for the mother's love'.[58] As further argued by Sabi and Yahia, the novel comments on 'the loss of the mother results in an identification of the homeland with motherhood; the motherland becomes a substitute for the mother's love'.[59]

Thus, many scholars argued that Mosteghanemi's choice of a male protagonist lies in her attempt to expose the masculinist perceptions of women in Algeria. It was showed to voice the burden and/or weight of representation on the Algerian woman and to de/construct imagi/nations of women as objects, of women as mothers and of women as cities. In so

[56] James McDougall, 'Social Memories 'in the Flesh': War and Exile in Algerian self-writing', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 30 (2010), 34-56; Hamza Issah Danjuma, 'Precursors of the Arab Spring: A Study of in *the Country of Men*, *Autumn Quail, Memory in the Flesh* and *the Earthquake'*, (doctoral thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University, 2015); Samah Elhajibrahim, 'Exposing the Ravages of Colonialism: A Political Analysis of Memory in the Flesh', *APSA Toronto Meeting Paper,* (2009), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1449503> [accessed 16 April 2019].

[57] Lamia Youssefi, 'The Embodiment of Algerian Trauma as Injury in Literature and Film: Two Female Voices from Memory in the Flesh and Rachida', *International Journal*, 6.2 (2018), 6-10 (p. 8).

[58] Tanja Stampfl, *A Century of Encounters: Writing the Other in Arab North Africa* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 135.

[59] Munthir A. Sabi and Eman Fathi Yahia, 'The Sense of National Belonging and Identity in Selected Works of Niko Kazantzakis, Kamala Mrkandya and Ahlam Mosteghanemi'*, College of Basic Education Researchers Journal,* 99 (2017), 61-80 (p. 72).

doing, Khaled's imagi/nation was showed to chronicle the many ways in which women's voice was reduced to silence, heard only when articulated by a na(rra)tion of his own.[60]

Far from being a failed choice and as further showed by Moore and others, Khaled's na(rra)tion was argued to point not only to images of women as objects, mothers and cities but also to images of woman as nation/nation as woman.[61] In so doing, the male voice adopted attempts to denounce the intersection of women and nation in postcolonial Algeria, where the woman as nation/nation as woman nexus constituted a pillar of the postcolonial imagi/nation which, while supposed to be a liberatory formation, turned out to be one of subordination.

Given Algeria's thorny linguistic background, it is no surprise that her choice of Arabic also become a topic of discussion in the emerging articles and/or critical essays on the author. The choice of Arabic was argued by many to attempt to mark a hiatus in the Francophone literary tradition in Algeria and to oust the linguistic exile into which postcolonial writers were long entrapped.[62] Putting an end to the Franophone na(rra)tion, she was shown to set Arabic, the language in which Malek Haddad wanted to voice the na(rra)tion, as the language of liberation, of restoring 'a turath (heritage) that was sullied when the French ruled Algeria'.[63]

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[60] Aida A. Bamia, 'Dhakirat al-Jasad (The Body's Memory): A New Outlook on Old Themes', *Research in African Literatures,* 28.3 (1997), 85-93; Ferial Ghazoul, 'Recalling (Af)filiation in Memory in the Flesh', *Journal of Comparative Poetics,* 24 (2004), 166-181; Asma Yousfi, 'The Algerian Woman and the Burden of Representation in Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine',* (Thesis, Msila University, 2020).

[61] Lindsey Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*: *Transformations* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 85.

[62] Shaden M. Tageldin, 'The African Novel in Arabic', in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, ed. by Francis Abiola Irele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 97.

[63] Tanja Stampfl, 'The (Im)possibility of Telling: Of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh', *College Literature*, 37.1 (2010), 129-158 (p.130).

Restor(y)ing Arabic as the language of Algeria's na(rra)tion, Mosteghanemi was further shown to have restor(y)ed Algeria's history with translation. As an unprecedented step in the history of the nation's literary na(rra)tions, the novel was translated first into English then into French, an issue considered by Stampfl as being never one of coincidence and which has, rather, to do with the fact that Mosteghanemi wanted to oust the colonial clutches through alienating the French readers themselves.[64] More to the language drama, the novel's French translation was showed to have omitted a part from the novel's dedication of the work to Malek Haddad as being a martyr of the Arabic language, obscuring as such the novel's explicit and deliberate investment with the language drama.[65]

With the publication of her later novels which adopt a woman's voice along with her publication of a non-fiction work *Nisyān.com* (The Art of Forgetting) which, with a note on its cover that reads 'not for sale to men', was intended as a guide to women to empower them to step out of destructive relationships, Mosteghanemi's literary project and use of Arabic started to be seen by some as being part of the feminists' fight against women's subordi/nation.[66] A recurrent trend in discussions of the author is, thus, a comparison of her literary fight to that of Djamila Debéche, Assia Djebar and Fadila Mrabet. Concerning themselves all with the issue of women's emancipation in Algeria, the authors are being usually brought together in discussions of Algerian postcolonial feminism.[67]

Brought under the same umbrella by some, Mosteghanemi's na(rra)tions were seen by others, like Cheref, as being rather 'somewhere on a spectrum between Assia Djebar and

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[64] Ibid., p. 130.

[65] Elizabeth Holt, 'In a Language That Was Not His Own: On Ahlām Mustaghānamī's Dhākirat al-Jasad and Its French Translation Mémoire de la Chair', *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 39.1 (2008), 123-140 (p. 140).

[66] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Art of Forgetting : a Guide for Broken-Hearted Women,* trans. by Raphael Cohen (Doha: Bloomsbury, 2011).

[67] Ellen McLarney, 'Unlocking the Female in Ahlām Mustaghānamī', *Journal of Arabic literature,* 33.1 (2002), 24-44.

Djamila Debèche', for her having less of 'a pen craft'.[68] However, Tageldin's study on the author which drew on her *Algérie*: *Femme et Écritures* revealed key differences between these writers and Mosteghanemi's project. According to him, Mosteghanemi's project was 'Pro-Arabic, postfeminist proclivities', for Mosteghanemi adopts a different approach to gender emancipation by both Arabising the na(rra)tion and taking into account the postcolonial brunt on both men and women.[69]

Although she succeeded to generate criticism as compared to other Arabophone writers, albeit very relatively especially in English literature on postcolonialism, the prize winning novel of *The Bridges* was/is being at the centre of all academic discussions while the remaining novels are being overlooked, in spite of their being complementary to *The Bridges.* The only two exceptions in current literature on the author are two major critical books which approached the author and her trilogy altogether. Krizam's study adopted an analytical, historical approach to the novels and the way they correspond to Algeria at the levels of politics, religion and society, along with a stylistic approach to the author's use of language. Krizam concluded that the author's techniques, mainly of intertextuality with canonical Arab and non-Arab literary texts, 'had a great role in deepening the content of the novels' and enabled the author to 'excel in a field where so many before her failed'.[70] Although insightful in detailing the author's linguistic techniques, forms, devices and choices, the approach was largely reductive and fell short of addressing the essence of the author's literary project, as I will argue below.

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[68] Abdelkader Cheref, *Gender and Identity in North Africa: Postcolonialism and Feminism in Maghrebi Women's Literature* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), p. 52.

[69] Shaden M. Tageldin, 'Which Qalam for Algeria?: Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djebar's L'Amour, la Fantasia and Mustaghānimī's Dhākirat al Jasad', *Comparative Literature Studies,* 46.3 (2009), 467-497 (p. 482).

[70] Raissa Krizam, *ʿĀlam Aḥlām Mustaghānmī Arriwāʾiy* [The Fictional World of Ahlam Mosteghanemi] (Amman: Zahran Publishers, 2010).

However, the same praised aspects in Krizam's work were a centre of criticism in El-Sharafi Taym's study, which accused Mosteghanemi for passing off other authors' ideas as hers. According to her, Mosteghanemi's novels, largely but implicitly, intertextualise canonical texts, mainly of Malek Haddad's *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus* (The Flower Pavement no Longer Responds) and Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma,* among others. Praised as creative and productive by Krizam, Mostegahenemi's technique of intertextuality was cast off as stealth by El-Sharafi Taym's.[71]

That said, literature on the author, except for Tageldin's article on *The Bridges,* to my knowledge, tends especially to fail to link the author's literary project to her *Algérie*: *Femme et Écritures.* Tracing the representation of women in the Algerian postcolonial na(rra)tions from the 1920s to the 1980s, Mosteghanemi, along lines similar to those of Cox, Cook and Woodhull, detailed above, concluded that the Algerian postcolonial novel contested the Algerian na(rra)tion except when it came to the issue of women, where it tended rather to fail to cope with their (r)evolution in the nation.

According to the author, while the modern, new woman emerged in Algeria as early as the 1950s, the type was largely denied, allowed existence only in the context of the liberation war with images of *la femme militante* (the woman fighter). Upon her return from the maquis, the modern woman becomes reduced to a set of symbols – mostly to images of woman as nation or depicted as sexually licentious in masculinist literature which was unable to cope with modernity and remained enmeshed in fears of change.[72]

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[71] Mouna El-Sharafi Taym, *al-Jasad fī Marāyā al-Dhākira: al-Fan al-Riwāʾī fī Thulāthiyyat Aḥlām Mustaghānmī* [The body in the Memory's Mirrors: Fictional Art in the Trilogy of Ahlam Mosteghanemi] (Lebanon: Difaf Publishing, 2015).

[72] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Algérie*: *Femme et Écritures* [Algeria: Woman and Writings] (Paris: Harmattan, 1982), p. 26.

As she continued to remark, while women emerged as an idea de-realised in both Francophone and Arabophone literature, the latter happened especially to bear the (post)colonial brunt of subordination. Subject to episodes of colonial manipulation and emerging as a sacrosanct pillar to the imagi/nation first in the conservative, anti-colonialist na(rra)tion of the AUMA (Association des Ulema Musulmans Algeriens: Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama) and then the FLN's, it happened to be notably burdened by their conservatism and seclusion. This was so much so that not only was the use of Arabic only associated with a religious frame of reference, but that literature was confined to a bunch of moralising lessons in the writings of Salah Kherfi, Mohammed al-Akhdar Assayahi, Abdallah Rkibi and Zhor Wanisi, among others. In the framework of their very idealism, not only were women imagined as an idea de-realised but also men, who had to be epitomes of the quintessential national hero and emblems of 'normative' and/or 'hegemonic' masculinities in the postcolonial imagi/nation. Scarce in quantity, modest and limited by simplification in quality, Arabophone literature was especially dissociated from the emerging nation. While the 1970s testified to the rise of novel writing at the hands of Abdelhamid Benhedouga, Tahar Wattar and Rachid Boudjedra, among others, who started to liberate Arabic language from those very clutches, the genre remained a male preserve for over a decade and continued especially to uphold women's subordination.

At the heart of Mosteghanemi's dissatisfaction was, thus, 'the absence of women's Arabophone literature open to the problems of the present and future'.[73] Denouncing Wanisi and her earlier attempt at narration in Arabic, which 'takes the defence of the traditional society', she queried: 'Should we accuse/inculpate Arabic language for this delay? Clearly not! As the Arabic-language literary productions [...] in the countries of both the Mashreq

[73] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures,* p. 286.

and the Maghreb attest to'.[74] Although Mosteghanemi started her literary career as a poet with a bunch of poems which liberated both Arabic language and women from the very chains of conservatism and had in embryo most of the ideas that were later pillars of her novels, the novel genre emerged as most suitable for her deliberate restor(y)ings of the literary na(rra)tions.

With her contention that 'when we lose a homeland we write a novel' as previously mentioned, she confirmed that no literary genre provided a fertile ground for penning the nation as did the novel. As asserted by Anderson, the novel was the most adequate site for the embodying of the national imagination for comprising the tools needed to voice the nation as an imagined community spatially, temporally, socially and psychologically. Far from being plagiarised or failed attempts at intertextualising, Mosteghanemi's narrations become, thus, an attempt at restor(y)ing the Algerian na(rra)tions not just at the official, pedagogical but also the performative, literary levels of the na(rra)tion, as will be shown in the four studied novels.

[74] Ibid., p. 287.

Chapter Two: '*We write to bring back what…has been stolen*': Nation, Identification and the Disruption of His-stories in *The Bridges of Constantine.*

Introduction

This chapter will analyse *The Bridges of Constantine*, the first novel of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's trilogy which narrates the story of the Algerian nation's birth, foibles and failure, spanning over four decades (1945–1988) of the issues plaguing Algeria at the socio-political and cultural levels. Set in 1988 and published in 1993, the novel is structured as a memoir of a former combatant in the liberation war of 1954 and is reflective of the ideological misconceptions long upheld in his-stories of Algeria as an imagined community springing from a male subjectivity which seized women's imagi/nation.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, postcolonial Algeria originated through episodes of imagination and narration as Arab and Muslim, hinging on frames of holism and seclusion against *l'Algérie Française*, an imagi/nation that was long contested in Algeria's literary narrations except in issues relating to women and language where literary narrations upheld the postcolonial subordi/nation. With both women and Arabic language carrying the postcolonial brunt, the postcolonial na(rra)tion was marked by the absence of women's Arabophone literature that copes with the emerging nation.

It is, thus, against this very backdrop that *The Bridges* voices Algeria in Arabic by a male protagonist as a direct restor(y)ing of the postcolonial literary imagi/nation. The adoption of a male voice attempts to reflect both on and off those very his-stories of subordi/nation, to disrupt the seizure of Arabophone women's na(rra)tions that are open to the problems of women, the greatest of which was their constant Othering in his-stories. This chapter attempts to show how the author adopted the technique of disruption as a first strategy of restor(y)ing the postcolonial na(rra)tion. It will draw on the issue of identification to chronicle the many ways

in which the postcolonial imagined community in Algeria emerged as based on language and women in his-stories of the imagi/nation. It will then show how the novel attempts to 'kill' and/or 'finish off' the hero, in the words of the author, and to 'bring back what has been stolen' in his-stories of the postcolonial na(rra)tion vis-a-vis language and women by disrupting the hegemonic na(rra)tions of Algeria, at both the pedagogical and performative levels of the nation.[75]

1. '*It thrusts the nation into my face*': (En)gendering Algeria in (Con)text

The postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion emerged as an imagined political community through episodes of counter French na(rra)tions and imagi/nations. While *l'Algérie Française* rested upon narrations of alienation, Frenchification, divide and rule and *keshf*, which refashioned the core of Algeria's space, culture, religion, gender and ethnicities, Algeria was soon restor(y)ed as an Arab, Muslim imagi/nation, resting on antithetical frames of holism and seclusion. With the colonial practices being most detrimental to, and having the most unsettling impact on, women and language, it is no surprise for these two to emerge as core identification referents in his-stories of the postcolonial imagi/nation.

While Algeria emerged from colonial history with visible bruises on the socio-political and cultural fabrics of the na(rra)tion, the official story was too limited by simplification and closure. It was entrapped in a people as one na(rra)tion of resistance that was delineated as both continuous and victorious from 1830 to 1962. While the political independence in 1962 put an end to the colonial presence, the latter's legacy continued, however, to impair Algerians, their space and time of the na(rra)tion. Women and language continued especially to bear the post/colonial brunt not only throughout the na(rra)tion of the nationalist resistance during 1919–1962, but also throughout that of nation-building during 1962–1988.

[75] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*. pp. 8-73.

While the late 1980s was a period of economic recession, socio-political unrest and surging Islamism, which, altogether, resulted in the total collapse of the national project as best manifested in the so-called the Black Decade, the imagi/nation of women and language was being even more reified under the Islamists' imagi/nation. Taking over the official imagi-nation of Arab, Muslim Algeria, the Islamists adopted a retrogressive conception of Islam and the ingredient of seclusion was invigorated, with language and women being especially sacralised. While Arabic was vigorously narrated as the language of the Quran, women, marginalised in the gendered na(rra)tion and understood to be a pillar of the nation, were further subjected to a retrogressive, a-historic imagination that emphasised their symbolic role in the na(rra)tion.

Set in 1988, the novel delves into the very onset of this unrest to chronicle his-stories of identification with Algeria both at the official and literary levels of the na(rra)tion. As to the latter, and while postcolonial literature in Algeria voiced counter-narrations that contested the monolithic, official his-stories of the imagi/nation, women and Arabic language emerged as immaculate, sacrosanct sites of the na(rra)tion. While women emerged as an idea de-realised in both Arabophone and Francophone masculinist na(rra)tions, Arabic-authored narrations were scarce and bore the mark of conservatism and conformity against French, which was conceived of as the language of contestation and freedom, as is manifested in the na(rra)tion of the protagonist of *The Bridges* with women and language, which were both imagined to be his 'bridges of Constantine', the pillars of his imagi/nation.

2. *'The other side of having one arm'*: On His-story as a Memory in the Flesh?

In this vein, *The Bridges* is an account of Khaled ben Toubal and his-story under the (post)colonial imagi/nation. Born in colonial Algeria to a powerless mother and a cheating, patriarch father, Khaled had a dysfunctional childhood as a victim of a failed patriarchal order. Growing attached to his mother and spending six months in Kidya prison following the events

of 8 May 1945, where he became nationally conscious, he returned home to a mother that he 'barely recognised' given his 'father's indifference'.[76] Against the memory of his merciless father, he associated his mother with the divine, the good and the sacred.

Following her death, Khaled was so enmeshed in feelings of dispossession and of orphanhood that he joined the liberation war in its second year leaving behind nothing but 'the grave of a woman who had been (his) mother and a younger brother for whom (his) father had already chosen a new mother'.[77] With the land being in need of safeguarding, very much like his weak, passive mother, the personal intersected with the collective for Khaled and the protection of the mother/land became his only resort to become a man. It was 'as if my rank', Khaled stated, 'certified that I had been cured of my memory and my childhood'.[78]

Before long and in a battle on the borders of Batna, he received two bullets in his left arm and had his arm amputated, carrying ever since the memory of colonial Algeria and of the liberation war in his flesh. Being unable to engender the actual nation, he resorted to painting as an antidote for his dispossession and became obsessed with painting women, Constantine and its bridges. Unable to cope with the rapidly disorderly present, he became fixated on, and nostalgic towards, his past, which offered promises of security, order and comfort, albeit relative. Longing for his past imagi/nation, he gave his very first painting the name of 'nostalgia', which, as famously theorised by Lacan, is based first and foremost on being un-whole and/or dispossessed, on not having.

The novel attempts, thus, to body forth the postcolonial na(rra)tion through the male voice of Khaled and his impaired body. It attempts to voice 'the physical textures' and 'the

[76] Ibid., p. 245.

[77] Ibid., p. 20.

[78] Ibid., p. 21.

material effects' of French colonialism that were 'embedded in the flesh/skin'.[79] As previously mentioned, the Arabic title of the novel *Dhākirat al-Jasad* means 'memory in the flesh' and was first translated as such. The wounded-body trope, as argued by Upstone, attempts to 'enforce the view that the postcolonial body is not an autonomous entity, but one already marked by the colonial past'.[80] Memory in the flesh becomes, thus, the embedded memory of his-story with, and resistance against, colonialism, the site on which colonialism's most enduring episodes of violence were written.

Testifying to colonial history, Khaled's missing arm bears also witness to the failure of the postcolonial national project of oneness. Being in self-exile in France for opposing the course of the postcolonial state in Algeria, Khaled lives 'on the margins of the nation', in Bhabha's famous formulation.[81] As stated by Khaled: 'I learned then the other side of having one arm: You were destined to reject and oppose because in no circumstances could you clap'.[82] Thus, the missing arm attests also to his inability to condone the project of nation building, to the failure of the project of national oneness which was rather partial.

Portrayed as marginalised, Mosteghanemi attempts, thus, to chronicle the (post)colonial legacy on his-stories, which were rigorously marked by the endured subordi/nation.[83] Throughout his narration, Khaled appears to be so overwhelmed with his feelings of subalterinity that he conceives of himself as 'a tangled skein of wool', as someone who is writing from a city that he has 'come to resemble' and as 'the person and the wound at the

[79] Anastasia Valassopoulos, *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 111-122-124.

[80] Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 149.

[81] Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 6.

[82] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 244.

[83] Anissa Daoudi, 'Algerian Women and the Traumatic Decade: Literary Interventions', *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies,* 5.1 (2016), 41-63 (p. 49).

same time'.[84] He also recurrently describes himself as being a man with 'psychological problems', with 'a disabled memory of which this disabled body was but a façade' and with 'a lifetime of complexes, obstacles and contradictions'.[85]

Taking a metro in France and coming upon a sign that reads 'reserved for the war wounded and pregnant women', Khaled laments: 'a quarter of a century later I was ashamed of the empty sleeve of my suit [...] as though hiding my memory and apologising for my past to those who had no past'.[86] Enmeshed in feelings of subjection, of obsession with comparison, validation and evaluation, Khaled echoes what Fanon referred to as being 'the first truth' of the (post)colonial subject. 'The negro is comparison. There is the first truth', writes Fanon.[87] He is so much so as he is first and foremost troubled by his body: 'I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me', as put by Fanon.[88] With Khaled being enmeshed in feelings of subalternity and bearing them on his disfigured arm, the novel sets his-story with the imagi/nation as being one of embedded dispossession. With the Algerian postcolonial na(rra)tion (en)gendered through 'masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope', in Enloe's famous words, it is no surprise for the postcolonial imagi/nation in Algeria to bear also this memory and/or mark on its flesh, on its text(ure).[89]

3. '*Woman in the guise of nation*': Women in His-stories of the Postcolonial Imagi/nation

Perhaps, nowhere did the Algerian na(rra)tion bear this (post)colonial mark of dispossession as it did in the imagi/nation of women, exemplified best by the heroine

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[84] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges,* pp. 39- 3- 49.

[85] Ibid., pp. 64- 49- 124.

[86] Ibid., p.48.

[87] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 211.

[88] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 84.

[89] Enloe, p. 44.

Ahlam/Hayat, who emerges as dispossessed and/or de-realised first in her father's and then lover's his-stories of the nation. In this vein, and as chronicled in *The Bridges,* Ahlam/Hayat is the newly born baby-girl of Si Tahar, Khaled's army commander during his martial service who entrusted him to register her officially as Ahlam at the town hall following the amputation of his arm and his leaving of the maquis.

Reflecting on his days in the maquis, Khaled narrates how Si Tahar chose a boy's name for his offspring upon learning of the pregnancy of his wife. 'Ignoring the possibility of a girl', as stated by Khaled, was the pure 'result of a military mind-set and nationalist obsession. I often heard him begin his military speeches and plans with we need men'.[90] The passage points, thus, to the fact that the imagi/nation of the postcolonial na(rra)tion was from the very onset intertwined with that of gender for the *mujahid* Si Tahar, who both narrated and (en)gendered a male space where women were apostrophised in the na(rra)tion. Learning of the birth of a baby-girl instead of a boy, Si Tahar chose to name her Ahlam (dreams) while her mother opted for Hayat (life). 'Did he want to register his *ahlam* -his dreams- at the town hall to ensure her reality?', queried Khaled.[91] (Re)named as Ahlam and replacing the name of Hayat testifies to the fact that nations are constructed under the law of the father and not that of the mother in the Maghreb, as argued by Moore.[92] While her mother wanted her to be born free and gave her the name of 'life', her father wanted her to be his 'dreams', an idea both mythologised and de-realised in his-story of the *mujahid* Si Tahar who echoes the FLN's official na(rra)tion.

The Bridges tells, thus, the story of the (en)gendering of the Algerian postcolonial na(rra)tion. It narrates the many ways in which the rise of the postcolonial imagi/nation was

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[90] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 24.

[91] Ibid., p. 24.

[92] Moore, p. 85.

from the very onset partitioned along gender lines in Algeria and was 'historically a male-constructed space, narrated into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists and writers', to borrow Boemher's words.[93] As famously argued by McClintock, 'all nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous'.[94] They are so much so because they are 'never sui generis', but rely 'on the formative structures which […] across history […] tended to comprise the formations of the old dynastic state and the patriarchal family'.[95] Building on the existing hierarchical, patriarchal structure of production, reproduction and sexuality, it becomes further male-dominated in the realm of the na(rra)tion, of labour, governments, bureaucracy and organisations.[96]

Men's domi/nation results, accordingly, in a retrogressive women's subordi/nation in the imagi/nation. As famously chronicled by Yuval-Davis, women have frequently been involved in nationalism in five principal ways: as procreators of ethnic members in the nation, as reproducers of ethnic/ national limits by performing proper gender roles, as producers and propagators of ethnic/national culture, as emblems of the nation's difference and as players in national struggles, which bodes very well with the Algerian case.[97]

Narrated as such on the pedagogical level of the na(rra)tion by the FLN's male leaders, as epitomised best by the *mujahid* Si Tahar, the gendered imagi/nation became further reified as such in Algeria's masculinist literary narrations, as manifest in the imagi/nation of the narrator Khaled Ben Toubal who is, in fact, the same protagonist of

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[93] Elleke Boemher, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 22.

[94] *Dangerous Liaisons*, ed. by Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock and Aamir Mufti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 89.

[95] Boemher, p. 31.

[96] Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Vintage, 1971); Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2002); Suzanne Franzway, Robert W Connell and others, *Staking a Claim: Feminism, Bureaucracy and the State* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1989).

[97] *Woman, Nation, State*, ed. by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989), p. 7.

Malek Haddad's 1961 novel *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus* [The Flower Pavement no Longer Responds], as I will show below. As mentioned above, with the rise of Khaled's national consciousness following the events of 8 May 1945, the idea of the beloved nation became largely intertwined with that of the beloved mother and rigorously detached from that of the patriarchal father. This occurred to such a degree that his imagi/nation of Algeria was conceived of as a mother/land, a site of his childhood and the harbour of his present and future desire.

Decades later, and in one of his art exhibitions in France, where he settled and became a famous painter, Khaled happens to meet Hayat/Ahlam, the woman who becomes instantly associated with his mother/land. Spotting Ahlam/Hayat for the first time with her 'long black hair' and her yellow gold plated bracelet, which 'had to be a piece of Constantine jewellery', he stated: 'the day you entered this exhibition hall, you brought Constantine with you. She came in your figure […] in the bracelet you were wearing'.[98] The bracelet Ahlam/Hayat wears is a *miqyas,* a traditional bracelet that women in Algeria wear, which, in Khaled's contention, brings the mother/land with it. Carrying the memory of his mother/land on her flesh, Khaled falls for Ahlam/Hayat before first sight, as he narrates: 'I am not fool enough to say I fell in love with you at first sight. Let's say I was in love with you before first sight […] I […] had always been ready to love a woman just like you'.[99] The en/gendering of Khaled's imagi/nation took, thus, the form of the woman as nation / nation as woman, an imagi/nation where women's position is largely stereotyped as predictable.

Ahlam/Hayat becomes, subsequently, entrapped in a set of symbols. M/othered and imagined as his mother/land, images of woman as city and of city as woman blend in Khaled's imagi/nation, where Ahlam/Hayat is narrated as a woman who has 'taken on the

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[98] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, pp. 33-83.

[99] Ibid., p. 32.

features of a city', as 'Constantine woman in dress', as 'Constantine woman in love, joy, in sadness' and, also, as Constantine 'with her cold limbs and feet, her hot lips, her bouts of insanity'.[100] She is also, as he continues to narrate, 'not a woman but a city', that is 'towering, proud, authentic, deep unassailable by dwarfs or pirates'.[101] Imagined as such, and as Bamia and other critics like Ghazul and Moore note in their respective analyses of the novel, the character of Ahlam/Hayat develops into a symbol for the nation itself.[102] She becomes a woman who, as Khaled continues to state, 'has gradually taken on [...] the contours of a nation'.[103]

Khaled's imagi/nation is, in fact, deliberately replicative of a trend in masculinist literary na(rra)tions in postcolonial Algeria, where women happened to bear the mark of the (post)colonial nation. Ever since the rise of postcolonial literature in Algeria which was male-dominated, male authors tended to Other the Algerian woman in their imagi/nations which envisaged women as an idea largely de-realised, manifest best in images of women as objects, as cities, as mothers and/or as motherlands, among others. The latter was maybe exemplified best by, but not confined to, Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* and Malek Haddad's *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus*, the two masculinist imagi/nations of the mother/land deliberately replicated in Khaled's na(rra)tion.

As previously mentioned, Khaled ben Toubal is himself the protagonist of Haddad's *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus,* a novel that heavily invested in the issue of women as mother/lands. It narrates the story of Khaled who takes to exile in France to escape the Algerian liberation war, leaving behind his beloved wife Ourida, to whom he remained faithful, in spite of his friend's wife Monique and her attempts to have him seduced upon his

[100] Ibid., p. 5.

[101] Ibid., pp. 118-85.

[102] Bamia, pp. 85-93; Ghazoul, pp. 166-181; Moore, p. 85.

[103] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 5.

stay in France. Enmeshed in his longing for his mother/land, Ourida becomes the quintessence of Constantine par excellence, a bridge of his imagi/nation of Constantine, a na(rra)tion framed in a womanly mould, very much like Khaled's imagi/nation of Hayat/Ahlam.

Procceding with his imagi/nation, Khaled of *The Bridges* queried: 'How then would I chase your fleeting shooting stars?'.[104] Referred to as a 'star', and echoing first Haddad's Ourida, Hayat/Ahlam further metamorphoses to Nedjma, the heroine of Yacine's classic of *Nedjma* (which means star in Arabic) that narrates the story of Nedjma, the ideal woman, mother, sister, cousine, lover and, most importantly, the mother/land of Algeria which is obsessively desired in the imagi/nation of all four narrators of the story, Rachid, Lakhder, Mourad and Mustapha.

In this vein, both Yacine's and Haddad's his-stories with the mother/land and or with womanly imagi/nation stem from their real-life stories with the mother/land. As to Haddad, born in 1926 in colonial Constantine, where he was raised on his mother's songs, tales and narrations in Algerian colloquial Arabic, both the mother and her mother/tongue became the matrix of his imagi/nation of Constantine. His imagi/nation was, however, soon disrupted following his enrolment in the French schools where he was faced with totally different wor(l)ds of French language, teachers and culture and became, thus, enmeshed in feelings of orphanhood and of dispossession.

As an adult, and while in France to pursue his higher education, he was traumatised by the events of 8 May 1945 when he became nationally conscious, a date which he celebrates as his birth-date. Living in French wor(l)ds, the rise of Haddad's national consciousness intersected with his dispossession from, and longing for, the mother and her mother tongue, which were both the bridges of his imagi/nation of the mother/land of

[104] Ibid., p. 57.

Constantine. Since then, the personal intersected with the collective in his-stories of the imagi/nation and became an embedded mark on the flesh of his na(rra)tion.

Along comparable yet slightly different lines, Yacine was born in colonial Constantine and had a happy childhood with his parents, which was yet interupted by his induction into a French school. The disruption became even more exacerbated for Yacine following the events of May 1945, when he was enjailed, along with thousands of other demonstrators. Being eager to reunite with both his mother and his cousine fiancée following his release, he learnt that his mother had lost her sanity and was taken to a madhouse following the death of her husband and many of her children, very much like the legend of the Keblouti Keltoum, the wife of Keblout who went mad after the killing of her husband, and that his cousine fiancée Nedjma had gotten married. With the rise of his national consciousness and the intersection of the collective with the personal, the image of the nation became, thus, blured with that of women for Yacine. Consequently, the character of Nedjma haunted Yacine's writings where she emerged at times as *la femme fatale* (the illusive woman), the desired woman yet unpossessed as a symbol for the cousine fiancée, and at other times as a symbol for his mad mother, *la femme sauvage* (the wild woman), merging, as such, the imagi/nation of the mother/land with that of the lover.

That said, Khaled's his-story in *The Bridges* is a reverberation of Haddad's and Yacine's his-stories with the imagi/nation. Troubled by their colonial and childhood memories of dispossession, of losing mothers or contact with mothers upon the events of 1945, the mother became the custodian of roots, values and origins which were yet disrupted by the colonial. With their personal his-stories intersecting with the collective, the imagi/nation of the nurturing mother/land became an embedded mark on the flesh of their na(rra)tions. Given the many ways in which most early postcolonial writers in Algeria had a similar his-story with the imagi/nation, the image of Algeria as a mother/land dominated the

literary canon of postcolonial literary na(rra)tions for over three decades. *Nedjma* is, as stated by Khaled:

> The novel I'd never write, but which I felt in some way was also my story. A story with my dreams and disappointments, with the face of Mother on the verge of despair […] Yes, in the end we were a generation with one story combining the madness of mothers who loved too much, the betrayal of fathers who were too cruel, make-believe stories and emotional frustrations.[105]

Khaled's imagi/nation is, thus, a direct reverberation of Algeria's masculinist literary na(rra)tions, a reverberation that derives from Mosteghanemi's study on Algeria's postcolonial literature itself.

As noted in Mosteghanemi's study, and as seen since the very onset of the postcolonial literary na(rra)tions of Algeria, male writers and/or narrators seem to be haunted by, and are oftentimes aggrieved at, a childhood afflicted with pain, at a childhood of malaise, dispossession and indifferent fathers. Whether in Haddad or Yacine's imagi/nations, or in the imagi/nations of other authors, dispossession became deliberately voiced in the trope of orphanhood to distance their na(rra)tions from their fathers.[106] 'There is always a dog who questions the point of his existence on this planet. There is always a dog, and he is perhaps an orphan or a bastard', writes Haddad.[107] Along similar lines, Yacine writes: 'I the old orphan, I was to relive the […] martyrology'.[108] It is no surprise, thus, for the trope to be similarly rampant in Khaled's imagi/nation: 'The death of a father doesn't an orphan make, only the death of a mother. I was an orphan and intensely aware of it, all the time'.[109] In these very

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[105] Ibid., p. 245.

[106] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, p. 55. The trope of orphanhood is also rampant in other male-authored works. See: Tahar Wattar *al-Lāz* [The Ace] (Algiers, SNED, 1974); Mohammed Dib, *La Danse du Roi* [The King's Dance] (Paris: Seuil 1968).

[107] Malek Haddad, *L'élève et la Leçon* [The Student and the Lesson] (Paris: René Julliard, 1960), p. 118.

[108] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, 1956), p. 176.

[109] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 15.

respective con/texts, it is also no surprise for the mother to emerge as a refuge-like figure for the heroes/writers. As famously argued by Fanon, 'beneath the patrilineal pattern of Algerian society' and beneath 'the visible, manifest patriarchy', there lied 'a structure of matrilineal essence', characterized by 'the role of the mother, that of the grandmother, the aunt and the 'old woman'.[110]

However, not only is the mother a refuge to the hero, but so, too, is the hero for the mother. Narrating his-story with his mother/land following his release from the prison after the events of 1945, Khaled writes: 'It was as if I was the only thing that could justify her existence'.[111] Unhappy in her dysfunctional marriage with the patriarch husband, the mother finds refuge in Khaled who becomes her only site of investment, of insurance and provision. He becomes conceived of as a '*rewejli*' (my little husband), to borrow Abdel-Jaouad's metaphor, a possession of her own.[112]

The trope impregnates Algeria's masculinist na(rra)tions, which results in the literary space appearing as an 'other space', where the mother–son relationship appears as 'an odd couple', as further contested in Mosteghanemi's study. While the imagi/nation, as Mosteghanemi proceeds to argue, corresponds to a prevalent condition in the Maghreb, where the mother is usually a refuge from the world's hostilities, the result was the domi/nation of the mother figure who happens to occupy the central, if not sole, image of women in masculinist na(rra)tions at the expense of the modern woman, the lover and/or the wife.[113]

Described as 'an odd couple' in Mosteghanemi's study, the mother–son relationship is described along similar lines as a 'utopian kingdom' in Abdel-Jaouad's study on Maghrebian

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[110] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, p. 37.

[111] Ibid., p. 245.

[112] Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, '"Too Much in the Sun": Sons, Mothers, and Impossible Alliances in Francophone Maghrebian Writing', *Research in African Literatures,* 27.3 (1996), 15-33 (p. 20).

[113] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, p. 47.

literature.[114] According to him, the mother–son na(rra)tion is nothing but a utopian kingdom 'founded essentially on the ruins of castrating Maghrebian, colonial and national patriarchy'. In this context, writing 'about or in the name of the mother becomes […] first and foremost a desire for self-emancipation'.[115] This is mainly because writing in the memory of, and for, dead and/or illiterate mothers distances writers from them more than it brings them closer to them. In so doing, these writers aim not at the emancipation of mothers and/or women but at the creation of a neopatriarchal order characterised by 'impossible alliances between past and present, male and female, the oral/aural and the written, the archaic and the postmodern'.[116] By this very token, Othering the woman in the imagery of the mother, the archetype of tradition, becomes but an impossible alliance and a failed attempt at bridging the gap between the past and the present of the masculinist na(rra)tion.

This very impossible alliance between the past and the present of the na(rra)tion attests, in fact, to a serious polarity inherent in the concept of the postcolonial nations and in cultural nationalisms more specifically, which looms large in Khaled's imagi/nation. As argued at length by Anderson and being 'an imaginary artefact', the nation happened to face a serious impasse and/or embarrassment as to its own story with time. As he argued, the rise of nations was first and foremost conditioned upon the (r)evolution in the understandings of the notion of time caused by the shift from dynastic, messianic time to national homogenous empty–time.[117]

While in the dynasties of pre-eighteenth century simultaneity was experienced 'along time', in one fixed direction, where Worldly time merged with, and was vertically connected to, the divine and the eternal, which was hardly horizontal and/or linear with no marked

[114] Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, '"Too Much in the Sun"', p. 15.

[115] Ibid., p. 16.

[116] Ibid., p. 30.

[117] Anderson, p. 24.

separation between the past and the present, the eighteenth century ushered in the introduction of two new modes of imagination, namely that of newspapers and novels. These two modes enabled a sense of shared experience and a modern conception of simultaneity 'across time' and not along it; that is from one point to another with radical separation between the past and the present.[118] As to novels, for example, the mode presented characters as simultaneously performing different tasks at once and imagined them as a unified community operating along homogenous empty–time which is both horizontally continuous and separate. The new temporal understanding made thinking the nation possible as it allowed the bringing together of a group of strangers who are engaged in different activities measured by clocks and calendars under the umbrella of a one single imagined community.

As he further argues, while the temporal change was, in and of itself, an offshoot of modernity, the present/past drama was, rather, one of manipulation for those nations faced with a power struggle and/or legitimacy crisis. Whilst, in the past, religious communities ruled in the name of, and drew their legitimacy from, the divine, nations drew theirs from the past. Very much like the divine, the past allows 'the axiomatic grip on men's mind', on continuity and tradition and, hence, on cohesion in the face of the discontinuous and/or fragmented present.[119] The past, as further argued by Suleiman, 'confers on the nation the appearance of vertical unity in diachronic time, thus, enabling it to counterbalance the horizontal diversity of cultural and physical spaces in synchronic time'.[120]

Hence, while nations are an artefact of modernity, they do, paradoxically, hinge on the past both to legitimise themselves and to safeguard their cultural difference from the Other, the colonial. Nationalism, Kandiyoti argues, 'presents itself as both a modern project

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[118] Ibid., p. 145.

[119] Ibid., p. 36.

[120] Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 38.

that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities and as a reflection of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past'.[121] This came to be infamously referred to as the 'Janus-faced' nation, paradoxically looking back to the past and ahead to modernity.[122]

In the clash between the past and the present, between continuity and discontinuity, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion happened to settle its philosophical embarrassment around the axis of women. While men had a different relationship to modernity and allowed themselves a degree of freedom to espouse the new lifestyles offered by modernity, women had to be fixed in the time of the imagi/nation as undiluted and had 'a strange relationship with time', in Khaled's words. Hence, while 'time flowed on', as narrated by Khaled, Hayat/Ahlam 'remained like the waters of Granada […] unlike the water pipes and taps', in his imagi/nation of Hayat/Ahlam, the mother/land of impossibility.[123] While the waters of Granada represented the good, undiluted past, the water pipes and taps represented the bad, tainted present of the na(rra)tion.

Being fixed in the time of the mother/land, the image of the new, modern woman becomes a betrayal for Khaled's imagi/nation. Coming coincidently across a photo of hers in a magazine's article to promote her book, *The Curve of Forgetting* and surprised by her new haircut, Khaled mourns:

> What had you done to your hair, now short […] searching for the memory of my first failure with you […] How had I once found an echo of my mother in you? I

[121] Deniz, p. 431.

[122] See Paul Stevens, 'Milton's Janus-faced Nationalism: Soliloquy, Subject, and the Modern Nation-state', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 100.2 (2001), 247-268.

[123] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 158.

> had imagined you in her burgundy dress, as you kneaded, hands with long, painted nails, the bread whose taste I have been missing for years.[124]

While Hayat/Ahlam's long black hair fostered a traditional imagi/nation of his mother/land in their very first encounter as previously seen, Ahlam/Hayat's new haircut and long painted nails, which epitomises the modern, becomes Khaled's 'failure'. Being a trustee of the image he has of his mother/land, she becomes fixed as a-historic in the time of his-stories of the imagi/nation. While the imagi/nation of Ahlam/Hayat as the modern brings about the Other, the imagi/nation of the mother solicits the good, harmonious past, stymieing as such any failure with the imagi/nation.

This very modernity was especially bad as it was brought about by the colonial. As argued by Abdel-Jaouad, modernity was 'an act of violence against Maghrebian society at large and, thus, regarded with suspicion especially by the male population'.[125] This was predominantly the case for Khaled whose experience with modernity was tightly linked with, and tainted by, the colonial, which, by and large, disrupted the mother/land of Constantine. Wandering through Constantine's streets upon his visit following years of absence, Khaled stops in front of a closed house commenting:

> It was […] a planned brothel […] Beautiful and miserable women […] came from all neighbouring cities […] It was there that my father had spent his money and his manhood […] which has been the cause of my mother's secret sadness, and perhaps death from despair.[126]

Khaled's narration testifies to the many ways in which the modern and the Other blend, as it chronicles episodes of malaise brought about by prostitution and gender manipulation in the imagi/nation of *l'Algérie Française,* which lies at the heart of the postcolonial gendered na(rra)tion in Algeria.

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[124] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[125] Abdel-Jaouad, '"Too Much in the Sun"', p. 25.

[126] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 234.

From a historical lens, when France first colonised Algeria in 1830, the French forged a series of mythologies that envisioned Algeria as a country of fanatics, oppressed, barbarians and, of most importance to Khaled's na(rra)tion, of prostitutes who were in need of saving.[127] Upon their landing in Algiers, and, as famously narrated by Alloula, the Algerian woman, veiled and impervious to the French and their gaze, marred the French's imagination of the prostitute and the sexually licentious woman who lays naked in the fenced *harem* (sacred space), with her opulent jewellery, dancing and/or smoking hookah and who, thus, needs saving. Shortly, the French photographers availed themselves of models to pose for prostitute-like photos in the now-quadrated studios where they had bars placed on windows and doors and where they had the bedrooms fashioned in harem and prison-like designs. Manipulating both the body and the space, the photographers produced photo postcards of prostitute-like, imprisoned and lesbian women, among others, which were nothing but a 'rhetoric of camouflage', to make-believe the women-in-need-of-saving narrative.[128] Embracing the doctrines of assimilation and the *mission civilisatrice* (a civilizing mission) to justify their move, saving was articulated best in their re-imagination of women.[129]

[127] Lahouari Addi, 'Colonial Mythologies: Algeria in the French Imagination', *Franco Arabs Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*, (1996), 1-10 (p. 1).

[128] Malek Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, trans. by Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 28.

[129] The idea of assimilation was initially ingrained in the 1789 French Revolution and the subsequent *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* which held that all men are inherently and naturally equal in rights. The latter entailed that the rights of the French citizens, their institutions and structures, had to be extended and transported overseas to colonized peoples. Algeria, as a French new possession, was believed, therefore, to have a natural right to become an integral part of France, the country of freedoms, both in political and cultural terms. The *mission civilisatrice* was an assumption that the Europeans were more civilized and enlightened than those non Europeans, who were reversely seen as primitive, savages and inadequate to govern themselves. They were, thus, believed to have a moral duty to disseminate their civilization, and more importantly, to rescue backward peoples. The colonization was, hence, projected as a noble act aiming at the uplifting of the wretched.

Re-imagined first as such, the Algerian woman was further subject to episodes of de-culturalisation and of Frenchification. Within the framework of the French colonial plan of making Algeria 'a mere continuation of France on the other side of the Mediterranean', in Stora's words, the French put into practice a rigid policy of Frenchifying Algeria.[130] As delineated best by Fanon, the Algerian woman who 'does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself', was, at once, the incarnation of Algeria's cultural difference and a peril to the colonial plans.[131] Accordingly, the French put into practice a 'let's win over women and the rest will follow' equation that imagined women as the chief pawns in the re-imagination of na(rra)tion.[132]

Added to the rhetoric of Othering, the Algerian woman found herself, hence, face to face with a myriad of sexual exploitations. She was subject to a rigid policy of *keshf* of Muslims *ser* (essence/secret), which was effectuated through unveiling and prostitution programs.[133] In this vein and as to the issue of prostitution, when the French conquered Algiers in 1830, prostitution was not non-existent under the Turkish state. An established practice that was mainly in the service of Turkish soldiers, prostitution was a small-scale enterprise that was kept in check by the mezonar, the chief of police. With the French soldierly influx in Algiers, the French engaged in the establishment of a number of brothels, mainly in, but not confined to, Algiers, which testified to the existence of fourteen prostitution houses, all owned by Europeans.[134] Under the French presence, not only was prostitution made larger in scale, but it became, also, an instrument of colonial control over Algerian men, who were punished for their non-collaboration with France by having their

[130] Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A short History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 6.

[131] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, p. 169.

[132] Ibid., p. 37.

[133] Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence,* p. 52.

[134] William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1858), p. 184.

wives and/or daughters kidnapped and coerced into prostitution during the liberation war.[135] Being a tool of colonial control, prostitution was also a harbour for a number of disadvantaged women, who were obliged to turn into prostitutes as a form of wage labour amidst the widespread poverty brought about by the conquest and the ensuing wars.[136]

While the French were establishing prostitution houses which, as narrated by Khaled, ushered in a surge of malaise, they were, however, and along contradictory lines, putting into practice a series of stern, regulating laws that outlawed both the brothels and human trafficking in the 1940s in France. In spite of the framework of the imagi/nation of the prostitutes in need of saving, the issue was, however, met with indifference in French Algeria. Treated as a shameful vice that had to be eradicated in France, prostitution was narrated as being part and parcel of the natives' customs in Algeria that cannot be changed. [137]

'Identity as understood in the context of a certain ideology of dominance', as stated by Min-ha, 'is usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake corrupted or Westernised'. In this process of elimi/nation and as she proceeds to argue, 'the other is [...] always condemned to remain its shadow while attempting at being its equal'.[138] In this context, thus, it is no surprise for the Algerian postcolonial na(rra)tion to narrate a parallel but antithetical imagi/nation against the very claims of *l'Algérie Française* and for the antithesis of the *keshf* of *l'Algérie Française* to be a na(rra)tion of seclusion, where the Algerian woman, her veil and body construe the very pillars of the inimical imagi/nation.

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[135] Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence,* p. 54.

[136] Ibid., p. 54.

[137] Ibid., p. 56.

[138] Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference', in *Dangerous liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 415-419 (p.415).

Ever since the rise of the reformist resistance with the AUMA, Ibn Badis imagined a na(rra)tion where girls are nurtured as the moral guardians of Algeria's authenticity within the very confines of the religious schools. Although women were at the very onset of anti-colonialist resistance part of the struggle, they were, later, largely secluded and, hence, excluded from the movement, which was overtly male-dominated. While a number of political parties such as the Party of the Algerian People (PPA) and the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (MTLD) started to have their attention drawn to the perks of women's inclusion in the movement, following the activism of a number of the French philanthropic organisations which targeted native women to save them from the veil and seclusion, under the framework of the civilising mission, women continued to be excluded.[139] Whilst, following the events of 8 May 1945, women of all ranks and ages partook in the struggle against the French and were largely involved in caring for the victimised and injured, they continued to be affiliated with seclusion, which dominated the narration of the nationalist movement.[140]

However, the outbreak of the armed resistance in 1954 was a watershed for women who were, from the very onset of the national struggle, engaged in the performance of both non-combative traditional roles of washing, cooking, nursing or sewing and combative, revolutionary ones. Amidst this very (r)evolution of roles, a number of women were ALN members and were part and parcel of the *mujahideen* (freedom fighters) in the *maquis* and were carrying arms, bombs, money and different war subsidies past French checkpoints under

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[139] Zahia Smail Salhi and Meriem Bougherira, 'North African Woman and Colonialism', in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies,* ed. by Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (Swizerland: Springer Nature, 2020), p. 8.

[140] A watershed moment in the history of Algeria and more specifically of women in Algeria was the events of 8 May 1945, where a number of Algerians demonstrated to celebrate the end of the Second World War and the Triumph of France and seized the opportunity to call for independence as an acknowledgment to their war-time efforts in the war with the French.

their veils or loose dresses. Some others were fooling the French, manipulating their perceptions of the passive woman, her body and veil, were appropriating their style for war-purposes, abandoning the veil, disguising themselves in Western-like clothes and acting as intermediate agents between Algerian and French posts. In spite of the latter, women's activism continued to be seen as an offshoot of the modernity of the Other and their participation was largely sabotaged by the FLN, which soon started to deport these very women to the borders of Morocco and/or Tunisia, curbing, thereby, their participation in, and engagement with, the *maquis.*

Upon independence, and with the closure of the war, women were, more than any time, deemed to seclusion, as their activism was no longer justified and/or accepted. While the 1962 constitution confirmed equality between men and women, the Algerian narration was hemmed in seclusion within the framework of the FLN's Arab, Mulsim imagi/nation. The seclusion reached its peak in 1964, following the institution of *Al Qiyam* (values) organization, which infringed women's rights and encouraged their public harassment. With the 1976 constitution having little to offer for women's narration, the promise of equality evaporated in the ensuing decade of the 1980s, when women's agency was largely circumscribed.[141] Although it started with the 1981 official decision that compelled women to travel accompanied by a *waliy* (male guardian), which was later nullified in response to feminist activists' protests, the repression began to be cemented with the introduction of the 1984 Family code during the term of president Chadli Bendjedid, who sacrificed the freedoms of women in an attempt to appease the 1980s wave of Islamism. Under the law, polygamy was ordained, divorce was made a male exclusivity, support for divorced women was denied and no sanctions were instituted against men who abandoned their children.

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[141] Zahia Smail Salhi, 'Algerian women, citizenship, and the 'Family Code'', *Gender & Development,* 11(3) (2003), 27-35 (p. 28).

Although all nationalisms were gendered, as showed above, Algeria testified that 'the nation's engendering took on particularly acute forms in Europe's former colonies'. This is so much so because 'a hyper-masculinity became both the overdetermined legacy of colonial state power and a means of resistance to it'.[142] While the author linked na(rra)tions of Ahlam/Hayat as a mother/land to existing patriarchies, the image was especially reified in the post/colonial realm, first due to the mother/land-in-need-of-protection narrative and then to the colonial imagi/nation of native women who were objects of colonial desire and manipulation.

Commenting on his painting of nostalgia which was his imagi/nation of the mother/land of Ahlam/Hayat, and surprised by her lack of fit to his imagi/nation, Khaled asks: 'Had I painted [...] an authentic copy of my memory, while, ultimately, you dreamt of becoming a copy of Catherine?' With the elimi/nation of *keshf* through seclusion, it is no surprise for Ahlam/Hayat to be aligned with the saint mother and for any deviation from this imagi/nation to be associated with the Other, represented in the novel by Catherine, Khaled's French mistress. Although precolonial Algeria testified to existence of a plurality of lifestyles for Algerian women who ranged from urban, veiled women that were free to engage in the prevalent public life of the time, to those rural *Nailiyat* (women from the Ouled Nail tribe) or the *Azriyat* (women from the Aures) who were unveiled and manifested a degree of sexual freedom, among others, the colonial practices resulted in a fierce ideological contestation over authentic/inauthentic, Western/Eastern, colonial/national definitions of womanhood.[143] It resulted in what Abdel-Jaouad called the *madona* or the *putana* dichotomy. As he puts: 'In the Maghrebian text, traditional female characters fall into two mutually exclusive types; the *madona* or the *putana*. They represent either the mother or the other, the saint or the whore',

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[142] Boehmer, p. 33.

[143] Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*, pp. 23-33.

which bodes very well with Khaled's na(rra)tion.[144] It gave rise to what Silva, along lines similar to Abdel-Jaouad, described as a clear-cut line between the valorised mother or the whore of the nation, 'the agent of cultural bastardisation […] whose body carries the insignia of the foreigner'.[145]

With the *madona/putana* dichotomy, Ahlam/Hayat becomes imagined as sacralised to elude the threat of the bastardisation of the modern, who is also the Other. The sacralisation is so much so that the heroine becomes mythologised as a 'Greek goddess', which Khaled created 'like the pre-Islamic Arabs created their gods'.[146] Narrating his-story with Ahlam/Hayat, Khaled further writes: 'I want to write about you in darkness'.[147] Although named officially as Ahlam, Khaled narrates how he prefers to call her Hayat as it is 'the name that is not on people's tongues, not written down on the pages of books and magazines nor in any official register'.[148]

This sacralisation is, in fact, very much like the mother/land trope, rampant in masculinist literary imagi/nations and a main point of dissatisfaction in Mosteghanemi's thesis. In Haddad's *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus*, for example, when Monique asks Khaled why he never dedicated one of his writings to his beloved Ourida, he answers: 'It is called modesty, it could be called shyness, or respect, or prejudice. Or dignity'.[149] Commenting on Haddad's passage and comparing the trend to Emir Abdelkader's old love poems which he wrote to his wife, Mosteghanemi pondered: 'One can then wonder if the Emir lacked modesty

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[144] Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, '"Too much in the sun"', p. 19.

[145] Neluka Silva, 'Mothers, Daughters and "Whores" of the Nation': Nationalism and Female Stereotypes in Post-colonial Sri Lankan Drama in English', *Journal of Gender Studies,* 6.3 (1997), 269-276 (pp. 272-273).

[146] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges,* pp. 72- 102.

[147] Ibid., p. 25.

[148] Ibid., p. 26.

[149] Malek Haddad, *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus* [The Pavement of Flowers no longer Responds] (Paris, FeniXX, 1961), p. 48.

in addressing his wife in his poems, something which Algerian poets still hesitate to do a century and a half later'.[150] With the skepticism towards the modern which symbolized the Other, the Algerian imagi/nation fell, thus, into the trap of yielding what Fanon called a 'hard-core of culture', which, while being overly fixated on the past, becomes alienated from 'the current of history'. Although Fanon acknowledges the historical necessity of the nationalist cultural project in Algeria, characterized, as it was, by its need to solicit a precolonial culture, he was still wary of the perils surrounding the latter, for any overemphasis and/or manipulation might lead to a 'blind alley'.[151]

The result of the blind alley was a constant subordination of women who were too marginalised in his-stories, as argued by Khanna, that they were 'cut' from the very structures of the (post)colonial narration.[152] Narrating the story of Kheira who was both raped and impregnated by the French officers during the liberation war, along with her son Mohamed Garne, a French citizen who, unlike her, was offered compensation by the French, she argued that in offering compensation 'from father to son, Kheira became incidental, the instrument of the violent reproduction of the masculinist state'. Going unnoticed and denied reparations, the act points to the many ways of 'cutting, interruption, impurity and incommensurability' in both France and Algeria's narration of women.[153] That said, Ahlam/Hayat was similarly cut from Khaled's narrations, from his imagination of the nation where she emerged as being apostrophised to a city, a mother and/or a mother/land, among others.

However, while Khaled identified with the mother/land, Hayat/Ahlam identified against it. While Khaled identified with Hayat/Ahlam's *migyas,* she narrated how she only wore it 'on

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[150] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, p. 21.

[151] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 241.

[152] Ranjana Khana, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 4.

[153] Ibid., p. 4.

special occasions', as it was 'heavy and hurts (her) wrist'.[154] The traditional *miqyas* which symbolises the mother/land and the weight of cultural continuity placed on Ahlam/Hayat, becomes an impossible alliance between Ahlam/Hayat and his mother, between Constantine's past and present.

With the impossible alliance, it is no surprise that, while Khaled identified Hayat/Ahlam with his mother/land, she happened, however, to detach herself of this very memory which was, in her words, 'unfit for habitation'.[155] This is mainly because the issue of identification, which shares with identity the Latin root *idem*, meaning 'same', is anything but same and/or static. It is rather 'a process never completed', in Hall's words.[156] It does not suggest 'a stable core of the self unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change, the bit of the self which remains always-already "the same", identical to itself across time'.[157]

Bringing the discussion of identification into a postcolonial context where it became used loosely to refer to the shared experience with the imagi/nation, and, along similar lines to Hall, Bhabha argued that identification is 'never the affirmation of a pre-given identity never a self-fulfilled prophecy'.[158] Bhabha's remarks were based on his analysis of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks,* which chronicles the black native's encounter with, and identity formation through, the alien colonial culture and the white settler's look, which made him aware of his difference and exclusion from that very culture. As argued by Bhabha, the black native's self-image becomes split between his desire to be like the colonial master and/or

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[154] Ibid., p. 83.

[155] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 204.

[156] Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London, Sage, 1996), p. 16.

[157] Ibid., p. 17.

[158] Homi Bhabha, *Remembering Fanon, Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition*, in *Black Skin White Masks*. Foreword, p. xvi.

settler and between his desire to keep his identity as a form of resistance against and avenge of the other. Being in two contradictory places at once with each on the end of one spectrum, the black native's identification becomes 'never a finished product'.[159] It becomes nothing but a process that 'bears the mark of splitting'.[160] By the same token, the ex-colonial's identification becomes one of 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications', which 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'.[161] While this very difference caused Khaled's 'failure' with the imagi/nation, Hayat/Ahlam happened, rather, to celebrate it and chose to wear Constantine's *miqyas* on special occasions, as will be shown in the next chapter.

4. Disrupting His-stories of Language: Arabic and French Restor(y)ed?

Not only did Khalid's imagi/nation rest on his perception of the mother and/or the mother/land, but also of the mother-tongue and/or of language. Reflecting on his childhood, Khaled narrates how modernity, as symbolised by the French school, has similarly upset his-story with language. Following his release from prison after the events of 8 May 1945, Khaled narrates how he returned to his secondary French school which 'was supposed to produce the top rank of Gallicised Algerian intellectuals and civil servants', in Khaled's words.[162] At this very school, and as Khaled continues to narrate, one was a traitor 'simply for choosing French […] in a city where it was impossible to ignore the authority of Arabic and its 'esteemed place in people's hearts and memories'.[163] Identifying with Arabic, which was a pillar of his imagi/nation of the mother/land as early as the 1940s, he opted for a clandestine school where

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[159] Ibid., p. XVII.

[160] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 64.

[161] Ibid., p. 65.

[162] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 18.

[163] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

he studied Arabic, 'the only subject whose teaching was banned'.[164] As he came of age, French became a 'complex' for Khaled, while Arabic was conceived of as one of his 'nationalist dreams'.[165] His childhood dialect was, in its turn, the language of his '*Omayma'* (mother), a pillar of identification with the mother/land and an archetype of tradition.[166]

In order to understand Khaled's na(rra)tion which also attempts at the restor(y)ing of the na(rra)tions of Malek Haddad and Kateb Yacine, as I will show below, one needs to trace the linguistic his-story of the postcolonial imagi/nation in Algeria. Historically speaking, on the eve of the French conquest, Ottoman Algeria was multi-lingual, with Berber, Arabic, Spanish and Turkish tongues, among others, which were all part of the amalgam of Algeria's colonial history. Although Ottoman Algeria testified to the existence of some linguistic hierarchies, language was by no means politicised and/or conceived of as a pillar of the empire's legitimacy of rule.[167]

At that very time, however, an antithetical trend prevailed in the linguistic scene in France. As early as the sixteenth century, France adopted a standardising linguistic policy, which required the use of French instead of Latin in official documents. The policy developed later in the seventeenth century to impose the use of a standardised version of French spoken by the elites in Paris, while ousting the vernaculars spoken by other regional nobles who constituted a threat to Cardinal Richelieu's ambitions. Being later reinforced by the Jacobins who imposed the use of French in education throughout the republic in the

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[164] Ibid., p. 14.

[165] Ibid., pp. 109-60.

[166] Ibid., p. 210.

[167] Mohamed Benrabah, *Language Conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013), p. 27.

aftermath of the French revolution, the policy made way to *l'Algérie Française,* resulting in what Calvet called 'glottophagie' (language eating).[168]

Driven by this very same monolingual and anti-dialectal ideology, when France re-imagined Ottoman Algeria as French Algeria and embarked on colonial nation-building, it adopted a rigid policy of Frenchification. The latter intended to drastically alter the heart of Algeria through the transmission of French culture via the establishment of French language as the one and only official language in the newly annexed country. This very plan was orchestrated through the colonial educational system, which adopted a curriculum that was especially designed for French Algeria and that intended not to civilise, but to forge 'a sense of attachment to France'.[169] Education was, thus, confined to a small group of elites, or what Khaled called 'Gallicised Algerian intellectuals', who were, ironically, the ones to constitute the first group of nationalist activists in the 1900s.[170] The literary corpus adopted was, to that end, discriminatory on several levels. With a content that was inferior to the one applied both in France and to the French settlers in Algeria, the natives' educational system was conversely confined to agricultural instruction. Natives were exposed merely to 'what they should do not what they should know'.[171] In so doing, the French thought of training a population to serve as a work force in the French industries.

Within the framework of this very colonial imagi/nation, Arabic, Berber, Turkish, Spanish and local dialects were disdained, whilst the *madāris* (traditional Koranic schools)

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[168] Louis-Jean Calvet, *Linguistique et Colonialisme: Petit Traité de Glottophagie* [Linguistics and Colonialism: Little Treatise on Glottophagy] (Paris: Payot, 1988).

[169] Jonathan Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002), p.42.

[170] Mahfoud Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria, 1830-1987: Colonial Upheavals and Post-independence Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 67.
Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 18.

[171] Bennoune, p. 46.

were debased. Arabic was, however, banned as early as 1904 and was later defined as a foreign language in 1938. These policies, as argued by Boudjedra, attempted to 'relegate it to the pillory of archaic antiquity, no longer in use'.[172]

It was in this very context that Yacine and Haddad, and most early postcolonial writers like Mohammed Dib, Jean Al-Mouhoub Amrouche and Mouloud Mammeri, had their his-stories with language shaped. As to Haddad, having been raised on the language of his mother/tongue, he experienced a state of extreme alienation, marginality and uneasiness upon his enrolment in a French colonial school for primary education, very much like Khaled of *The Bridges*. Completing his secondary education in Constantine, his alienation exacerbated following his departure to France, where he resumed his studies as a Francophone, whilst his mother remained fluent only in his/her mother-tongue which caused a rigid separation between the two. 'To say mother one says *Ya Ma* and I say *ma mère* […] I have a first name that is even more fallacious than my own manners', writes Haddad.[173] Carrying the name of Malek (which means 'to be in possession' in Arabic), Malek was, however, dispossessed. Along similar lines, Yacine's entry into French schools was experienced as 'a second rupture of the umbilical cord' and described the experience as similar to be thrown 'into the lion's den'.[174] Enmeshed in feelings of dispossession, French was, for him, 'almost but not quite' motherly; it was a step-mother language.[175]

Being ill-at-ease with their colonial linguistic his-stories, these very writers soon found themselves in a second linguistic rupture. Given 'the search for an identity', which entails 'a process of elimination of all that is considered other' and very much like the

[172] Rachid Boudjedra, *Le FIS de la Haine* [The FIS of Shame] (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1992), p. 32.

[173] Malek Haddad, *Le Malheur en Danger* [Sadness in Danger] (Paris: La Nef de Paris, 1956), p. 25.

[174] Kateb Yacine, *Le Polygone étoilé* [The Star-shaped Polygon] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), p. 181.

[175] The 'almost but not quite' formulation was used by Bhabha to refer to third spaces; moments or situations of join which fall outside the dyad of two others. See: Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 122.

elimi/nation of the *keshf* through seclusion, Arabisation was adopted against Frenchification in the postcolonial imagi/nation of Arab, Muslim Algeria. With the rise of the very first organised anti-colonial group in 1925, consecutively known as PPA and MNA, the ENA under the leadership of Ahmed Messali Hadj, there emerged an imagi/nation hinging on Arabness and hence Arabic language. This imagi/nation was later more fossilized with the AUMA, which was led by Shaikh Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis whose association, being influenced by the Middle Eastern notion of *iṣlāḥ* or Islamic reformism that entailed a total return to, or recovery of, Islam, the Quran and Arabic, adopted an everlasting moto of 'Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my homeland'.

Upon independence, Islam, Arabism and Socialism were altogether adopted as pillars of the independent nation, with Arabic language, understood to be the language of Quran, being especially sacralised. Arabisation was, thus, passed into law in the program of independent Algeria, aiming not only at making standard Arabic the sole official language of Algeria but, also, at the dissemination of Arabic to the major sectors of the country mainly through the arabisation of the educational system and the curricula. The lack of cadres led the leaders to call upon teachers from the Arab world in attempt to focalise the Arabness of the nation. The policy, albeit more intense under president Boumedienne, was promoted by all leaders of the new imagi/nation.

French was, however, counter-narrated as a foreign language and introduced in the third year of primary education and was increasingly perceived to be the language of colonisation, pain and agony and was largely decried. This was to such a degree that French language advocates were denounced as being supportive of France or belonging to *ḥizb fransā* (the party of France) and the French elites as orphans of culture. Following the death

of the Francophone Tahar Djaout, the Arabophone Tahar Wattar commented that it was a loss for France.[176]

Thus, postcolonial Algeria experienced 'two cultural wars in 50 years', to borrow Benrabah's formulation.[177] It manifested a shift from a 'hard power' linguistic practice, wherein French was forcefully implemented, to a 'soft power' policy, wherein Arabic was similarly yet subtely imposed, as argued by Daoudi.[178] Whilst the official narration was reifying a linguistic na(rra)tion of wholeness, the postcolonial na(rra)tion in Algeria was, rather, one of impossible 'uncontaminated identity'. With the impossibility of uncontaminated identities and with the resilience of the issue of identification as previously detailed, it is no surprise that Algeria's story with language is unfinished as well. Supposedly a pillar of the imagi/nation, language was, rather, and very much like women, too fragile a referent, subject to constant contestations, renegotiations and restor(y)ings.

Defined as the official language in the official na(rra)tion, Arabic was, for some postcolonial writers who had French as their first language in colonial Algeria, more of a dream given their inability to master the language. This was mainly the case with Haddad, who, growing up as a monolingual Francophone, considers Arabic the language of which he was an orphan and a language in which he feels. He writes: 'I am isolated from my country less by the Mediterranean than by the French language'.[179] Apologising for his non-mastery of Arabic, he addressed his audience in Beirut in 1961 as a spokesman for the FLN saying:

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[176] For more details, see: Margaret A. Majumdar, *Transition and Development in Algeria: Economic, Social and Cultural Challenges* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), p. 136.

[177] Benrabah, p.11.

[178] Anissa Daoudi, 'Multilingualism in Algeria: Between 'Soft Power', 'Arabisation', 'Islamisation', and 'Globalisation'', *The Journal of North African Studies,* 23.3 (2018), 460-481.

Daoudi drew on Nye's theorisations on 'hard power' and 'soft power' practices, which refer to coersive and noncoercive forms of domination. See: Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

[179] Malek Haddad, *Écoute et je t'appelle* [Listen and I Call you] (Paris: François Maspéro, 1961), p. 9.

'the French language is my exile'. Being his exile, French was also conceived of as a complex and a language defect that the writer decided to give up writing, putting an end to his struggle with the na(rra)tion and became, henceforth, hailed as the martyr of the Arabic language. Arabic was, however, 'a language of deadwood' for other writers like Yacine. Although his entry into French schools was 'a second rupture of the umbilical cord', as previously mentioned, and although his divorce from the mother/tongue to the French tongue was an experience that he likened to being thrown 'into the lion's den', the French language brought him passion for writing unlike Arabic, which he had learned in the Quranic schools until age seven.

These were two dichotomous but most emblematic imagi/nations in the history of the Algerian literary narrations and, subsequently, in that of Mosteghanemi. With the postcolonial na(rra)tion's impossibility of restoring the pre-colonial plurality, 'choosing sides has become a necessity, since it is the only way to remain whole', to borrow Šukys's formulation.[180] For Mosteghanemi, and with a now dead, French-speaking father whose linguistic his-story resembles that of Haddad and who encouraged her to study Arabic, leaning towards Arabic was her stance towards the na(rra)tion.

Joining the wor(l)ds of Haddad and being so pressingly a concern of the author's literary project, Mosteghanemi brings discussions of the issue of language before the first chapter of the novel begins, by dedicating the work both to her father and to Haddad. She then moves to recuperate Khaled Ben Toubal, Haddad's hero who, as narrated in his novel *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus,* was very much like Haddad and her father, imprisoned in the French linguistic exile and had him voiced in Arabic. Unlike her father, Haddad and his hero, Mosteghanemi's hero managed to transcend his linguistic 'complex', very much as she herself

[180] Julija Šukys, 'Language, the Enemy: Assia Djebar's Response to the Algerian Intellocide', *Journal of Human Rights,* 3.1 (2004), 115-131 (p. 120).

did. Reflecting upon his years in Tunisia during the war of independence, Khaled narrates: 'I had spent the years in Tunisia perfecting my Arabic and had overcome my old complex as an Algerian fluent only in French'.[181]

Overcoming his 'old complex', Khaled states: 'It is my right, today, to choose how I will be written […] These are the words I have been denied'.[182] Unlike Haddad and most postcolonial writers, who emerged from the 132 years of colonial Frenchification as entrapped in the language barrier and had no choice but to write in French, Mosteghanemi and her hero are empowered today to pen their na(rra)tion in the language of their choice, the language which they 'feel in', as narrated by Ahlam/Hayat: 'I could have written in French, but Arabic is the language of my heart. I can write in nothing else. We write in the language we feel with'.[183]

By restor(y)ing Arabic as the language of the 'heart' and as the language we feel in/with, Mosteghanemi joins the linguistsic wor(l)ds of Haddad and contests those of Yacine that have long considered Arabic as a language of 'deadwood'. The contestation becomes even more apparent in a conversation between Khaled and Hayat/Ahlam when Khaled finds it strange that she only speaks French, despite her claim that Arabic is the language of her heart. Ahlam/Hayat says: 'That's habit […] what matters is the language we speak to ourselves, not the one we use with others'.[184] Restor(y)ing Arabic as the language of the 'heart', Mosteghanemi further disrupts Yacine's narration of French as being 'a war booty' and reduces it to a 'habit'. Whilst Yacine's narration of a 'war booty' brings into narrative attachment to, and identification with, French, Mosteghanemi's narration of French as 'a habit' ushers in tropes of dis-identification and distancing.

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[181] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 109.

[182] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[183] Ibid., p. 62.

[184] Ibid., p. 61.

Thus, between Haddad's narration and that of Yacine's lies Algeria's ongoing struggle with the issue of language, an ill of which the postcolonial na(rra)tion is 'never cured […] That is why we […] write', in Mosteghanemi's words.[185] Between these two dichotomous imagi/nations, *The Bridges* intervenes to reconcile thorny episodes with his-stories of the na(rra)tion of Algeria, a reconciliation that attempts, however, at no closure of the imagi/nation but, rather, at the disruption of the dominant narrations, which, in turn, bespeaks the unfinishedness of the language his-story.

However, Khaled's story with language was not only vexed vis-à-vis French and Arabic but, also, vis-à-vis local dialects. Landing in Constantine for the funeral of his brother, Khaled narrates: 'Constantine […] How are you *Omayma*? *Washik* ?'[186] *Omayma* is the Constantian dialect for the word 'mother', the mother whose love Khaled tried to compensate for through Constantine, Ahlam/Hayat and his brother Hassan in vain, as I will show below. 'What the eye is to the lover […] language-whatever language history has made his or her mother tongue-is to the patriot', writes Anderson. 'Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave', as he continues to argue, 'pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined and future dreamed'.[187] That is, while the eye links lovers, the mother tongue links one with his/her nation, which makes of the mother-tongue a site of identification.

Whilst languages are all equal, and following French nationalism's elitist, monolingual ideology and its colonial legacy, languages emerged in the postcolonial imagi/nation as unequal, hierarchical and largely segregated. Whilst Algerian nationalism was fighting the colonial na(rra)tion, it was, however, entrapped in its very mechanisms of centralisation and exclusion. In this vein, the postcolonial narration of Arabic as being the official language was

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[185] Ibid., p. 1.

[186] Ibid., p. 210.

[187] Anderson, p. 154.

largely at odds with the Algerian linguistic scene, which was plurilingual. While much of Algeria's population spoke no standard Arabic following the French linguistic policies of suppression, Arabisation was, thus, but a 'linguicide'.[188]

While Algeria's monolingual linguistic policy was largely influenced by the centralisation of the ideology of French/nationalism, the issue was also seen by many to have symbolic connotations in his-stories of the postcolonial imagi/nation. The Algerian dialect happened, for example, to borrow heavily from French language. In so doing, it appeared as impure and mixed, hybrid and contaminated, having something of 'the Other' and had, thus, to be disdained. Drawing on Grandguillaume's famous analogy between the imagi/nation of women and that of language, which were both imagined as something intimate that had to be shielded in his-stories of postcolonial Algeria, Berger argued:

> The emancipation of Algerians through the acquisition of new language deemed national thus implied not only that they shake off a foreign authority but also that they turn against and away from the indigenous powerlessness of the mother by renouncing the mother-tongue.[189]

The dispossession of Algerian men by the French colonization happened to shape not only the issue of women, but, also, of language perceptions and policies in the postcolonial imagi/nation.

This was true not only of the dialect, but, also of standard Arabic, which emerged as equally sacralised. As previously seen, Hayat/Ahlam was as sacralized as the Greek goddess in Khaled's imagi/nation. Similarly, mastering Arabic and transcending his complex of being an Algerian fluent only in French, Khaled found himself to be in one more linguistic barricade.

[188] Djamila Saadi-Mokrane, 'The Algerian Linguicide', in *Algeria in Others' Languages,* ed. by Anne-Emmanuelle Berger (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 44.

[189] Anne Emmanuelle Berger, 'The Impossible Wedding: Nationalism, Languages, and the Mother Tongue in Postcolonial Algeria', in *Algeria in Others' Languages*, p. 75.

Writing his-story with Hayat/Ahlam in Arabic, for the first time, Khaled narrates how he was restrained and unable to lay bare his-story in Arabic, whilst he used to write freely for women who passed by his life in French. Perplexed at his diction and at what words to choose to narrate Hayat/Ahlam, he states: 'The French language, with its freedom, naturally induced me to speak openly and without complexes or shame'.[190] Writing in Arabic, he found himself 'biased towards the letters that resemble (her)'. Hence, he queries: 'was language also feminine?'[191]

Khaled's complex corresponds, in fact, to a trend rampant in Algeria's official and literary na(rrat)ions. Ever since the rise of the nationalist resistance in Algeria, Arabic language was especially conceived of as the language of the Quran within the AUMA's na(rra)tion of seclusion, a narration which, as previously mentioned, continued to constitute the pillar to the independent postcolonial imagi/nation. Ever since the rise of resistance to nationalism in literary narrations, there emerged two antithetical trends and stances towards the narration, one conservative and conformist and the other liberal and contestant. Whilst the former was a trend espoused especially by the Francophones, the latter was a badge of the Arabophones' na(rra)tions.

This was mainly attributed to the fact that most postcolonial Arabophone writers were former students of the AUMA. This was so much so that Arabophone literature happened to be largely dissociated from the emerging na(rra)tion and remained, very much like women, entrapped in the impossible alliances between past and present. It was not until the 1970s that Arabic started to be desacralised in masculinist na(rra)tions with the rise of novel writing. Women's Arabophone's na(rra)tions were, however, exemplified best by Zhor Wanisi whose writings bore the brunt of conservatism, as will be shown in the next chapter.

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190 Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 160.

191 Ibid., p. 160.

5. '*We might also write to bury our dreams*': Writing Algeria as a Reconciliation of His-stories

Khaled's imagi/nation was, thus, entrapped in the colonial legacy that disrupted his relationship with, and resulted in impossible alliances with, the past and the present of the na(rra)tion. Incarcerated in his-story of dispossession and bearing the latter on his amputated arm, he happened, similarly, to mar his imagi/nation of Algeria, of women and language which all carried, very much like he did, the postcolonial legacy and emerged as split. However, with the course of his narration along with the experiences he goes through, Khaled succeeds in reconciling his marred imagi/nation.

While his imagi/nation has long been founded on his perception of Ahlam/Hayat as a mother/land, the imagi/nation started to slowly fall apart by the 1980s, following Ahlam/Hayat's marriage, the death of his brother and the 1988 massacre. In this very vein, Khaled narrates how his imagi/nation of the mother/land was first disrupted upon Hayat/Ahlam's departure for Constantine for summer holidays. Enmeshed in feelings of dispossession and amidst his waiting for her return, Khaled learns of her marriage to a corrupt Algerian politician. Imagined as a natural possession of his own, very much like the mother/land, he started to realise that she is, very much like Yacine's heroine Nedjma, rather un-possessed. Being, at first, the trustee of his nation's image, she becomes now conceived of as both profiteering and unethical. 'Why at a moment of madness did I imagine you were an authentic copy of her (his mother)? Why did I demand from you things you did not understand and roles you were not up to', asks Khaled.[192] Putting an end to her idealisation, Khaled realised his imagi/nation to be nothing but 'a myth', in his words.[193]

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[192] Ibid., p. 247.

[193] Ibid., p. 135.

Being unable to possess her and upon his visit to Constantine for her marriage, Khaled's brother, who had also something of his mother/land, becomes all that Khaled 'had left in the world' and a last pillar for his imagi/nation.[194] 'I started to be attached only to Hassan, as if I had suddenly discovered he existed', states Khaled.[195] However, once in Constantine, Khaled happened to come face to face with the illusion of his idealised imagi/nation. Upon his stay at Hassan's house, Khaled saw that his brother, who was a badly paid teacher and a father of six children, lived in a modest house that was 'surpassed by the modern age' and that Constantinians were so enmeshed in the difficulties of daily life, that the mother/land had turned into 'a nation of ants hunting only for food and a nest to hole up in with the children'.[196] The Algeria of the 1980s, and as narrated by Khaled, was more backward when compared to the way it was under colonialism, where people had bigger dreams and more beautiful hopes.

Becoming the last pillar of his imagi/nation after his lover's marriage, Khaled quickly learns that Hassan had been shot by a random bullet during his visit to Algiers and had died shortly thereafter. The random bullet, which destroted Khaled's last pillar of the imagi/nation, hints at the electric atmosphere of October 1988 in Algeria and the onset of the Black Decade. In this vein, the1980s was a period of unrest which signalled the beginning of the official fall and/or failure of the national project and which ushered in the Black Decade, as I will show in the next chapter. At that time it was clear that the Algeria promised in the liberation war was nothing but a myth.

This was so much so, mainly because it was a period of economic recession following the acute decline in oil revenues, which constituted the bone of Algeria's economy. With the

[194] Ibid., p. 289.

[195] Ibid., p. 289.

[196] Ibid., pp. 223-225.

unfolding of the economic crisis, which led to the government's suspension of a number of social welfare services and the people's sense of paralysis and inability to cope with the needs of daily life, people from different ages, but mainly youths, took to the streets of the capital in October 1988 to protest against the humiliating and ineffective system, with banners that read 'we are men' and 'we want our rights'. While rioters were crushing the city's shops, boutiques and cars, the atmosphere became more electric when Algeria's flag was substituted for an empty bag of couscous. Referred to as 'bread riots', the protests were suppressed leaving 600 people dead and were referred to as 'Black October'.[197]

This very malaise of the 1980s that caused Hassan's death reminded Khaled of the very reasons that motivated his departure for France by 1967, shortly after independence. From a historical lens, malaise with the na(rra)tion of Algeria was not uncommon prior to the 1980s, epitomised best by the economic crisis and the power struggle of the 1960s.[198] Being left with a totally collapsed and undefined economic, social, cultural and agricultural fabric, Algeria in the 1960s was especially plagued by poverty, crimes and social problems.

The discomfort was coupled with a power struggle caused by the factionalism of the different groups namely, the Wilayas (districts) commanders, the GPRA (the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic), the ALN (National Liberation Army) and the FLN main leaders, who all battled for power. Whilst Ben Bella, a returned soldier previously exiled by the French, became Algeria's first president, he was soon deposed by Colonel Houari Boumedienne as he was believed to have power monopolized by reducing that of the military and eliminating that of his rivals after three years of rule (1962–1965). With Ben Bella's power monopoly being seen as a divergence from the war's path and principles, the

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[197] *Islam in a Changing World: Europe and the Middle East*, ed. by Anders Jerichow and Jorgen Baek Simonsen (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 114.

[198] Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, p. 106.

coup was conceived of as *taṣḥīḥ thawrī* (revolutionary redress). The struggle, which together with the economic crisis, put an end to the euphoria of independence, resulted in a surge of emigration to France and it was in this very context that, as narrated in the novel, Khaled was lured to leave Algeria. While the 1970s was a period of certainty under the rule of Boumedienne, who, building on Islam, Arabism and Socialism and being in rule for 14 years (1965–1976), advocated development, progress and prosperity and embarked on an agrarian, industrial and cultural revolutions, the 1980s soon disrupted the national project and affirmed its inability to realise the Algeria promised in the liberation war.

With the intersection of the personal with the collective in Khaled's imagi/nation, 1980s was, thus, 'a time of personal and national failures', which compelled Khaled to come to terms with his memory of the mother/land.[199] With Hayat/Ahlam not fitting his mould of the imagi/nation, along with the failure of his imagi/nation of the mother/land, Khaled realised the tragedy of his own idealism and started to conceive of himself as 'a mad scientist who wanted to combine two explosive mixtures'; that is of Hayat/Ahlam and Constantine. As he states: 'I wanted to experience them both together in one internal blast that would shake and destroy only me. I would then emerge from the firestorm and devastation as either a new man or the remnants of one'.[200] Reconciling his imagi/nation, Khaled realised he was but one of Constantine's 'deranged lovers', but 'another cripple who loved her' and 'another Fool of Constantine' who attempted to possess Constantine to no avail.[201] He became but Salah Bey who, as we learn from Constantine's popular beliefs, died because of the curse of the bridge of Constantine.

[199] Ibid., p. 180.

[200] Ibid., p. 202.

[201] Ibid., p. 215.

Coming to terms with his own utopian imagi/nation of Hayat/Ahlam, he manages to demythify all of the previous delusions of the nation as woman, of a woman as the bridge of Constantine and of a woman as the mother/land. 'Here was the homeland that I had once let take the place of my mother. I believed that it alone could cure me of my childhood complexes, my being an orphan and my humiliation', narrates Khaled.[202] Previously idealised, very much like Hayat/Ahlam, Constantine becomes rather a lady of 'coldness', a 'hypocrite city' and 'a cure that turned fatal', in his words.[203] Very far from being motherly, Constantine becomes, rather, a cruel father: 'There are homelands without maternal feelings. Homelands like fathers'.[204] Coming to terms with his imagi/nation, Khaled realised he does not like bridges either, as 'under the bridges there was only an abyss'.[205] Imagining his lover as a brigde of Constantine, he realised the bridge, itself, is but illusive: 'I discovered that I don't like bridges I hate them in the way I hate all things with two sides'.[206] Previously obsessed with painting women, bridges and cities, Khaled decides to abandon painting itself. Drawing Ahlam/Hayat to fix her in the mould of his imagi/nation, he realised that he, himself, had become like the painting, 'a fixture in the house' and that Nostalgia, the first painting he drew of the mother/land of Ahlam/Hayat, had become but an 'incomplete copy of Constantine'.[207]

Deciding to write a book, the book we are reading, Khaled chooses the 1st of November, marking the passing of 34 years since the first shot of the war of liberation. Choosing the date, Khaled states: 'Between the first and the last bullets, hearts have changed and aims have

[202] Ibid., p. 214.

[203] Ibid., pp. 210-235.

[204] Ibid., p. 214.

[205] Ibid., p. 216.

[206] Ibid., p. 303.

[207] Ibid., pp. 169-210.

changed the country has changed'.[208] His first of November becomes, thus, a date to disrupt the previous imagi/nation and make room for a reconciled one. The disruption starts first and foremost by the disruption of his previous *ahlam* (dreams/delusions):

> Between the letter A for agony and the letter M for pleasure your name was spelled out. Dividing them was the letter h for heat and the letters l and a, the Arabic word la for warning. I failed to heed the warning of a name that starts with ah, the autonomic cry of both pleasure and pain .I failed to heed the warning of this noun, which means dreams, both singular and plural, like the name of this country which means islands, and realise from the beginning that plurals are always created to be split up.[209]

By breaking the name of Khaled's lover Ahlam, which means 'dreams' in English, into a four-letter acronym, the author interrupts and demythifies the masculinist discourse in Algeria, be it nationalist or literary.

Coming face to face with the idealisation of his mother/land, and in a phone conversation with Ahlam/Hayat after her marriage, where Khaled learns Ahlam loved him, he was so foiled that he was speechless. When Ahlam asks for the reason behind his unusual silence, Khaled replies that 'the pavement of flowers no longer responds',[210] a statement that is the very title of Haddad's novel which imagined Ourida as the bridge of Algeria, as previously seen. In Haddad's novel, while Khaled was consumed by his longing for the mother/land of Ourida, Khaled learns, to his shock, that she died while she was trying to escape with her new French lover, after which Khaled committed suicide. His suicide becomes, thus, an indication of his shattered dreams in the image of woman as nation, an imagi/nation that brought about his downfall. While Haddad's hero chose to silence himself and his dreams by putting an end to his life, Mosteghanemi's opted for reconciling his

[208] Ibid., p. 13.

[209] Ibid., p. 23.

[210] Ibid., p. 283.

memory : 'I abandoned my memory', narrates Khaled, making of the novel, the tomb of his memories and his delusions. 'We might also write to bury our dreams', he proceeds to narrate.[211] Thus, the choice of this very voice and protagonist becomes twofold: on one hand, it voices Algeria in Arabic against French, curing, thereby, Haddad, the martyr of the Arabic language, along with his linguistic complex, and on the other hand, it cuts off Khaled's gendered imagination of Algeria, marking, as such, a hiatus in masculinist literary his-stories of the nation.

Returning to the now tyrannical mother/land of Constantine for his brother's funeral, the customs officer in the airport asks Khaled whether he has anything to declare, a common practice to protect passengers' fortune when getting into, or out of, Algeria. Khaled laments: 'My body raised memory before him but he didn't read me. It can happen that a nation becomes illiterate'.[212] Carrying the (post)colonial memory of dispossession on his flesh and going, despite this, unnoticed, recalls Spivak's Bhaduri, who, aware of her imprisonment in the Bengali patriarchal culture that attributes girls' suicides to their attempts to cover up their illicit relationships, tried to inscribe speech on her flesh by committing suicide while menstruating. The act is, according to Spivak, 'an interventionist practice' to disrupt the patriarchal na(rrat)ions.[213] In spite of her instance of resistance, and in spite of her physiological inscription, she was, however, still said to have committed suicide because of an illegitimate pregnancy. This becomes, thus, a failure of communication between the subaltern and his/her na(rra)tion. By the same token, carrying the (post)colonial scars on his flesh, Khaled continues to be unheard by the officer, who, described as being of independence age, bespeaks the postcolonial nation's failure of communication with the subaltern, be it man

[211] Ibid., pp. 284.

[212] Ibid., p. 305.

[213] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?' in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 28-36 (p.34).

or woman. Saddened at his own and his nation's failure, Khaled addresses the airport officer replying: 'I declare memory, my lad'.[214] Declaring this very memory becomes an interventionist act to both reconcile and disrupt the postcolonial imagi/nation of dispossession that had long been embedded in his flesh.

Conclusion

The Bridges indexes, thus, his-story of dispossession in Algeria's postcolonial imagi/nation. Emerging from the colonial history with enduring bruises at the na(rra)tion's fabric, Algeria's official story was reduced to a very simplistic narrative of colonisation, of liberation war, of independence and of restoration. Algeria's story, which appears at its most finished at the official level of the na(rra)tion and as testified to at the performative level of the literary na(rra)tion, was, however, unfinished. With colonialism being most detrimental to women and language, the two bore the greatest mark of dispossession. Whilst both women and language have long been reified as sacred in Khaled's na(rra)tion in order to elude the threat of the French Other, he happened, however, to reconcile his very imagi/nation that caused his mania by the very end of his-story with the mother/land. Such disruption of his-story enables the author's later insertion of her-story, of female subjectivity, in the second novel of the trilogy, *Chaos of the Senses,* where she counter-narrates the story of Algeria from Hayat/Ahlam's perspective, for any attempt at (re)constructing and/or restor(y)ing starts first with one of deconstruction, of disruption.

[214] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges,* p. 305.

Chapter Three: *'On the edge of the forbidden':* Sites/ Sights of Resistance and Transgression in *Chaos of the Senses.*

Introduction

This chapter will analyse *Chaos of the Senses,* the second novel in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's trilogy, which picks up where *The Bridges of Constantine* ends. The novel signals Ahlam/Hayat's passage from the symbolic realm of masculinist na(rra)tions to that of narration, restor(y)ing, thereby, Algeria from Ahlam/Hayat's perspective. Centring itself on her-stories, the novel intervenes to destabilise masculinist discourses by inserting the previously *non-dit*, complicating the postcolonial national space, time and histories. The intervention in the narration of the nation becomes, thus, an act of resistance and transgression against the unbreachable bridges of the male national space.

Given the constructed-ness of nations, as previously seen, the nation emerged as a gendered space in both nationalist and literary na(rra)tions of Algeria. Offering a site through which perceptions of the nation can be re-anchored, the studied novel helps make apparent the ways in which the author engages in challenging and resisting former narrations on Algeria through inserting new cultural, historical, and political outlooks into the contemporary narration of Algerian Arabic literature, constituting, thereby, na(rra)tions that are more hospitable to women.

The chapter will discern the various sights/sites of resistance and transgression as they manifest themselves in the studied novel. It will first conceptualise transgression as a paradigm of discursive resistance by shedding light on words and their importance to all narrations that seek liberation and freedom. These wor(l)ds become consequently a site/sight of resistance against given sites of power and subordination, which in Algeria became epitomised best in women's language, space, body and sexuality, among others.

The chapter will then move to engage with Mosteghanemi's use of language to challenge patriarchal discourses by focusing on the so-called *écriture feminine* (Women's writing). Being constructed and objectified in narration, the chapter will show how language is adopted as a site from which to transgress dominant, masculinist discourses. Central to this very *écriture* is the heroine's narration of women's body, desire and sexuality, to go beyond the chains and to open, thereby, sights of new modes of narration and transgression.

It will then engage to show the ways in which *Chaos of the Senses,* although it stages the female body, it does not reduce women to their physical aspect, but is also infused with the political. It will attempt to redress criticism raised against *écriture feminine*, usually dismissed as being essentialist in nature as it disregards the materialistic sides of women's experience in the nation. It will deal first with the author's focus on the theme of the crossover from the personal to the political and vice versa, a traditional theme in feminism adopted to assert that women do not only engage with the domestic and/or personal, but also with the collective, public sphere of the nation. It will then move to engage with key episodes in 1990s Algeria that placed acute restraints upon women's agency, like the Black Decade and the rise of Islamism and how, amidst the repressive constraints, the heroine manages still to adopt diversified tactics to trespass, resist and stand 'on the edge of the forbidden', in her words.[215]

1. '*The little words that change the course of a life'*: On the Implications of Transgression in Women's Wor(l)ds

The story of the Algerian na(rra)tion continues, thus, in *Chaos of the Senses,* which attempts to counter-narrate the masculinist imagi/nation detailed in the previous chapter.

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[215] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Chaos of the Senses*, trans. by Nancy Roberts (London: Bloomsbury publishing, 2015), p. 227.

Whilst *The Bridges* narrated how his-stories of the imagi/nation tended to objectify women as mother/lands, among others, *Chaos* attempts to show how a female voice tends, rather, to subjectify the motherland's space and time, making of the novel a site of resistance against the previous masculinist nar(ra)tions.

Chaos of the Senses is in fact the chaos (en)gendred by women's subjectivity, which intervenes to show how the dependence on women as bridges of the imagi/nation is but slippery. Adopting the technique of frame story or story within a story, the novel comprises two parallel stories; The story of Ahlam/Hayat, a woman writer who is enchained by a number of socio-political shackles in the Algeria of 1990s, and the love, erotic short story she is writing which revolves around a woman and her intimate conversations about her own body and desire.

The technique of frame story enables the author to reflect on the novel's postmodern status as self-conscious of the postcolonial imagi/nation's condition as being a construct that can also be transgressed and deconstructed through narration. It is also, and more importantly to the novel, a trope of feminist critique and resistance as it is reminiscent of the famous Scheherazade and her story within story in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (The Thousand and One Nights), which tells the story of king Shahryar who, discovering his wife's cheating, took revenge by marrying a virgin woman at night and having her killed in the morning.[216] Living under king Shahryar's murder threats, Scheherazade managed to keep him immersed in, and enchanted with, her narrations, managing, hence, to be in control of her own fate, to resist and survive his oppression. With Narration equating life for Scheherazade, the trope became an archetype of survival and resistance for many women in the Arab world. In her interview

[216] *Alf Layla wa-Layla* is a collection of stories that range from erotic, adventure, to satire stories, linked by a frame story. See: Mehdi Mouhsine, *Kitāb Alf Layla wa-Layla* [The Thousand and one Nights] (Boston: Brill, 1984).

with Baaqeel, Mosteghanemi asserted that the novel attempts 'to show the ways in which small words are responsible for deciding our fate in life'.[217] Very much like Scheherazade, the heroine of *Chaos of the Senses* is in need to tell stories to endure a world of subordination and/or obliteration and to survive on 'the little words that change the course of a life'.[218] Very much like Scheherazade, the heroine is not submissive, but rather an agent of change and a subject who is in control of her fate. 'At every moment', narrates the heroine, 'for whatever reason, my fate might take a different course'.[219]

It is no surprise, thus, for writing, language, narrative and words to appear as crucial to the novel. The words 'word/ words' alone appear over thirty times just in the first chapter of the novel. This very concern is further emphasised by the chapters' titles which appear as: 'Beginning', 'always', 'of course' and 'inevitably'… Herstory becomes, thus, a tool of resistance, empowerment and transgression. Mosteghanemi's transgression is, however, more deliberate given that her narration was a direct restor(y)ing of the postcolonial imagi/nation. *Chaos of the Senses* is, in fact, a site of resistance against Khaled's imagi/nation, which showed how men conceive of the nation. While as previously seen, Khaled identified with Ahlam/Hayat as a fixed mother/land in his time and space of the imagination and with Arabic as 'the language of the heart' that is yet sacralized, Ahlam/Hayat's na(rra)tion in *Chaos* shows the many ways in which she identifies not with but against this very imagi/nation. With a na(rra)tion that counter-narrates Khaled's, she throws a layer of uncertainty into Khaled's pillars of the imagi/nation, be they language, time and/or space of the mother/land.

In this very novel, Ahlam/Hayat turns from a bearer of the imagi/nation to its narrator, transgressing in process the story of the silent, symbolic *Nedjma* to that of Scheherazade.

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[217] Nuha Baaqeel, 'An Interview with Ahlam Mosteghanemi', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 26 (1-2) (2015), 143-153 (p.150).

[218] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p.10.

[219] Ibid., p. 272.

Unlike Khaled's imagi/nation of the woman symbol, Ahlam/Hayat is depicted as an epitome of the modern woman that masculinist literature dis/regarded out of fear. She comments on a plethora of women's problems in the context of the 1990s Algeria like the silencing of women's voices and subjectivities, arranged marriages, polygamy, the rise of Islamism, violence against women and the constraints placed upon their agency, among others, which all testify to the vexed relationship of women in the nation.

Tensions surrounding women writings in Algeria became even more intricate in the context of the 1990s with the rise of Islamism, where issues pertaining to women, body and Arabic language were more than anytime understood as a bridge of the imagi/nation. They became the very locus of a genuine, authentic imagi/nation that is not tainted by the Other, the modern and/or colonial. Amidst these very conditions, writing in Arabic was in and of itself an act of transgression.

Embracing the pen amidst the height of the endured tragedies, Mosteghanemi asserted: 'The more they take us by surprise with their knives, the more they make our blood one with our ink; and when they shoot us, their bullets raise us to the rank of martyrs'.[220] The novel, the use of Arabic, and more importantly, erotic Arabic as I will show below, become, hence, a tool of resistance and transgression against both the state and the Islamists attempts to fossilise Arabic and confine women. It becomes a site of difference, of resistance and transgression against man's masculinist agenda, against Khaled's reduction of Ahlam/Hayat to an object of desire in the previous novel and against the imposed socio-political shackles of 1990s Algeria.

Trespassing and/or transgressing are discursive tools of resistance against those sites of subordi/nation conceived of as oppressive. 'No poem, no piece of music can overthrow a

[220] Mosteghanemi, '*To Colleagues of Pen'*.

dictator. But, it can resist the normalization of oppression', states Adwan.[221] Resisting the normalization of oppression, discursive na(rra)tions are first and foremost based on a belief that change is possible. However, 'there can be no radical politics of change without performative contradiction', as stated by Spivak and Butler.[222] For Mosteghanemi, performative contradiction took the form of counter-stor(y)ing the imagi/nation through the trope of chaos which intervenes to destabilize the status quo. 'Creative women', writes El Saadawi, 'know how to live with chaos, because they understand that every creation is an inspiration that surges up out of chaos'.[223] It is this very chaos that defies the fixed imagi/nation constructed by the patriarchal diktat and which upsets patriarchal harmony that, as stated by Mernissi, 'exists when each group respects the prescribed limits of the other; trespassing leads only to sorrow and unhappiness'. But Arab women, she continues to write, 'dreamed of trespassing all the time'.[224]

The na(rra)tion's transgressive engagement becomes apparent from the opening chapters of the novel when the author includes at length scenes from *Dead Poets Society*, an American movie that criticizes and mocks traditional ways of education and calls for an alternative system that teaches students to think for themselves, to question and never take things from one single perspective. 'He (the teacher) wanted them to see that the proper way to understand the world is to break out of the tiny spot we occupy in it, to dare to change our orientation even if it means standing on top of a table rather than sitting at it and leaning on

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[221] Mamduh Adwan, in *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 91.

[222] Spivak and Butler, p. 66.

[223] Nawal El Saadawi and Adele Newson-Horst, *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi: A Reader* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2009), p.73.

[224] Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Childhood* (New York: Perseus Books, 1995), pp. 1-2.

it'.[225] The novel engages, to that end, in transgressing the boundaries of the nation, bespeaking thereby a relational rather than an essential image of both the nation and of women within the nation.

Throughout her narration, the heroine employs a strategy of displacing tropes and stereotypes usually used by masculinist discourses. Such strategy recurs throughout her narration where she constantly appropriates tropes found in Khaled's narration in the previous novel:

> I spent the entire night trying to kill that adder. As dawn drew near, I realized that this adder's 'No' has seven heads, and that whenever you kill one of them, another one appears, thrusting this or that warning or negative or imperative in your face. Nevertheless, I dozed off munching on the apple of forbidden desire while those even seven heads looked on.[226]

This analogy with the adder in the Garden of Eden and the biting of the forbidden apple points to Ahlam/Hayat's appropriation of the character of Eve, referred to as the bad Eve in Khaled's imagi/nation.[227] Rather than signalling a relationship of dismissal and separation, she opted rather for one of identification by her continuing to eat the apple, by her continued transgression. Displacing the stereotype of the bad Eve, she goes further to play with the trope of women as nation when she states: 'If women, like the peoples of the world, truly desire life for themselves, then Fate is bound to let them have their way'.[228] That is, she manipulated the trope which has long been said to restrict women's agency, the trope that Khaled assigned her in his narration, to a trope that makes of women share with nations their potential to resist.

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[225] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos,* p. 40.

[226] Ibid., p. 206.

[227] Ahlam/Hayat is reccurently imagined as the bad Eve who tempted Khaled, the 'idiot' Adam, to eat the apple in his-story. See: Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, p. 4.

[228] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 204.

2. ‘*With a guillotine of language*’: A Language of Desire of a Woman’s Own?

Picking up where *The Bridges* left off, *Chaos of the Senses* chronicles Ahlam/Hayat’s story with a photojournalist, who, amidst the political chaos of the 1990s, masquerades as Khaled Ben Toubal, the character he learnt of while reading her novel *The Bridges.* As previously mentioned, the metafictional novel comprises a story of Ahlam/Hayat as being a woman writer in the electrified context of 1990s Algeria and an erotic short story she is writing, which revolves around a woman and her intimate conversations about her own body and desire. The two narrations crisscross when she thinks she happened upon the character she herself created because of the cologne he wears, beginning, as such, an affair with the man. Blurring the lines between narration and life, between bringing her narration to life and between bringing life to her narration, Ahlam/Hayat falls for Khaled and his scent which ‘made up a presence that awakened (her) senses’.[229] At the end of the story, she learns that Khaled is not the owner of the cologne she fell for as it belongs, rather, to a friend of his, a journalist called Abdelhaq. She states: ‘I remembered how Diderot had proposed a hierarchy of the senses […] As for smell, he described it as the sense of desire’.[230] Her chaos becomes, thus, the chaos of her unleashed womanly desire, hitherto repressed in his-stories of the imagi/nation.

‘When I woke’, narrates Ahlam/Hayat, ‘desire woke with me. Enveloped by the scent of my craving, I stayed for a while, scattered, under the sheet, not wanting woman’s slumber to come to an end’.[231] Very much like ‘words’, desire emerged as a pillar of Ahlam/Hayat’s imagi/nation, with the word desire appearing over sixty times in her na(rra)tion. As previously seen, *The Bridges* mapped an imagi/nation of male desire, where Ahlam/Hayat figured as a

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[229] Ibid., p. 177.

[230] Ibid., p. 177.

[231] Ibid., p. 114.

mere object in his-story of the na(rra)tion. With Khaled taking over the national subjectivity, *The Bridges* staged the many ways in which the postcolonial national experience was essentially male-conceptualised, both constructed and reified by a patriarchal his-story.

Within the framework of his imagi/nation, male and female sexuality, body and identity were especially a product of male experience and subjectivity. In so doing, *The Bridges* mapped the terrain upon which *Chaos* proceeds to transgress and offer different sites and/or sights of resistance. Against this seizure of the imagi/nation, *Chaos* maps a na(rra)tion of a woman's own, where Ahlam/Hayat, far from being the object and/or pillar of the imagi/nation, is, rather, a subject of desire and a full agent of the na(rra)tion. 'I feel just as much desire as you do', writes Ahlam/Hayat.[232] Narrating a sexual subjectivity of her own, she becomes an acting subject in control of her own body, desire and subjectivity.

Unlike Khaled's na(rra)tion where she was imagined as a symbol of the mother/land, the heroine narrates herself in *Chaos* as a modern, new woman with socio-political and sexual consciousness. Unlike Khaled's imagi/nation which was fixed in the time and space of the mother/land, hers resists definition and/or identification with one idea, role or attribution. Unlike Khaled's na(rra)tion which derives from the memory of the mother and which '*reduc(ed) all others to the economy of the same*', to borrow Irigary's formulation, hers is anchored in her body.[233] 'I still hadn't escaped from my body', narrates Ahlam/Hayat in her counter-na(rra)tion of that of Khaled in *The Bridges*. Unlike Khaled's pleasure which was aroused by sight or 'before first sight' as previously seen, hers was aroused by touch: 'I took pleasure in being overwhelmed by him as he placed his keys in my body's secret locks […]

[232] Ibid., p. 258.

[233] Luce Irigary, *This Sex which is not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 26.

This man who had used nothing to arouse me but his lips'.[234] Unlike Khaled's monistic phallic desire, hers is of rhythmic circles of pleasures that defy closure.

With the narration of her free, playful body there comes also her *jouissance* and/or pleasure, which is 'a form of robbery' within the confines of her patriarchal world.[235] It is so much so because 'pleasant experiences whatever they happen to be, have to be stolen from life, or from others', in the heoine's words.[236] With desire continually brought into the text, Ahlam/Hayat's counter-narration intervenes to transgress ideas of women's passivity and sacredness, playing off and/or loosening as such Khaled's very hold on national subjectivity.

However, central to Ahlam/Hayat's imagi/nation is the complexity of her own desire. Very much like Scheherazade did with Shahrayar, she added the word to the equation of desire, displacing it as such to the realm of narration. As argued by Ghazoul in her discussion of the story of *One Thousand and One Nights,* 'the phallic pleasure is turned into a discursive pleasure' in Scheherazade's narration. Similarly, and surviving on narration, Ahlam/Hayat had to fight back with 'a guillotine of language', with 'words [...] that are scandalously transparent, like a woman who's just come out of the sea wearing a diaphanous dress that clings to her body', in Ahlam/Hayat's words.[237] She had to put to use a language where words are 'sodden' and the voice is 'naked', which enables a 'linguistic usurpation', as stated by the heroine.[238] Subordinated in, and surviving through, narration, her access to desire in the imagi/nation becomes negotiated first and foremost through her entry into the symbolic order.

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[234] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 211.

[235] *Jouissance* comes from the French word *jouir* which translates to (to enjoy) in English. It also means to have an orgasm.

[236] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 243.

[237] Ibid., p. 21.

[238] Ibid., pp. 21-18.

The ‘linguistic usurpation’ of the symbolic order corresponds, in fact, to a trend in women’s na(rra)tions known famously as *écriture feminine*, put forth by France-based figures like Julia Kristeva, Ellen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig who, believing women’s oppression to be rooted in the order and structure of language itself, concerned themselves with a poetics of language that attempts to transgress men’s na(rra)tions. ‘As long as our language is inadequate’, Rich writes, ‘our vision remains formless, our thinking and feeling are still running in the old cycles, our process may be ‘revolutionary’ but not transformative’.[239] Subordinated in man’s word(l)s, only a language of her own, trusted women, could upset the authority of his-stories and make room for stories of their own that challenge the animosity of the former.

In this vein, the linguistic usurpation emerged in response to the work of Jaques Lacan and his ideas on the symbolic order which postulated that patriarchal culture is made possible not due to biological differences, as long theorized by Freud, but to the symbolic order, that cultural structure which encompasses words, ideologies and more importantly, the law of the father, or the phallic law. [240] Developing a nexus between language and law by a way of a pun on the French words Non (No) and Nom (Name) which rhyme and/or sound alike, Lacan argued that it is through the authority of the Non/Nom of the father that we learn and/or submit to the rules of the society and become as such bearers of language. Within this very domi/nation, the mother’s wor(l)ds are especially suppressed and/or relegated to the margins.

Against the backdrop of the domi/nation of the phallic wor(l)ds over the symbolic, Kristeva suggested the transgression of the very scene of its representation through a na(rra)tion based on the semiotic order of the mother, a space that is both pre-linguistic and pre-oedipal where bodies exist equally and enjoy more expression, play and freedom. Along

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[239] Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (London: Norton, 1997), p. 248.

[240] See: Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *Le Séminaire* [the Seminar] (Paris: Seuil, 1994).

very similar lines, Irigaray put much emphasis on a na(rra)tion based on the dynamics of the mother-fetus relationship, which, unlike the regulatory wor(l)ds of the phallic, symbolic order which works along rigid gender lines, accommodates both sexes of the infant undifferentiatedly. Drawing on the semiotic, these women called for the substitution of man-made language for a narration that is rather rooted in the free, playful body as it exists in the maternal semiotic order, far from the father's repressions, regulations and codifications.

Whilst the symbolic order of the father was anchored in the monistic male sexual desire, was built into the male body and rooted in the intrinsically-male experience of penetration, the semiotic order of the mother emphasized women's physicality and bodily aspects of sexuality. The bodily aspects are, rather, epitomized by the two vaginal lips, which make of the woman a subject that is 'already two-but not devisable into one(s)- that caress each other […] whence the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units'. This very woman, as she continues to argue, '*is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person or two'.[241]

Given the human nature which is two, the one of culture becomes but a construct. The two of nature does not entail a mere act of replacement of one subjectivity with another, but that subjectivity itself, in being two, is split and partial. It is more about the in-between-ness that allows for an intersubjective relationality between the two which erases the one. Tellingly, thus, Ahlam/Hayat narrates in her counter imagi/nation of Algeria: 'I took pleasure in my anomalous presence between the two sides, since I considered neither of them morally superior to the other'.[242] Unlike Khaled's *madona* or *putana* imagi/nation of women, Ahlam/Hayat's 'stands halfway between purity and sinfulness', in her words. While, as

[241] Irigary, p. 26.

[242] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 190.

previously seen, Ahlam/Hayat's hybridity was Khaled's failure with the imagi/nation of the mother/land, hybridity is, hence, counter-narrated as Ahlam/Hayat's stance towards the na(rra)tion.

Central to the heroine's counter-na(rra)tion of the body is an emphasis placed on the pleasure she takes not just in her body, but also in writing about it. 'The urge to write tempts you', narrates the heroine, 'to experience things not for themselves, but for the pleasure of writing about them'.[243] The pleasure of writing about the body is perhaps expressed best in the playful insertion of its rhythms, dynamics and cycles which all stem from the pre-oedipal semiotic experience:

> The vibrations that passed through us in the stillness placed us on a fault-line where an earthquake might strike at any moment. And since passion is a state of silent anticipation, we both loved and feared the silences that would suddenly come over us […] taking us by surprise, it (the music) advanced upon us slowly, even lazily at first, before picking up speed […] it communicated its passionate rhythm like the steps of a dancer twirling in the pouring rain, his feet clad in nothing but the buoyancy of our ardent craving.[244]

The heroine's *jouissance* and/or pleasure in/of writing is, thus, anchored in the female experience, which is 'unleashed and raging' which 'has never held still' and which is characterised by its 'explosion, diffusion, effervescence, abundance', for women take 'pleasure in being boundless', in the words of Cixous.[245] Women's *jouissance* ushers in a rhyming, poetic fluid and elastic, empowering and powerful, transgressive and liberating language, where meaning is constantly shifting and resistant to both structure and closure. Although it appeared first and mainly in response to Freud and Lacan's reading and treatment of female sexuality, *écriture feminine* provided a potent poetics of narration for women

[243] Ibid., p. 246.

[244] Ibid., pp. 228-230.

[245] Cixous, pp. 90–91.

worldwide to fight back in writing by the inclusion of na(rra)tions of women's own that work as a site of difference, a difference that transgresses the patriarchal wor(l)ds.

While the heroine's narration of the previously *non-dit* of her body and desire plays off Khaled's masculinist imagi/nation and casts doubt on his language and monism, she further casts explicit doubt on language, on its certainty: 'After all, isn't language a tool of distrust?', queries the heroine.[246] With language being a tool of distrust, Ahlam/Hayat further resorts to a narration where language is suggestive rather than absolute. She narrates:

> It was a way of conversing that had long unsettled her causing her to choose her words carefully, and forcing her to explore all sorts of linguistic turns in the road [...] That game has suited her perfectly, since she was a woman who, standing poised on the edge of doubt, liked to reply with 'maybe' even when she meant 'yes', and 'might not' when she meant 'won't'. She liked vague formulations and statements that sounded promising even when they really weren't: sentences that ended not with a full stop, but with ellipses.[247]

Women must, as argued by Kristeva, transgress conventions governing culture and language, they must 'reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning'.[248] The latter enables language to emerge as a site of difference from masculinist na(rra)tions, a site of transgression against that of man who was rather 'of categorical language. His sentences consisted of words that put all doubt to rest, from 'of course' to 'definitely', to 'always', to 'absolutely''. These wor(l)ds were 'not only his language; they were his philosophy of life', in Ahlam/Hayat's words.[249]

Ahlam/Hayat's imagi/nation was, thus, founded on her narration of the bodily and the hybrid. As to the latter, hybridity has been a dominant feminist trope of resistance in

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[246] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 12.

[247] Ibid., p. 9.

[248] Julia Krestiva, 'Oscillation between Power and Denial', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle De Courtivron (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 166.

[249] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, pp. 9-10.

imagi/nations of writers like Nina Bouraoui, Meissa Bey and Leïla Sebbar, among others. In Bouraoui's *Garcon Manqué* (Tomboy), for instance, Yasmina narrates: 'I don't know who I am anymore […] French? Algerian? Algerian French?'[250] Along similar lines, Bey writes in her famous *Bleu, Blanc, Vert* (Blue White Green), a title which blends the colours of the Algerian and French flags into one, how she can no longer tell whether she is Algerian or French, Arab or Western and how she can be 'one and the other' at the same time.[251] By the very same token, Sebbar's *Shérazade: 17 Ans, Brune, Frisée, les Yeux Verts* (Sherazade: 17, Brunette, Curly Hair and Green Eyes), offers a similar hybrid portrait of a brunette heroine of curly hair, but of green eyes, going as such beyond Algeria and France dichotomies, celebrating rather than dismissing hybridity.[252]

Similarly and as to the narration of the body, Francophone women adopted early this type of *écriture* to resist the animosity of masculinist narrations. The language of the body was, as famously argued by Djebar, the fourth language of women writers in Algeria. Added to Arabic, Berber and French, women, trusted Djebar, had recourse to the fourth language, which 'for all females, young or old, cloistered or half-emancipated remains that of the body: The body which male neighbours and cousins' eyes require to be deaf and blind since they cannot completely incarnate it'. It is the body which, as she further puts: 'in trances, dances or vociferations, in its fits or hope or despair, rebels'.[253]

However, both tropes, of the hybrid and of the bodily, remained for decades a taboo in Arabic. As previously seen in *The Bridges* and mastering Arabic and transcending his complex

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[250] Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon Manqué* [Tomboy] (Paris: Stock, 2000), p. 145.

[251] Maïssa Bey, *Bleu Blanc Vert* [Blue White Green] (La Tour-d'Aigues: l'Aube, 2006), p. 149.

[252] Leïla Sebbar, *Shérazade : 17 Ans, Brune, Frisée, les Yeux Verts* [Sherazade, 17, Brunette, Curly Hair and Green Eyes] (Paris: Stock, 1982).

[253] Assia Djebar, *L'amour, la Fantasia* [Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade] (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2002), p. 180.

of being an Algerian fluent only in French, Khaled was unable to lay bare his-story with his lover in Arabic, whilst he used to write freely for women who passed by his life in French. As previously detailed, Khaled's complex corresponds to a trend rampant in Algeria's official and literary na(rrat)ions. Ever since the rise of the reformist resistance in Algeria, Arabic language was conceived of as the language of the Quran within the AUMA's na(rra)tion of seclusion, a narration, which, as previously mentioned, continued to constitute the pillar of the independent postcolonial imagi/nation.

Ever since the rise of resistance to nationalism in literary narrations, there emerged two antithetical trends and stances towards the narration, one conservative and conformist and the other liberal and contestant. While the latter was a trend espoused especially by the Francophones, the former was a badge of the Arabophones' na(rra)tions, resulting in a clear-cut gap that separates Arabophone from Francophone writings. This was so much so that Arabophone literature happened to be largely dissociated from the emerging na(rra)tion and remained, very much like women, entrapped in the impossible alliances between the past and the present of the imagi/nation. It was not until the 1970s that Arabic started to be desacralized, albeit very modestly, in masculinist Arabophone na(rra)tions of Abdelhamid Benhedouga, Tahar Wattar and Rachid Boudjedra, among others, whose na(rra)tions showed a certain degree of freedom associating Arabic to a secular instead of a religious frame of reference.[254]

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[254] Boudjedra is especially known for his secular style, but showed more freedom writing in French than Arabic. See: Cox, p. 197.

For the desacralized Arabophone narrations, see: Tahar Wattar, *al-Zilzāl* [The Earthquake] (Algiers: SNED, 1974); *ʿUrs Baghl* [A Mule's Wedding] (Algiers: SNED, 1974); *al-Ḥawwāt wa-al Qaṣr* [The Fisherman and the Palace] (Constantine: Baaṯ Publishers, 1980); Abdelhamid Benhedouga, *Rīḥ al-Janūb* [Wind from the South] (Algiers: SNED, 1971); *Nihāyat al-Ams* [The End of Yesterday] (Algiers: SNED, 1974); *Bān al-Ṣubḫ* (Morning Becomes Clear) (Algiers: SNED, 1980); *al-Jāziya wa-al Darāwīsh* [Jaziyah and the Dervishes] (Algiers: SNED,

Women's Arabophone na(rra)tions were, however, scarce and exemplified best by Zhor Wanisi whose writings bore the brunt of conservatism, obedience and conformity. Starting her career as a writer of short stories, her first attempt at writing a novel, *Min Yawmiyyāt Modarrisa Ḫurra* (The Diaries of a Free Woman Teacher) published in 1979, confused the critics as her work crossed the genres of autobiography and/or memoir.[255] For those who treated the work as a novel, Wanisi's narration is oftentimes dismissed for being modest, easy and simple. Wanisi's legacy is further complicated by her conservatism. As argued by Mohammed Berreda, Wanisi's works, like most early North African women writers, are marked by traditionalism and 'are not remarkable for their freshness of either form or content […] and are still bound to the traditional social climate, the nationalist struggle and the ideals that constituted the frames of reference for North African women'.[256]

A member of the AUMA school, of the wartime FLN and later Minister for Education (1985-1988), Wanisi adopted a conformist attitude towards the na(rra)tion, where emphasis was put on Algeria's liberation war, on the FLN's 'one hero: the people' slogan and on Algeria's principle of the preservation of Algeria's Arab, Muslim character. Within the framework of her reductionist, exclusionary na(rra)tion, Wanisi was also a fierce opponent of mixed marriages and a proponent of endogamy in Algeria. According to her, foreigners to Algeria are but enemies and viruses in Algeria's blood.

1980); Rachid Boudjedra, *Layliyyāt Imraʾa Āriq* [Nightime Journal of a Sleepless Woman] (Algiers: ENAL, 1985); *Maʿrakat al-Zuqāq* [The Batlle of the Straits] (Algiers: ENAL, 1986).

[255] Wanisi started her career with a collection of short stories with *al-Raṣīf al-Nāʾim* [The Sleeping Quay] (Algiers: SNED, 1967) and *ʿAlā al-Shhāṯiʾ al-Ākhar* [On the Other Shore] (Algiers: SNED, 1974). She was then shifting alternatively between biographies, novels and short stories like: *Min Yawmiyyāt Mudarrisa Ḫurra* [From the Diaries of a Free Woman Teacher] (Algiers: SNED, 1978); *al-Ẓilāl al-Mumtadda* [The Outstretched Shadows] (Algiers: SNED, 1982); *Lūnja wa-al Ghūl* [Lounja and the Monster] (Algiers: SNED, 1996); *Rūsīkādā: Qiṣaṣ* [Rusicada: Short Stories] (Algiers: SNED, 1999).

[256] Berreda, p. 248.

In this very context, it is no surprise that both women and Arabic language emerge as sacralized in her imagi/nation, replicating as such Algeria's official and masculinist literary narrations. As chronicled at length in Mosteghanemi's *Femme et Écritures*, Wanisi's texts tend to portray 'idealist' heroines and are mostly and heavily invested in moralizing lessons. Portraying her heroines as saintly and attributing their qualities to all Algerian women, Wanisi, as Mosteghanemi remarks, both falls in the trap of generalization and puts forth a de-realized imagi/nation for women.[257] Given her reductive and exclusionary framework of, and moralising tone in, her na(rra)tion, it is no surprise for her literary project to serve little, if any, to the woman question in Algeria.

In this very context, Mosteghanemi's transgressive imagi/nation marks a hiatus in the Arabophone, conservative and conformist versus the Francophone liberal and contestant na(rra)tion, and secures a place 'amid the dualities' of the na(rra)tion, in the heroine's words.[258] Bringing up women's body, along with its sexuality and desire in text is, thus, also a daring, transgressive gesture for Mosteghanemi against the established na(rra)tions, given the restrictive roles reserved for both women and for Arabic language. Nadimi writes:

> What characterizes Mosteghanemi's poetic images is her going beyond the norms as she is surprising, creative [...] It is difficult to conceive of her narration as prosaic, for it is poetic in the first place, and we will start from the assumption that the creative text is transgressive, it transcends the already-set forms.[259]

In so doing, not only did Mosteghanemi destabilize masculinist discourses in Algeria, but also set Arabic as the language of literary expression against both colonial and postcolonial fossilisations, a language that is incapable of narrating modern Algeria. 'Only language and

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[257] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, pp. 119-121.

[258] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 10.

[259] Zahra Nadimi, 'al-Logha al-Shshi'riyya fī Riwāyat Aḥlām Mustaghānmī Fawḍā al-Ḫawās' [The Poetic Language in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's Novel Chaos of the Senses], *Turath Journal*, 13 (2013), 121-133 (p.131).

emotions are capable of restoring and rebuilding a new Algeria', states Mosteghanemi.[260] Her use of language is, more importantly, highly transgressive of the boundaries given the prevalent understanding of Arabic language in Algeria, long sacralized as the language of the Quran, God and religion.

Mosteghanemi's thinking owes in fact much to her story with her father, a militant political activist who lived tormented for being Francophone due to the French educational history exerted in Algeria, and who encouraged her to study and master Arabic. Starting her literary career as an Arabophone poet, unlike her father who wrote poems in French, Mosteghanemi narrates in one of her essays how Arabic language empowered her to express herself freely, as neither her father nor her family mastered the language.[261] One day and as she continued to narrate, she planned a poetry evening at a time when her father was in hospital to make sure he could not hear what she was writing. However, eager to to see her reading poems, her father managed to run away from the hospital to surprise her at the event. Now spoken rather than written, Mosteghanemi's poems, wherein she laid bare her feelings, emotions and desire in Arabic, became understood for her father, who, expected to attack her like the audience did in the electrified atmosphere of the 1980s Algeria, embraced her confirming she be free 'to write her feelings'.[262] Encouraging her first to learn and love Arabic instead of French and later to express herself freely in Arabic, her father became a major influence on the author, along with her language choice and/or perception.

Mosteghanemi's thinking owes, also, much to her hybrid background. Born in Tunisia, lived and studied in Algeria and then France, and residing in, and writing about Algeria from

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[260] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, 'Writing against Time and History', in *In The House of Silence*, ed. by Fadia Faqir and Shirley Eber (Reading: Garnet, 1999), p. 82.

[261] Mosteghanemi started her literary career first as a poet. For a compilation of her poetry in Arabic, see: Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *ʿAlā Marfaʾi al-Ayyām* [To the Days' Haven] (Algiers: SNED, 1972); *al-Kitāba fī Laẖẓat ʿOray* [The Writing in a Moment of Nudity] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1976).

[262] Mosteghanemi, 'Writing against Time and History', p. 83.

Lebanon, Mosteghanemi crossed both cultural and geographical borders and happened to enjoy 'the pleasures of exile'.[263] In his *Reflections on Exile*, Said argued that barriers and borders can imprison intellectuals and confine their visions. Exiles, on the other hand, 'cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience'.[264] Exilic representations are, thus, unbound, insubordinate and original as the exile lays foundations for a new consciousness. Exile becomes, thus, a significant site of empowerment, a site which enables transgressions, agency and resistance for the studied author. This is mainly given the political paralysis of the 1990s, the restraints placed, censorship and the state's monitoring of free expression. Given the pleasures of exile and the agency it yields, it becomes, thus, a bridge to intellectual freedom for Mosteghanemi and other Algerian writers plagued by the socio-political and cultural scene of postcolonial Algeria.

However, *écriture feminine* did not go totally unchallenged. Being overly and uniquely focused on the linguistic and the discursive, French feminism was dismissed as being too essentialist and idealist in nature that it denies the lived experiences and/or materialistic aspects of women. However, 'The feminine of écriture feminine' as stated by Weil, 'must not be regarded as representing which exists in the world, but as (re)productive, giving life to new possibilities for imagining and so living women's bodies and desires'.[265] That is to say, the charges gave birth to a highly influential trend in recent theory of which French feminists themselves were aware, that of strategic essentialism, or deploying an identity politics based on strategic essentialism. Kristeva asserted: 'we must use 'we are women' as an advertisement or slogan for our demands'.[266] This stance was also espoused by

[263] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p. 185.

[264] Ibid., p. 147.

[265] Kari Weil, 'French Feminism's Ècriture Féminine', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory,* (2006), 153-171 (p. 168).

[266] Julia Kristeva, 'Woman Can never be Defined', trans. by Marilyn August, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks, Isabelle De Courtivron (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 136.

Moi when she stated that ‘It still remains *politically* essential for feminists to defend women as women in order to counteract the patriarchal oppression that precisely despises women *as* women’.[267] That is to say, *écriture feminine* is used more as a tool to create, to reimagine rather than to fixedly represent.

Closer to the context of the Arab world was Mascat’s discussion of Arab women’s erotic literature. According to her, a number of works like Joumana Haddad’s *I Killed Scheherazade*, among others, ended up duplicating the stereotypes they claimed to undermine. In their focus on writing the body, the works have:

> No trace of feminist stances; rather we are confronted with […] unchallenged normative gender orders. Moreover […] traditional gendered roles are emphasized […] Masculinity mainly coincides with logos and mastery, while femininity matches with corporeality.[268]

Appropriating Spivak’s famous strategic essentialism and *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Mascat questioned: ‘Is ‘strategic eroticism’ possible? Or, can the subaltern desire?’[269] Given the complexities of the latter, and drawing on Lorde’s *Uses of the Erotic*, Mascat suggested a possible, different use for the erotic. Denouncing the former as superficial eroticism, she suggested the erotic as a site that bridges the personal with the political, and vice versa.

3. ‘*Treading air when the line runs out’:* Transgressing the Mother/land’s Politics of Subordi/nation

Far from being reduced to the erotic, *Chaos* is infused with the political. Narrating the female body, it does simultaneously and explicitly invest in the theme of the crossover from the personal to the political, for the heroine’s desire is not only reduced to her will to

[267] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 13.

[268] Jamila Mascat, ‘Can the Subaltern Desire? The Erotic as a Power and Disempowerment of the Erotic’, in *Golbal Justice and Desire*, ed. by, Nikita Dhawan and others (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 52.

[269] Ibid., p. 50.

transgress the poetics of masculinists' imagi/nations but also their very politics. 'I didn't understand, nor did I want to understand, why politics had to be a third party to every human relationship', states Ahlam/Hayat. This was so much so that, as she further narrates, 'it slept in the same bed with both spouses and lovers. It ate breakfast with us in the morning, and all of our other meals, too'.[270] Being inextricably intertwined, politics is part and parcel of the heroine's imagi/nation, which points to its investment with Algeria's political scene even before the first chapter begins when the author dedicates the novel to Mohammad Boudiaf, to Suleiman Omeirat, to the men of the first of November and to her father, again.

This is so much so that the political appears in Ahlam/Hayat's na(rra)tion not just as personal and intertwined but also as embodied, mainly on men who were equally victimized by the postcolonial chaos. In this vein, Khaled appears in the novel as emasculated, paralyzed in his left arm. Working as a journalist, he was shot in the events of black October 1988 while he was trying to photograph the demonstrations which happened to 'become an indelible memory in the flesh', in his words.[271] Very much like the protagonist of the previous novel, Khaled has his arm disfigured and his memory of dispossession with the na(rra)tion embedded on his flesh.

'The most mysterious and surprising men are the ones who've been through protracted wars that swallowed up their childhoods and youths without mercy and turned them into men who are at once violent and fragile, sentimental and superhuman', narrates Ahlam/Hayat.[272] The novel, thus, registers men's malaise in postcolonial Algeria, which, according to the author, failed both men and women. Throughout her na(rra)tion, the heroine recurrently aligns herself with the figure of Cinderella: 'Like a modern-day Cinderella, I'd

[270] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 208.

[271] Ibid., pp. 254-255.

[272] Ibid., p. 26.

turn from the mistress of the impossible into an ordinary woman'.[273] The figure, looming large in the story, brings into narrative the marginalised whose liberation rests upon the intervention of a rich, powerful man. However, in Ahlam/Hayat's na(rra)tion, in the modern-day story of Cinderella, not only women need to be rescued by men; they rather need to rescue each other. She states: 'Each of us was, to the other, both Cinderella and the prince, and this was the strangest thing about our story'.[274] The latter adequately summarizes the author's stance on, and perception of gender in Algeria, which signals an unprecedented trend, and a watershed event, in the Algerian postcolonial novel where men are represented in feminist literature more as a victim to sympathize with rather than a foe, as will be discussed in the next chapter.[275]

With the crossover of the personal with the political and its embodiment on the very flesh of the postcolonial na(rra)tion, the heroine's conjugal life becomes tightly intertwined with the very politics of the mother/land. Narrating herself recurrently as being burdened with, and as struggling to fit neatly into, the imagi/nation of the mother/land on so many levels, she develops a hate relationship towards the mother/land and its very pillars of tradition. In this context, she becomes resentful even of the *ḥammām* (Turkish bath) she is obliged to frequent with her mother on a weekly basis, as it is the only place where her mother 'could meet all the women in the city […] could gossip freely, talk about whatever was new in her life, and show off her new purchases, her jewellery and the clothes', as narrated by the heroine.[276] Being of the old generation, and given that her mother along with the other women she meets have very limited spaces to head to, the Turkish bath constitutes a

[273] Ibid., p. 41.

[274] Ibid., p. 62.

[275] See, p. 161.

[276] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 185-186.

cherished space, more of a refuge, where they can be free of men's control, gossip and have some time off.

However, the bathhouse is for the heroine a site of tradition with which she wants to break. Rather than hailing the place as a feminine site to celebrate the body, she registered a relation of dis-identification and of separation:

> Are all women, regardless of their nationality or their age, the granddaughters of Cleopatra, who ruled Egypt during its glory days without ever entirely leaving her bathroom […] these women were of the belief that after every bath they would go back home to take up their seats on the "throne" of the marriage bed, whose crown they would wear for a few brief moments […] The dark! [277]

This is mainly because the *ḥammām* can be conceived of as the epitome of 'the patriarchal structure's marginalisation of women', in Graiouid's words. This is so much so because, as he continued to argue, 'though the male is physically excluded from this sphere, his symbolic presence is predominant, since […] through most of the rituals of cleaning she performs, the woman seeks to render herself desirable to her partner'.[278] The dark becomes, thus, the dark of women's false consciousness, of their submissiveness and conformity to the established, of women's acceptance of their reduction to their sexualities. Identifying against the past, her mother and other women of her generation who do nothing but sustain patriarchy, the heroine is both congnizant and transgressing of the prevalent subordi/nation.

Not only is the mother/land's traditional space of the *ḥammām* transgressed, but the imagi/nation of the mother herself. As previously seen, central to Khaled's imagi/nation of the mother/land was a *madon/putana* dichotomy, a clear cut split between the good, idealized mother who brings about a sense of continuity, conformity and harmony, and between the

[277] Ibid., p. 186.

[278] Said Graiouid, 'Communication and the Social Production of Space: The Hammam, the Public Sphere and Moroccan Women', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 9.1 (2004), 104-130 (pp. 105-106).

modern, Other woman who ushers in a sense of change and a betrayal. However, unlike the mother-son relationship, described previously as 'an odd couple' or 'a utopian kingdom', the mother-daughter relationship is characterized by deep fissures in Ahlam/Hayat's imagi/nation. Unlike Khaled's, the heroine's mother is imagined as silent, reliant and cold: 'She became more and more attached to me […] She consulted me about everything, and she liked to go everywhere with me. Things got to the point where I felt as though I was her mother'.[279] As argued by Rich, 'many daughters live in rage at their mothers for having accepted, too readily and passively, whatever comes'.[280] This detachment is also accompanied by feelings of pity as she was widowed at the age of twenty three and was left with two children in the nation, which stripped her of 'her womanhood […] then it walked away'.[281] Although Ahlam/Hayat conceives of her mother to be a victim of the nation, she constantly faults her for paying lip-service to the patriarchal na(rra)tion, for her submissiveness and acceptance of the patriarchal chains imposed: 'I sat pondering her, with her damaged womanhood, her placid beauty […] She was mysterious and calm like the Mona Lisa. But I don't like the Mona Lisa! I don't like calm features, placid femininity and frigid bodies'.[282]

Depicted as passive, Ahlam/Hayat's mother becomes further depicted as being in control of her daughter's body. 'Since she had given birth to me, did she think of my body as a personal possession?', queries Ahlam/Hayat.[283] Women, as further argued by Rich, 'growing up in a patriarchal society can feel mothered enough'.[284] In this context, it is no surprise for communication to be blocked between the two, for the heroine, belonging to a different

[279] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 185.

[280] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1994), p. 243.

[281] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 79.

[282] Ibid., p. 79.

[283] Ibid., p. 188.

[284] Rich, p. 243.

generation, has different problems, concerns and preoccupations from those of her mother and many other women surrounding her. 'I could have answered by telling her what wasn't wrong with me, which would have been a lot easier than telling her what was wrong with me. I kept quiet, since she wasn't going to understand'.[285] This very stance of disidentification with the mother/land stems also, indeed, from the author's actual relationship with her mother, who, unlike her father who encouraged her to master Arabic and to be free to write her emotions, considers her being a writer to be an instance of *ʿayb* (demerit), as narrated by Mosteghanemi in her autobiography.[286]

Bringing into narration the mother-daughter imagi/nation to counter masculinist depictions, Ahlam/Hayat transgressed the utopian kingdom of the impossibly valorised mother figure and had it displaced from the quintessential masculinist imagi/nation of the mother/land. The negative depictions became, thus, a discursive strategy to transgress hegemonic national and literary discourses, a site/sight of difference against masculinists' na(rra)tions.

In the context of this very patriarchal society, it is worth-mentioning that Ahlam/Hayat developed a complicated relationship not just towards her mother, but also towards motherhood. Imagined as a mother/land, defined solely in relation to her procreation or having womanhood equated with motherhood in the masculinist na(rra)tion, the heroine narrates herself as sterile. Throughout her narration, she narrates how her husband is irritated by her sitting writing rather than going to doctors to cure her infertility and how her mother attempts to make of motherhood her sole concern. Unlike them, however, Ahlam/Hayat is especially indifferent to the issue: 'For two years she and I made the rounds of Algeria's shrines even though I wasn't convinced of the value of what we were doing and didn't even want to be

[285] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos,* p. 77.

[286] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Shahiyyan Kafirāq* [As Lovely as Farewell] (Beirut: Hachette Antoine, 2018), p. 29.

‘cured ‘of my barrenness’.[287] With her indifference towards motherhood, she dis-identifies with the very bridges of the mother/land, which has been dominating the postcolonial masculinist na(rra)tions in Algeria, as seen in the previous chapter.

Ahlam/Hayat’s dis-identification with the mother/land becomes even more intricate in the context of 1990s Algeria. In this vein, and given its deliberate focus on the intersection of the personal with the political, the novel traces key episodes that shaped the so called ‘the Black Decade’, as it chronicles not just the chaos inflicted by Ahlam’s womanly desire in the monistic imagi/nation but also that of Algeria’s political chaos. Although the novel locates the chaos in the power struggle witnessed by the wake of independence, it puts much emphasis on the 1980s, which, as previously mentioned, signaled the exhaustion of all pillars upon which the imagi/nation stood.

As previously seen, resistance to Algerian nationalism reached its peak during the 1980s with the rise of Islamism, which was attempted to withstand the official and monolithic imagi/nation. It was in this context that the Islamists were officially organized and recognized as a major political force that restor(y)ed Algeria along *Sharī'a* lines, giving rise to the Black Decade.[288] Whilst the Islamists manifested a takeover of the official imagi/nation, their take was far more extreme and way too reductionist. Under their non-secular na(rra)tion, and adopting a retrogressive interpretation of Islam, the ingredient of seclusion was invigorated, with women being especially sacralized. Women, marginalized in the gendered na(rra)tion and understood to be a pillar of an uncontaminated Algeria, were further subject to a retrogressive, a-historic imagination that emphasized their symbolic role in the na(rra)tion.

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[287] Mosteghenemi, *Chaos*, p. 74.

[288] Michael D. Driessen, *Religion and Democratization: Framing Religious and Political Identities in Muslim and Catholic societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.158.

Thus, as further testified to in Ahlam/Hayat's na(rra)tion, the period was especially chaotic for women for it witnessed the introduction of an array of constraints, which began to be placed upon women's agency during the term of President Chadli Bendjedid, the president under whose presidency women's rights were crushed, the president who was the 'nail in Algeria's heel', in the heroine's words.[289] In an attempt to appease the 1980s wave of Islamists, he introduced the infamous 1984 Family Code, which cemented women's oppression in the imagi/nation. The Code, being overly patriarchal in tone, sacrificed women by objectifying them and concretizing their perceived inferiority through ordaining polygamy, making divorce a male exclusivity, and denying support of all of its kinds for divorced women, taking women's oppression to a whole new level as it became both ratified and codified.[290]

Amidst the rising subordination, the mother/land became increasingly gendered, divided by rigid lines between public vs. private, men's vs. women's. In Ahlam/Hayat's na(rra)tion, subordi/nation, at times social at others political, looms large. Whenever she is wandering out of her house, she feels spied at in the street which is recurrently depicted as a street with 'bright lights', 'noisy bustle' and 'curious passer-by'.[291] Her street and city largely squash individuals' freedom, mainly that of women and lovers, who 'must be miserable in a city like this, where love has to spend every minute holding its breath, cowering in the darkness on seats that have been knifed', in Ahlam/Hayat's words.[292] The confines placed upon her become even more acute given her husband's status as a general in the military, as, for security reasons, she cannot be but accompanied by a driver which overly confines her agency. 'I knew that by going alone to see a film in a city like Constantine, where women

[289] Ibid., pp. 150-151.

[290] See: Smail Salhi, 'Algerian Women, Citizenship'.

[291] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 43.

[292] Ibid., p. 31.

don't frequent cinemas', narrates Ahlam/Hayat, 'I was embarking on a foolhardy adventure'.[293]

Albeit being chained and fettered by fear, very much like Scheherazade, the set dualisms and divisions never caused the heroine to acquiesce. She is, rather, portrayed as daring, defiant and non-compliant. In spite of the restraints placed, she manages at several occasions to allow herself a certain degree of freedom making transgression a routine matter in her conjugal and daily life in the mother/land of subordi/nation. 'I made a point of arriving fifteen minutes late so that I wouldn't have to wait in line or be seen as I went in', narrates Ahlam/Hayat of herstory with heading to the cinema which was by then conceived of as men's place.[294] Having managed to go to the cinema to meet the character she created, the short story takes her, again, to The Date café, where it was even more difficult for her given the deteriorating security conditions in the region: 'In the end, the only thing I could refuge in that morning was the words of Irish poet [...] who spoke of treading air when the line runs out, and the fishers, 'who don't know and never try', pursuing the work at hand as their destiny'.[295] The act of treading becomes, thus, an act of trespassing, of transgressing shackles for agency.

In the wake of the rising threats, and while out for a walk, her driver Ahmad dies in an attack by the Islamists, which causes her husband to impose more security measures. Commenting on her husband sending her to the capital, she narrates: 'It was the nicest idea he'd had for a long time, and an unexpected gift from fate'.[296] While her house at Constantine is described as prison-like for being surrounded by high walls, the house in Algiers is by the sea, with a garden at the back: 'This particular house was a lot like me, its windows didn't

[293] Ibid., p. 30.
[294] Ibid., p. 31.
[295] Ibid., p. 47.
[296] Ibid., p. 109.

open out on to any neighbours' yards […] it was light and spacious bounded by nothing but the greenness of the trees and the blueness of the sea and the sky'.[297] Away from the chains of her husband, she wanders as if she bumps into the world for the first time and it was during her stay in the capital that she started her affair with Khaled stating: 'I wanted to make the most of every drop of this freedom that might suddenly be taken from me'.[298] Every moment of freedom becomes, thus, one of rebellion for her, one of transgression that allowed her to stand on the mother/land's 'edge of the forbidden'.

Standing on the mother/land's 'edge of the forbidden' becomes even more intricate for the heroine as the Islamists made of their war a war against women. Progressing with her imagi/nation, she narrates how a bunch of girls were kidnapped on their way from school and found later with their throats slit. These were modern women, who, understood to be a pointer to the decline of faith, became the FIS main target and were, henceforth, brutally persecuted. For the Islamists, modernity entailed anything they believed to be an offshoot of the French colonial legacy. Turshen pondered:

> Why were women the target? Conservative ideas about the place and role of women in Algerian society are deeply entrenched –a holdover from the colonial period when a woman was a symbol and the last line of defense against the loss of national identity- and some believe these ideas resurfaced (with a vengeance) in reaction to the real advances women made after independence […] The Islamists want absolute power over society, and they understood perfectly that such power passes through control of women's sexuality.[299]

Being a woman writer in this very context of the mother/land made of Ahlam/Hayat a double target for the Islamists. She became doubly subordinated, once as a woman and another as a liberated intellectual who carried something of the Other, the foreigner. 'In the face of death,

[297] Ibid., p. 112.

[298] Ibid., p. 114.

[299] Meredeth Turshen, 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims', *Social Research*, 69.3 (2002), 889-911 (pp. 902-904).

neither being a woman nor being a writer is any consolation. On the contrary both of them are constant reminders of death's presence', laments Ahlam/Hayat.[300]

Being misogynic in essence, the exerted atrocities were but an 'Islamist femicide' in that they were an attempt to sacrifice women just for being women in the name of Islam to preserve patriarchy.[301] The femicide culminated when the Islamists, particularly noteworthy for their extremism, and grounded on a radical interpretation of jihad to advocate the exertion of violence, went far and did issue a *fatwa* (religious verdict) in 1994, which assented the kidnapping and the assassination of women not wearing the *hijab*. The Islamists focus on women and veil, and as argued by Lazreg, aimed not so much at re-Islamizing but at recolonizing Algeria. She writes:

> The Islamists' aim is not to "re-Islamize" Algeria as is often said. Rather, it recolonizes private and public spaces by infusing them with new meanings and norms derived from ideational and behavioural sources […] I am referring to this process as recolonization because of its targeting of Algerians' cultural space in a manner similar to the French who, in the nineteenth Century, attempted to displace local norms and values to suit their political purposes.[302]

Lazreg drew affinities between Islamism and colonialism given the former's use of the French policies of social control and cultural manipulation. The focus on veil, according to her, was nothing but an intervention to halt women's witnessed social advances and changes in time when they started to take over the public sphere.[303]

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[300] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 288.

[301] *Gender and Diversity in the Middle East and North Africa,* ed. by Zahia Smail Salhi (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 161.

[302] Marnia Lazreg, 'Islamism and the Recolonization of Algeria', in *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 45-46.

[303] Ibid., p. 51.

Commenting on the Islamists' colonization of space, coupled with their public pretensions of religiosity, Lazreg further pondered: 'Algerians have been Muslims since the seventh century-whence comes, then, this ostentatious display of religiosity and the delirium it seemed to provoke?'[304] Ever since its first emergence on the Algerian political scene, the Islamists were denounced as a party with no economic program. Having an overwhelming majority of supporters from the grieved young merchants and newly college graduates who were increasingly dissatisfied with their status, they were mocked as *un parti des gamins* (a party of a bunch of kids). The Islamists, hence, according to Lazreg, attempted to address 'mythical rather than real grievances'.[305] Their focus on the issue of the veil was used as a cover for real problems of political and social inequality that exist within postcolonial Algeria.

In this vein, and on the day of meeting, Khaled warns Ahlam/Hayat that the Islamists took over Larbi Ben M'hidi Street: 'The capital's squares turned into huge bedrooms. The Islamists spread out everywhere, and didn't get up till this morning to shout slogans and threats and recite loud prayers'.[306] Having the space colonized, Ahlam/Hayat, however, does not bow out, but chooses to resist and to transgress by making a strategic use of the veil. Amidst this very recolonization, she chose to masquerade in an *abaya* (cloak) and veil: 'I crossed Emir Abdelkader Square with a steady gait, walking long in my cloak and long headscarf as though I'd been wearing them all my life. I felt safe in the midst of the crowds'.[307] Given the Islamists re-colonization of space and their war against unveiled women, she opted for the veil as a tactic to trespass the Islamists without being noticed.

Thus, Mosteghanemi brought the veil, along lines similar to Fanon, in a political context. As she trespasses the Islamists's space unnoticed, the heroine narrates:

[304] Ibid., p. 44.

[305] Ibid., p. 44.

[306] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 134.

[307] Ibid., p. 136.

> As I walked warily past the Milk Bar Café, I suddenly remembered Djamila Bouhired. It's said that one day during the revolution, she came to this café dressed in European clothing and ordered something. Before leaving, she put her bag under the table. It turned out that the bag was filled with explosives, and when they went off, the resulting blast rocked all of France, which after having demanded that the Algerian women remove their hijabs, discovered that European dress might be used to conceal a freedom-fighter![308]

The passage traces long episodes of the context in which the veil emerged as a trope of identity in French Algeria. In this vein and amidst the Algerian liberation war, when Tunisia and Morocco, recently independent from French rule, inaugurated programs that were, at the time, drastic and emancipatory for women, France attempted to imitate the model to prove to the international public that Algeria did not lurk behind in women's issues. Although women have long been pawns in colonial policies, as discussed in the previous chapter, the model resulted in more exerted manipulations for the French to prove Algerian women were modern too. To broadcast Algerian women as modern, and in an infamous incident in 1958, a deputation of French women publicly unveiled a number of Algerian women, which provides concrete material for the France to broadcast.

Although the programme comprised an array of reforms like voting rights, health care and welfare, the focus was on unveiling.[309] According Lazreg, this event had indelible detriments on Algerian women, since it 'brought into the limelight the politicization of women's bodies and their appropriation by colonial authorities'.[310] Commenting on the portrayal of the events in the colonial press where they were described more as spontaneous, as a proof of Algerian women's alliance to France, Fanon argued:

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[308] Ibid., p. 138.

[309] Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954-62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 3.

[310] Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*, p. 135.

> Every veil that fell, everybody that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the haïk, every face that offered itself to the hold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer.[311]

The act constituted a triumph for the French colonial administration, a potent act of penetrating into the sacred.

Amidst the manipulation and amidst the Algerian liberation war, women attributed new drastic and revolutionary understandings to the veil. Against the reduction of women's Muslim identity to being veiled or unveiled, women engaged in deliberate acts of veiling and unveiling according to the tactics needed, transgressing all fixed meanings the French attributed to the veil. While some women wore European dress so that they could walk around the European city without suspicion, other women put on a veil when it was needed to carry messages or military Equipment from place to place without being detected. Celebrating the new role, Fanon writes:

> A new technique had to be learned: how to carry a rather heavy object dangerous to handle under the veil and still give the impression of having one's hands free, that there was nothing under this haik, except a poor woman or an insignificant young girl. It was not enough to be veiled. One had to look so much like a Fatma that the soldier would be convinced that this woman was quite harmless. [312]

Fatma was the French stereotypical name used to refer to veiled Algerian women as a form of essentialism to denote their servitude.

Crossing the square, the heroine states: 'Here I was, forty years later, Djamila Bouhired's legitimate heir, passing the same café disguised in the garb of piety, since women had discovered that this very garb might conceal a lover whose body is set to explode with

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[311] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, p. 42.

[312] Ibid., p. 61.

passion'.[313] Hence, between French and postcolonial Algeria, understandings of the Fatmas, of the veil and of the dangerous behind the garb underwent marked changes. While in colonial Algeria women had to use the veil, to look like a Fatma to hide weapons and to help the revolution, women had to disguise as such to hide their bodies amidst the FIS recolonization of the postcolonial imagi/nation. In their reduction of women to an essentialist imagi/nation of veiled/unveiled and very much like the French, the Islamists reduced women to their clothing and fell, hence, in the trap of essentialism. Masquerading in a veil to meet her lover and making a strategic use of the veil which is supposed to be a pillar of the imagi/nation of the mother/land, the heroine transgresses further essentialist definitions of women as veiled/unveiled, pointing, thereby, to the perils of positing the na(rra)tion on slippery signifiers of women, their veils and bodies.

With the heroine's transgressing of the mother/land's sites of tradition, be it of language, the mother, the *ḥammām* or the veil, among others, she becomes, thus, transgressing of the mother/land's very time. As previously seen with Khaled's narration, the postcolonial imagi/nation happened to face a serious embarrassment as to its own narration of time. Claiming to be modern, it anxiously solicits the past both to legitimize its own narration and to safeguard the nations' cultural difference from the Other, the colonial. In the clash between the past and the present, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion happened to settle its philosophical embarrassment around the axis of women who had 'a strange relationship with time', as they remained fixed while 'time flowed on', as previously seen with Khaled's imagi/nation.

Unlike Khaled's, time appears in Ahlam/Hayat's imagi/nation as cyclical, as constantly moving and shifting and as resistant to fixity and linearity. 'We' re governed by a recurring sequence of Fate from whose grand cycles and vicissitudes we're separated by […] How long

[313] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 138.

had it taken her to realize that the two of them had completed the cycle of love?'.[314] To be out of the phallic wor(l)ds, women had also to be out of time and/or linear time, as famously championed by Kristeva and Irigaray. Writing against feminist politics which seeks resistance along the linear time of history, women called for a flowing temporal imagi/nation that stems, also, from the maternal and the bodily and that challenges that of the fixed, static time of his-stories. According to Kristeva, women's time should also stem from the bodily, cyclical and monumental. While the former involves repetition, seasons, cycles such as menstruation and life's daily routines, the monumental refers, rather, to the eternal. These two temporalities are opposed to the linear, historical time, which refers, rather, to our place in history, to man's wor(l)ds that progress in a given, fixed direction while that of women is, rather, open, and points to no direction.

To opt for open, cyclical time is, however, not to totally do away with the symbolic, linear time. 'How then could language accommodate both of them at once?', ponders Mosteghanemi.[315] The perfect na(rra)tion has to do, rather, with the transition 'from time to time', in Ahlam/Hayat's words, with a constant and ceaseless deviation between temporalities, from linear to non-linear, from fixed to cyclical and vice versa. Thus, while Ahlam/Hayat tells stories along the narration's linear temporality, bringing into narrative episodes from Algeria's distant and close pasts, she proceeds to simultaneously permeate the imagi/nation with cyclical narrations that move backwards and forwards, challenging, thereby, all forms of fixity and/or closure.

Ahlam/Hayat's na(rra)tion of transgression comes to a close with the Islamists' assassination of Abdelhaq and her laying the notebook in which she has been writing the

[314] Ibid., p. 10.
[315] Ibid., p. 11.

short, erotic story at his grave and asserting that she is about to start writing another story, again. Amidst this very bloody atmosphere, the heroine puts on elegant clothes narrating:

> That's why I love Zorba, who starts to dance when he ought to be crying […] All I wanted to do was to defy the killers, brandishing the two accusations that I knew might be levelled against me: being a woman and being a writer.[316]

In the very closing scene of herstory of transgression, she states: 'And on this day, as the year before, he (the librarian) stopped and came over to me […] I was about to ask him for envelopes and postage stamps when…'.[317] With the open end of the story, she emphasizes, again, the unfinishedness of the na(rra)tion, which, in its turn, attempts to question the certain, absolute and closed and which becomes another site/sight of resistance against that of Khaled in *The Bridges*.

Conclusion

Mosteghanemi was, hence, able to narrate various sites/sights of transgression in the counter-na(rra)tion. The different narrators adopted and the different subjectivities inserted into the national story points to the author's awareness of the unreliability of narrative and to her assertion that no story attempts to offer a finished community, but to suggest the unfinishedness of the postcolonial nation against the dominant na(rra)tions. It is an attempt at intervening to destabilize the one fixed version narrated in nationalist and masculinist discourses of Algeria, the nation which, in spite of the differences, continues to accept only one na(rra)tion, a stance which will further be endorsed in her following novel.

[316] Ibid., p. 288.
[317] Ibid., pp. 301-302.

Chapter Four: *'It's the game of masks in the carnival of life'*: The Postcolonial Na(rra)tion between Carnivalism, Masquerading and *Mask*ulinity in *The Dust of Promises.*

Introduction

This chapter will analyse *The Dust of Promises,* the novel which brings Ahlam Mosteghanemi's trilogy to a close. While the previous two novels engaged in restor(y)ing the postcolonial na(rra)tion through paradigms of disruption and transgression, *The Dust of Promises* utilizes that of carnivalism and masquerading to shed light on the instability of the imagi/nation. As hitherto discussed, while *The Bridges of Constantine* indexed the ways in which masculinist discourses in Algeria firmly defined the nation on the axis of women, and while *Chaos of the Senses* reconciled women's position and being off that very axis, *The Dust of Promises*, in its turn, disinters the paradigms of *Mask*ulinity that led to this very delineation. It indexes the ways in which the postcolonial carnival-like condition ushered in nothing but dissimulations.

Published in 2003 and set in 2002 Algeria, a period which marks the end of the ten-year long power struggle (1990-2000), the novel comments at length on Algeria's path in its postcoloniality, tracing over five decades of the key episodes that moulded the emerging nation and its narration. The novel especially denounces the postcolonial condition that was reduced to a mere 'game of masks in the carnival of life', in the author's terms, and emphasizes the deceitfulness of the postcolonial, characterized as it was with the malleable, the obfuscated and the duplicated.[318]

The chapter will draw first on Bakhtin's notion of carnivalism as a model of subversion to show how the world of the novel -very much like medieval carnivals where

[318] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Dust of Promises*, trans. by, Nancy Roberts (London: Bloomsbury publishing, 2016), p. 256.

people disguised and created a parallel world to deride and subvert hegemonic authority-forged a parallel world to denounce the postcolony that was reduced to a state of reversals, contradictions and upside-downs. It will simultaneously show how the novel treated the theme of the carnivalesque in a postcolonial context to shed light on the absurd, sarcastic and grotesque condition, voicing, thus, discontent with the postcolonial homeland.

It will then shed light on the difficulties of exile, usually reduced to discussions of agency and creativity, as seen in the previous chapter. It will first discern the ways in which the inadequacies of the Algerian carnivalistic state resulted in problems of im/migration and asylum seeking, and how, haunted by the homeland memories of violence, war and destruction, Paris ceased to be a bridge of freedom and turned, rather, to a postcolonial Waste Land for Algerians. It will then show how Mosteghanemi recuperated the Seine events of 1961 as a colonial memory of racism to comment on postcolonial unresolved issues of racism, im/migration, refugism and citizenship in postcolonial France, which, with policies that purport marginalization, exclusion and control emerged, very much like Algeria, as carnivalistic.

The chapter will proceed to draw on the trope of the masquerade, central to the carnival spirit, to show how memory, proper names, language, space, painting, photography and all mediums of signification and representation turned out to be nothing but dissimulations, demythifying the concept of nation itself, along with its narration(s), its backbone. It will then show how the novel digs deep into Algeria's (post)colonial history and into the resulting issues of inferiority, castration, mimicry and *mask*ulinity to unweave the braids of the narrations that govern gender relations, mainly as regards the perception of women.

1. *'Everything is born upside down'*: A World with a Carnival Attitude?

The restor(y)ing of Algeria continues, thus, with *The Dust of Promises,* the last novel of the trilogy consisting also of *The Bridges of Constantine* and *Chaos of the Senses.* As previously discussed, *The Bridges of Constantine* tells the story of Khaled Ben Toubal, an ex-freedom fighter in self-exile in Paris, where he became a famous painter and where he narrated his story with Hayat/Ahlam, the woman who embodied Algeria, Constantine and his mother/land, and who remained, however, unpossessed. *Chaos of the Senses,* in its turn, narrated by Ahlam/ Hayat, chronicled her falling in love with a photojournalist, who, amidst the political chaos of the 1990s, masquerades as Khaled Ben Toubal, the character he learnt of while reading her novel *The Bridges. The Dust of Promises,* accordingly, is narrated by Khaled the photojournalist, the third voice of the trilogy's love triangle of -Khaled the painter, Hayat/Ahlam and himself- which picks up where *Chaos of the Senses* ends.

The novel tells, thus, the story of Khaled the photojournalist, who, very much like the narrator of *The Bridges,* has his left-arm disfigured, carries the memory of his dispossession on the flesh, and more importantly, is haunted by his love for Ahlam/Hayat, who remains, again, elusive. Being in France to receive the *'Best Press Photograph of the Year'* as a prize for a picture he took during his work amidst the civil unrest of the 1990s, he came upon an art exhibition organised by Katherine, who is the same Françoise of *The Bridges,* the mistress of Khaled the painter who becomes known as Zayyan.[319]

Bringing the characters of the previous two novels altogether in France -Khaled the painter, Katherine, and Hayat/Ahlam who came together with her mother to visit her Islamist brother Nassar who fled Algeria to escape persecution- the novel seamlessly blends the line

[319] For more details on the image and its reception in media, see: Joseph McGonagle, 'Dispelling the Myth of Invisibility: Photography and the Algerian Civil War', in *The Violence of the Image: Photography and International Conflict,* ed. by Liam Kennedy, Caitlin Patrick (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 78.

between fiction and reality, making of the latter a highly suspect concept. Masquerading as Khaled Ben Toubal and presenting himself as such upon their brief encounter in Paris thinking that he did not know him, Khaled comes across a copy of *Chaos of the Senses* upon Zayyan's death and learns, thus, that he had actually known who he was. Khaled states: 'In novels, too, we need to borrow names that don't belong to us. So as we move back and forth between fiction and reality, we often don't know who we are anymore. It's the game of masks in the carnival of life'.[320] Going through a series of bizarre events, he ponders about his life in Algeria and France and learns, thereby, that people, memory, proper names, language, painting, photography and all mediums of signification can wear a mask that conceals, deconstructing, hence, his imagi/nation.

In so doing, the novel creates what Bakhtin called 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom', a world that is very much carnival-like.[321] The carnival, as an idea and concept in literary criticism, originated with Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostovesky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and his World* (1956), where he discussed how carnivals, as annual festivals, allowed common people in medieval and early modern Europe to undermine hegemonic authority, be it legal, ideological or political. Through the use of masks, costumes, disguises, humour, irony and sarcasm, people could discard their chains, transcend their identities and express their scepticism towards prevalent power structures and at once escape punishment. At carnivals, hierarchies between men and women, rich and poor, ruler and ruled and between all other groups usually exclusive lose all relevance, creating an alternative space that is largely subversive.

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[320] Ibid., p. 256.

[321] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 6.

Carnival festivals, Bakhtin writes, are 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom'; aiming at challenging 'immortalized and completed' truth, a truth that is 'already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and undisputable'.[322] Carnivals evoked, thus, a sense of the open, the changing and the disputable against medieval Europe's insistence on the stable, fixed and the perennial. The carnivalesque was, accordingly, used by Bakhtin to refer to those writing practices that embody the carnival spirit; that is, writings that are satirical, comic and subversive of power structures.

Contemporary metafiction fiction, Hutcheon asserted, proved, however, to be even more emblematic of the carnivalesque than Rabelais's and Dostovesky's. This is so much so not only because the carnivalesque has continuously been adopted by, and appropriated in, post-colonial/modern and even feminist contexts for its subversive potential, but also because it 'exists -as does the carnival- on the boundary between art and life, denying frames and footlights, making […] little or no formal distinction between actor and spectator, that is, between writer and reader'. Added to that and as she continues to argue, 'its form and content both also operate to subvert […] authoritarian structures. The ambivalent incompletion of contemporary fiction also suggests, perhaps, that the medieval and modern worlds may not be as fundamentally different as we might like to think'.[323] Given the similarities between metafictional and carnivalesque practices and in its combination of both models to overturn hegemonic or patriarchal discourses, *The Dust* becomes, thus, a novel with a carnival attitude, attempting to relativize all established narratives, traditions, roles, and all sense of truth.

The carnival, as presented in Bakhtinian theory, is a world of reversals, a world 'turned upside down'.[324] Tellingly, Khaled, the photojournalist, narrates: 'By the logic of the

[322] Ibid., pp. 6-10-9.

[323] Linda Hutcheon, 'The Carnivalesque and Contemporary Narrative: Popular Culture and the Erotic', *University of Ottawa,* 53.1 (1983), 83-94 (p. 85).

[324] Bakhtin*, Rabelais*, p. 87.

image itself, which the camera captures upside down, I have to accept the idea that everything is born upside down'.[325] It is, indeed, this very trope of the world turned-upside down that structures Khaled's narration, rendering Algeria as carnivalistic par excellence. The leitmotif of reversals and of inversions is best manifest in the author's play on her characters names. Although they are the same characters the reader previously encountered in *The Bridges of Constantine*, Mosteghanemi surprises the reader when Khaled Ben Toubal, the narrator of the first novel, becomes Zayyan and when his mistress Katherine becomes Françoise, a trope that I will tackle below.

The novel's title in Arabic reads as *ʿĀbir Sarīr,* which literally translates into bed farer in English, a play on the Arabic word *ʿābir sabīl,* which, in turn, means wayfarer in Arabic. In the course of narration, the reader encounters, at times, images of actual wayfarers and of bed farers, at other times. The title becomes, thus, a site of playfulness, manipulation and subversion, open to a plurality of interpretations. At a first glance, Mosteghanemi tricks the reader to expect the bed to be one of adultery and sinfulness, given that she writes in the words of Khaled at the very onset of the story: 'How can you resist the temptation [...] that you're in the same room with her? When she invites you to sit down on the corner of her bed'.[326] In the course of narration, however, the reader learns that the bed is the site at which the postcolonial carnival is best manifest.

As rightly argued by Suyoufie, the bed stands as a metaphor for life's stages from birth to death: It is infancy's bed that is supposed to epitomise homeliness, the bed of mid-life's (dis)ease and finally, that of death.[327] It is the bed that accompanies one throughout the journey of life in which one is but a farer. However, in the course of narration, we learn that

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[325] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, pp.13-14.

[326] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[327] Fadia Suyoufie, 'The Uncanny in Ahlām Mustaghānmī's Ābir Sarīr', *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 36.1 (2005), 28-49.

the bed is also the site on which the postcolonial carnivalistic and the turned-upside-down is best manifest. 'In the realm of postcolonial theory', Öztürk-Yagci writes, 'home has almost lost its widely accepted connotations of shelter, safety, privacy, peace and protection'. It became rather a site that 'leaves unshielded. It does not lodge but it dislodges. It does not promise hope, but causes despair'.[328] Tellingly, thus, home features through the world of the novel as an 'unhomely' space that is turned upside down.[329] As soon as the narration unfolds, we learn how the bed of homeliness was one of unhomeliness for Khaled as early as infancy. Telling the story of his orphan-hood, he puts:

> It was she (his grandmother) who embraced me from the time I was taken from my mother's bed as an infant. It was her bed that I slept in [...] And it was on the pallet on the floor that she and I shared that I began my journey as a wayfarer who would be received by many a bed.[330]

Sharing a floor pallet and leading a vagabond life since infancy, Khaled lived as an orphan both as bed farer and wayfarer, moving from his mother's bed to his grandmother's, from the homely to the unhomely space of home and by extension, to that of nation.

Deprived of all notions of homeliness that a bed is supposed to evoke at a very young age, the bed was no exception in Khaled's adulthood. It becomes, rather, further linked with images of treachery and deceitfulness, when he witnesses his father's cheating on his step-mother, a trope which I will tackle below. At midlife, the image of the bed was even more tainted as it became linked with instances of violence, monstrosity and blood. Working as a

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[328] Dilek Öztürk-Yagci, Home as the Unhomely in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (Jan 10, 2016), https://www.ohio.edu/parlour/news-story.cfm?newsItem=BEA4EF7B-5056-A874-1D289923712F6B92 [accessed 18 November 2018].

[329] Bhabha's idea of the unhomely draws on Freud's ideas of the *Heimlich*, that is, that which was once 'home-like' and 'familiar', and the *Unheimlich* which stood, rather, for the unfamiliar, the unhomely. See: Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by, David Mclintock (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 51.
Homi Bhabha, 'The World and the Home', *Social Text,* 31.32 (1992), 141-153 (p. 141).

[330] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 39.

photojournalist during the Black Decade of the 1990s, Khaled tells the story of Bentalha massacre, where a bunch of babies, children, and elderly were dragged from under the bed where they were frightfully hiding and atrociously slaughtered by the terrorists, an event which marked Khaled's life.

As he proceeds with his narration, and upon his meeting with, and visit to, Zayyan, Khaled interviews him on his sick bed, where he resumes his narrative of dissatisfaction with the course of the nation, first started in *The Bridges.* Now a cancer patient in one of France's hospitals, Zayyan's hospital room reminds Khaled of Amal Donqol's last poetry collection *Papers in Room No.8,* a collection that was indeed written on Donqol's death bed. Central to this very collection, and especially to the novel's title, is a short poem entitled as *sarīr* (bed), which tells the story of Donqol's last days on his death bed, a detail that fully demystifies the novel's title. The bed of the title becomes, thus, a bed that bridges death and life, where one is but a farer. Dying of cancer, the Egyptian poet, very much like Zayyan, was best known for his dissidence, for his dream of, and fight for, Arab unity. Especially disappointed by Egypt's defeat to Israel in 1967, Donqol becomes Zayyan's 'comrade in tragedy' of the malaise plaguing Arab artists in postcoloniality, in Khaled's words.[331]

Failing to put an end to inequities prevalent in colonial Algeria and giving rise to new subjugations, the carnivalistic state further spurred a second war, a ten-year long power struggle that marked the official collapse of the national project. It is indeed this very narrative of failure that forms the imagistic background to the novel. According to the novel, the seeds of failure were sown in the orphan nation or the 'orphan complex', which, constantly recurring, weaves the narration altogether.[332] Telling the story of the orphan Coco Chanel, who, although she became famous, successful and rich, could not overcome her

[331] Ibid., p. 128.

[332] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 250.

complex and gave her perfume, Chanel No.5, the number she was given in an orphanage, Khaled narrates: ‘But we’re an orphan nation. We have been this way ever since history abandoned us […] An orphan never gets over his feeling of inferiority’.[333] The trope is, thus, suggestive not only of Khaled and Zayyan’s orphan-hood, but also of Algeria’s.

As previously mentioned with Khaled’s his-story with the imagi/nation and as noted in Mosteghanemi’s study, male narrators are oftentimes aggrieved at a childhood afflicted with dispossession. Whether in Haddad or Yacine’s imagi/nations, among others, dispossession became deliberately voiced in the trope of orphanhood to distance their na(rra)tions from their fathers.[334] With the constant intersection of the personal with the political, Algeria happened similarly to bear the orphan stain. In this very vein, and as narrated in *Nedjma*, the seeds of orphan-hood were sown in the French colonization and the defeat of the Emir, Algeria has become, as stated by Yacine in this very novel, an orphanage, a fatherless country, which ever since has been suffering from a spoliation of Algeria’s lineage of leaders. ‘Abdelkader was’, Kateb writes, ‘the only shadow that could have darkened the whole country, a man of the pen and the sword, the only chief capable of uniting the tribes into a nation, if the French hadn’t come and cut short his efforts’.[335]

However, the world turned upside down is not the only carnivalesque trope deployed by Mosteghanemi. Rampant in the novel are also images of the grotesque, the deformed, the strange and the unpleasant, which are also central to the carnival spirit. ‘You are implicated in feeding a world that’s hungry for bodies’ comments Khaled on his job as a photographer, ‘enamoured of victims and grotesque death in all its forms’.[336] Replete with references to the grotesque, that is, images of, blood, corpses, victims, wars, massacres, cemeteries and burials,

[333] Ibid., p. 249.

[334] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures,* p. 55.

[335] Yacine, *Nedjma*, p. 135.

[336] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 20.

the novel evokes the monstrousness of life, reinforcing the gloomy mode of the postcolonial world. 'In the system of grotesque imagery', Bakhtin writes, 'death and renewal are inseparable in life as a whole, and life as a whole can inspire fear least of all'.[337] The grotesque becomes more apparent when the author brings to the narrative the image of *Bouzellouf,* an Algerian dish composed of roast sheep's heads, and of sheep's trotters, evoking, thereby, the distorted, central to the grotesque, to the carnivalesque.

Ironically, in a very telling scene, commenting on Algerians' obsessions with *Bouzellouf* and citing a study that disinterred connections between food and criminal tendencies, Khaled mocks: 'If government officials in my country read it, they'll conclude that it's their duty to intervene from now on in what Algerians eat, since terrorism has its roots in Algerian cuisine'.[338] Addressing the chaotic with the carnivalesque, the grotesque with grotesqueness, the novel further reacts to the absurd and the serious with sarcasm. Commenting on the relation between Algerian cuisine and terrorism, Nasser sarcastically replies that the pizza is no innocent since its origins lay in Italy, the land of the mafia. Sarcasm and laughter, also pivotal to the carnival and the main means by which the novel is carnivalized, are indeed widespread in the novel and are foregrounded as early as the first page when the author puts: 'So then, we were practicing on joy's dance floor, believing that happiness is an act of resistance?'[339] It is an act of resistance because, by constantly poking fun at the serious, the closed and the scary, authority is undermined, reduced to mockery.

In its adoption of the carnivalesque as a model of subversion, *The Dust* created, thus, a parallel world, a second world that turned the one inside officialdom upside-down. Constantly blurring the line between fiction and reality, it subverts the latter and denounces it

[337] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 50.

[338] Mosteghanemi*, The Dust,* pp. 108-109.

[339] Ibid., p. 1.

as a highly suspect concept. In shedding light on the grotesque, absurd and carnivalesque, it shows how, in its passage from the war's memory to that of the 1990s' chaos, the Algerian postcolony ushered in nothing but an unhomely, orphan and carnival-like homeland.

2. *'If the river Seine had a memory'*: On the Displeasures of Exile

The carnival-like homeland resulted, accordingly, in Algerians' leaving of Algeria to escape the 1990s electric atmosphere. While exile was celebrated as a site of freedom, emancipation and agency given Algeria's political unrest in the 1990s as tackled in the previous chapter with Ahlam/Hayat's imagi/nation, it emerged as a site rife with malaise, mal-integration and ambivalence in Khaled's. As rightly argued by Smail Salhi, there are three heterogeneous Maghrebi understandings vis-à-vis the Occident in postcolonial literary na(rra)tions. The East-West encounter is experienced either as a form of 'Occidentophilia', of 'Occidentophobia' or of 'ambivalence'.[340] While the Occident was generally conceived of positively in Arab literary productions from the Mashriq as the Arab World continued to conceive of the West more in terms of the ideals and slogans of freedom and liberty, the tendency pales in Maghrebi narrations given the heterogeneous yet equally brutal colonial experiences throughout the area, along with postcolonial hostilities towards migration.[341]

Very much like the unhomely homeland, France was an ambivalent space that can also segregate, exclude and impair. The latter was endured most by Zayyan, the ex-freedom

[340] Zahia Smail Salhi, *Occidentalism: Literary Representations of the Maghrebi Experience of the East-West Encounter* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p.36.

[341] This view was supported in a number of essays. See:
Zahia Smail Salhi, 'The Maghreb and the Occident: Towards the Construction of an Occidentalist Discourse', in *Orientalism revisited: Art, land and voyage*, ed.by Ian Richard Netton (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 273; Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident. East West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006). Lorenzo Casini, 'Beyond Occidentalism: Europe and the Self in Present-day Arabic narrative Discourse', *Robert Shuman Centre for Advanced Studies*, 30 (2008), 1-21 (pp. 7-12).
Riad Nourallah, *Beyond the Arab Disease: New Perspectives in Politics and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 90.

fighter, who has long been in self-exile, and who, upon his meeting with Khaled in the hospital, narrates his story of exile and displacement on his death bed, putting:

> Life in a foreign country isn't a station […] The punishment inflicted by life abroad lies in the fact that it takes from you the very thing you'd come to take from it. You find yourself living in a country, which, whenever it takes you in its arms, intensifies the chill inside you because, in everything it gives you, it brings you back to your initial deprivation. You go to live in a foreign land in order to discover something, to expose something, only to find that you yourself are exposed by your foreignness.[342]

France was, thus, not unhostile as Zayyan was also embittered by his experiences of alienation, rejection, defeat, detachment and non-belongingness. This discontent with exile was also evoked by Khaled whose stay in France, albeit short, was similarly so saturated with the repugnant that France emerged as a Waste Land in his narration. 'Mistaken are they who believe that when we enter a new city we leave our memory elsewhere […] If you have destroyed your home in this little corner of the world, destruction will follow you wherever you go'.[343] Very much like Zayyan, Khaled's experience in France was uncomforting for it was tainted with the memory of his homeland, with its ruin, grotesqueness and debris.

Enmeshed in his memories, Paris was, thus, for Khaled, very much like Algeria, a grotesque space rife with the erratic. Wandering in Paris's streets, and coming across a butcher shop decorated with pigs' heads, he reminisced about Algeria of the 1970s when his European neighbours used to go out to hunt boars. His memory of the good, old past led him, thus, to bemoan today's situation in postcolonial Algeria that stymied all hunting trips as human heads were being hunted instead of pigs. Similarly, and coming through the Tuileries Garden, a place brimming with prostitutes, Khaled could see nothing but bodies of marble

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[342] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 99.

[343] Ibid., pp. 81.82.

and stone as he was reminded of another scene of the prostitutes of Arab misery whose heads were cut and hung on the doorways of their houses.

This very memory happened to taint Khaled's relationship with the Seine. During his temporary stay in Paris, he resided at Zayyan's apartment with Françoise, an apartment which overlooks the Pont Mirabeau Bridge along with the river Seine. However, the Mirabeau Bridge also reminded Khaled of Constantine's bridges, their decay and destruction. The river Seine becomes for him very much like Eliot's Thames river, wrecked and soiled, while Paris, very much like Eliot's London, 'an unfamiliar city', a postcolonial waste land, where his memory 'wanders about in a ruin that she only sees'.[344]

However, exile was not grotesque for Khaled just because of his memory of homeland, but also because of the carnivalistic experience he endured. Wandering in Paris, Khaled comes across Zayyan's art exhibition, where he stops at a painting of fishing nets brimming with shoes. Unconcerned at first, he later learns from Françoise that the painting's value lies in its attempt to commemorate the victims of 17 October 1961 demonstrations, when a number of Algerians were brutally thrown into the river Seine under the orders of the then-Police Chief Maurice Papon. 'I know', replies Khaled, 'not wanting to appear less knowledgeable of my own history than she was'.[345] By having the Seine events narrated by Françoise, who comes to stand, indeed, as a metaphor for France, and by evoking Khaled's unfamiliarity with them, the novel seems, thus, to reflect on a politics of suppression, concealment and then reconciliation plaguing the French history vis-à-vis the Seine events and the Algerian War at large.

Historically speaking, the events were sown in colonial violence, racism and inhospitality towards North Africans, and more precisely, in Maurice Papon and his brutality

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[344] Ibid., p. 82.

[345] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 50.

towards the Algerians. In charge of Constantine's police in colonial Algeria and later a Prefect of Paris Police, Papon employed a series of repressive measures against immigrant North African workers in France, culminating in the adoption of a new curfew imposed only on Algerian immigrant workers and more specifically, on *Français Musulmans d'Algérie* (French Muslims of Algeria) in an attempt to curb the FLN's mobility in the area.

In protest against the racist measure, and on the night of the 17th of October 1961, a huge number of Algerians, who were indeed hired as workers in France, went for an unarmed, peaceful demonstration organized by the FLN. However, the peaceful demonstration turned into a bloody massacre for the police resorted to the use of abysmal violence, as Françoise continues to narrate:

> A police officer would ask a demonstrator, "Muhammad, do you know how to swim?" to which the unfortunate […] would generally reply, "No," […] Once the police officer has gotten his answer, he would push the demonstrator off the bridge, since the only reason for the question was to save himself the trouble of tying up his victim's arms and legs with his necktie![346]

While some workers were punched, kicked and beaten with sticks, others were shot and thrown into the Seine where they were left to drawn.

In their very wake, the events were censored in, and supressed from, the official, historical record as publishers, the press and news media were all prevented from their dissemination.[347] 'News media usually do what they are told', writes Napoli commenting on the events' censorship and cover-up in media.[348] The events were later fully entombed

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[346] Ibid., p. 50.

[347] For more details on the events, how they were first occluded and then reintroduced in France, see: *Contesting Views : The Visual Economy of France and Algeria,* ed. by Edward Welch, Joseph McGonagle (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 65- 89.

[348] James Napoli, 'A 1961 Massacre of Algerians in Paris When the Media Failed the Test', *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* 15.7 (1997), 1-3 (p. 3).

following France's adopted policy of amnesia, or national forgetting, mainly in the period spanning 1962-1982, when the parliament passed legislation which applied amnesty to all those involved in crimes related to the 'events in Algeria' as the war was officially referred to in France. The events, thus, drowning in the Seine altogether with the Algerian protestors, constituted 'a singular moment of censorship in post-war France'.[349]

Accounts of the Parisian massacre became exposed by mid-1980s in other forms of records, mainly eyewitness testimony and *Beur* literature, and were, however, intensified by October 1997 upon Papon's televised trial for crimes against humanity committed as a Vichy bureaucrat during the Second World War. At this very trial, historian Jean-Luc Einaudi testified to the role Papon played in the events, a testimony which compelled the French state, as Rice reminds us, to 'revisit the date and redress its omission from official history'.[350] Since then, the massacre became exhaustively employed by a group of *Beur* writers to counter French official discourse, making of the event, at first supressed, an obsessional theme in their writings.[351]

'If the river Seine had a memory', laments Khaled, 'grief would change its course'.[352] Learning of the events, France becomes, very much like homeland, a postcolonial carnival that violates, oppresses, segregates and conceals. Similarly, and summoning the corpses of the French and those of different nationalities, who were also thrown into the Seine in the name of the French Revolution in 1789 and who were 'washed downstream towards the

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[349] Dawn Fulton, 'Elsewhere in Paris: Creolised Geographies in Leïla Sebbar's La Seine était Rouge', *Culture, Theory & Critique,* 48.1 (2007), 25-38 (p. 27).

[350] Alison Rice, 'Rehearsing October 17, 1961: The Role of Fiction in Remembering the Battle of Paris', *L'Esprit Créateur,* 54.4 (2014), 90-102 (p. 92).

[351] See: Benjamin Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie dans les Mémoires Française et Algérienne' [Algeria's War in the French and Algerian Memories], *Revue de l'Institut Français d'histoire en Allemagne,* 3 (2011), 50-53. Benjamin Stora, *Les Immigrés Algériens en France : Une Histoire Politique* [Algerian Immigrants in France : A political History] (Hachette Littératures, 2009).

[352] Mosteghanemi*, The Dust*, p. 90.

river's mouth', the Seine became also grotesquely carnivalized in Khaled's narration, as a river that swallows.[353]

However, the Seine events were not only evoked in *The Dust* to reflect on France as being a regime of unreality, but also to comment on wider issues relating to racism, immigration and citizenship in (post)colonial France. This is mainly because the events' exposure following years of cover-ups paralleled a series of restrictive immigration measures along with an increasingly inhospitable atmosphere towards immigrants in France between 1970s and 1990s. At first indispensable to France's economy and a constitutive part to the *Trente Glorieuses* (the three glorious decades) (1945-1974), immigration was, however, gradually being curbed following the 1970s' oil shocks and the ensuing labour shortage. The restrictions were further enforced by the 1990s, an era where civil unrest, poverty state failure and repression were at an all-time high, resulting, thus, in increased immigration, asylum seeking and simultaneously in the 1993 Pasqua, and 1997 Debré restrictive immigration laws.

These measures were coupled with a remarkable increase in racist crime and in anti-immigrant sentiments as immigrants, overwhelmingly North Africans, were competing for jobs with the French and were, thus, subject to constant racist gazes and identity checks. Testifying to the difficulties faced by, and racism manifested towards, the North African immigrants, the events were, thus, recuperated in the novel to denounce the persistence of colonial violence and racism towards the Other in contemporary France.

According to Haus, the Seine events emerged as 'a narrative of resistance to racism, and a focal point of the search for an identity politics in the face of an increasingly hostile media and political discourse on the theme of immigration'.[354] Ever since its exposure, thus,

[353] Ibid., p. 90.

[354] Jim House, 'Antiracist Memories: The Case of 17 October 1961 in Historical Perspective', *Modern and Contemporary France,* 9.3 (2001), 355-368 (p. 362).

the event was adopted by a number of anti-racist and immigrant rights groups and by antiracist social movements and marches like the 1983 *Marche pour L'égalité et Contre le Racisme* (March for Equality and Against Racism), a movement which the media labelled as *la Marche des Beurs* (Beurs' March). Tellingly, and in her narration of the Seine events and the fishing nets painting, Françoise narrates:

> A certain anti-racism group was inspired by this painting to memorialise the crime […] during the last commemoration of the 17 October massacre, they loaded fishing nets with as many pairs of tattered shoes as the estimated number of those killed […] and lowered them into the river Seine. Once the shoes were saturated with water, they pulled them out and displayed them on the riverbank for people to see as a reminder of those who had drowned.[355]

Summoning the massacre as an anti-racism memory and linking it to other episodes of violence and savagery in French history, to that of the Vichy regime, when the very same man, Papon, deported French Jews to Nazi camps, *The Dust* seems, thus, to extend its denouncement of racism to all the different communities of immigrants and minorities.

'In Europe', Zayyan continues to narrate, 'you are naked, exposed and suspect because of your name, your religion, the way you look'.[356] Narrating episodes of continued racist encounters in Paris decades after the end of French colonial colonization, Zayyan summons the events to comment also on the racist rhetoric prevalent in France and the West at large especially following the 9-11 attacks in New York as Western countries placed tighter restrictions on migrants and manifested intolerable level of suspicion as anti-terrorism and anti-fundamentalism measures. The 2001 laws in France, for instance, vested expanded power in the hands of officers to monitor transactions, raid homes, to enter and search suspect premises and vehicles. 'Some foreigners',

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[355] Mosteghanemi*, The Dust*, p. 50.

[356] Ibid., pp. 107-108.

Tahar Ben Jelloun writes, 'are less foreign than others'.[357] This is mainly because European immigrants, for instance, are usually more tolerated than others who come from a Muslim culture. Along similar lines, Behdad attributes contemporary narratives on, and attitudes towards, Muslim immigrants to a deep-seated tradition of Orientalism. According to him, current discourses on Muslim immigration are 'indebted to Orientalism because they display similar ideologies of ethnocentrism, progress, and race to differentiate European citizens from Muslim immigrants'.[358]

In this very vein and central to *The Dust* are not only the figures of the immigrants and/or immigrant workers, but also of the expelled, asylum seekers and the refugees, best epitomised in Murad and Nasser, the Islamists. In his discussion of postcolonial India and more specifically of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Nayar rightly argued that the rise of the problem of refugees in the postcolony testifies to 'the inadequacy of the postcolonial state to provide a safe home'.[359] Being offshoots of the carnivalistic postcolony, the problems of immigration and asylum seeking posed new challenges to the concept of nation and testified to its inability to deal with the colonial remnants.

Seeking asylum in Europe for their political activism, Murad and Nassar's plight becomes, indeed, emblematic of that of a plurality of Algerians, who were persecuted during the Black Decade, choosing, thus, to depart to escape imprisonment or affliction. Amidst the rise of refugism, the concept of 'cities of refuge' was restored to help activists escape persecution, a model first embraced by Germany. With both Nasser and Murad portrayed as refugees and asylees in Germany, the novel seems, thus, to comment on the inhospitable atmosphere in France not only towards the immigrant workers, but also towards those in need

[357] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality: Racism and North-African Immigrants*, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 86.

[358] Ali Behdad, 'Inhospitality, European Style: The Failure of Human Rights', in *The Postcolonial World* , Jyotsna G. Singh and David D. Kim, eds, (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 297.

[359] Pramond Nayar, 'The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide', *College Literature,* 37.4 (2010), 88-119 (p. 89).

of shelter, safety and protection, and subsequently, on the change of France's role from a *pays d'accueil* (A welcoming country) to one of rejections, hostility and exclusions.

In his narration of his journey from Algeria to France, Khaled also chronicles how he was largely burdened with a number of administrative hostilities and painstaking visa procedures. 'I realised […] that it turns out the free movement of photographs doesn't extend to people!', grieves Khaled.[360] Being in France on a tourist visa, he denounces how Zayyan, in his stay with Françoise, 'hoped that, between her thighs, he might find residency papers in France and, just possibly, a way of getting himself a red passport!'[361] The novel, thus, also testifies to the brutalisation of modern-world politics, which are largely one of strict divisions, placed limitations and outright exclusions.

'Contemporary migratory movements' Sayad writes, 'are, in a way, similar to the internal migrants of old and the rural exodus […] The difference is, however, that the migrations […] took place within the limits of national frontiers, or in other words within the same territory'.[362] That is to say, with the rise of the nineteenth's century nationalism and nation-states, as previously seen, the establishment of walls and borders as physical barriers and the adoption of mechanisms like nationality, residency and citizenship, which are all excluding in nature, people's mobility was largely stymied.

Denouncements of these very mechanisms are rampant in the novel and become, however, more apparent when Mosteghanemi writes in the words of Khaled, who, disappointed with the carnivalistic condition in Algeria and then France, puts 'Citizenship, it was only created because of a hoax known as the homeland'.[363] By denouncing the concept of nation/homeland as a hoax, the novel, indeed, along similar lines, both denounces and

[360] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 43.

[361] Ibid., p. 140.

[362] Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2018), p. 294.

[363] Ibid., p, 274.

demythifies the concept of nation and points to its excluding nature, a model which sits ill with discourses of human rights, globalization and the highly-called for model of hospitality, a concept that emerges also as crucial in the novel.

In this very vein, hospitality was increasingly being adopted in discussions of the relationship between countries and their immigrants, as an alternative model to the rampant hostilities and exclusions. For instance, in his *French Hospitality*, a title which indeed derides the prevalent inhospitality, and commenting on North Africans' deteriorating situation in France, Ben Jelloun queries: 'We already have laws restricting entry and residence; why shouldn't we have other laws based on the idea that to welcome strangers into one's country is a fundamental mark of civilization?'[364] Drawing on what he conceived of as hospitality as a Moroccan 'tradition'[365], hospitality as 'an ethic'[366], Ben Jelloun advocated the putting forth of a more open, welcoming model where the nation is perceived of as a 'house' in which the receiving country is the host and the immigrant is the guest. [367]

However, in her *Postcolonial Hospitality*, and drawing on the former, Rosello argued that what makes the concept of hospitality pertinent to postcolonialism is rather its malleability, its potential for the redefinition of the conventional roles and duties of the guest and the host.[368] She queries: 'Is a postcolonial host always defined as a citizen of the nation?'[369] The answer to Rosello's question seems to be found in *The Dust,* where, in its adoption of the carnivalesque, everything seems to resist definition, evenness and dualisms. In the postcolonial carnival of the novel, the guest/host dichotomy becomes also turned

[364] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality: Racism and North-African Immigrants*, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 6.
[365] Ibid., p. 2.
[366] Ibid., p. 5.
[367] Ibid., p. 6.
[368] Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*: *The Immigrant as Guest* (California: Stanford Press, 2001), p. 18.
[369] Ibid., p. vii.

upside down. When in France, learning that Françoise usually rents her flat for immigrants, and asking whether Zayyan also lives at her apartment, Françoise replies: 'Yes, […] or rather, I'm the one living in his apartment. When he went back to Algeria, he left the place to me for a long time'.[370] In *The Dust*, a postcolonial host is, thus, not always defined as a citizen of the nation. In so doing, the novel undermines the very essence of citizenship, of national borders, of what it means to be a guest and/or host in a postcolonial world.

While denouncing the model, Mosteghanemi seems to put forth an alternate model, 'an ersatz homeland', in her words.[371] With the rise of globalization, more challenges to the concept of nation were posed, ones that put forth the multi-locality and mobility of the nation. This is especially pertinent to Mosteghanemi, who, born in Tunisia, living in, and writing from, Algeria, France and Lebanon, the nation becomes for her very pliable. She writes in the words of Zayyan: 'The geography of my spiritual homelessness has taught me to paint with my steps. This […] is the map of my inward journey'.[372] Her ersatz homeland becomes, thus, a multi-local, deterritorialized space beyond any defined borders: 'A homeland isn't a place on earth, but an idea in the mind', as further ascertained by the author in the words of Khaled.[373]

This is mainly because the diasporic imagination upsets the boundaries usually mapped by nationalism and substitutes them for a new genealogy of imagination, one that is more flexible, open and malleable. In this very spatial setting, the circulation of people and identities become so loose that it also extends to the circulation of whole countries. When in France, and coming across a Morrocan neighbourhood with Algerian sweets, dates, bread and a café that serves Algerian Couscous, Khaled, amazed, puts: 'I was astounded at this world

[370] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust,* p. 68.

[371] Ibid., p. 221.

[372] Ibid., p. 243.

[373] Ibid., p. 243.

I'd known nothing about: another Algeria that had been transported whole, complete with its products and customs […] Apart from your mother and father, you can find anything in this country!'[374] Turning all borders upside down, the novel challenges the idea of nation as fixed and champions, rather, the multi-locality of the postcolonial nation, which is not only confined to mapped territories, but also to mobile, transportable ideas and values.

'Governing is a process of reduction', states the author in the words of Khaled, 'There is a blessing in being nobody that you realise only when a ruler comes along and nationalises all names'.[375] Evoking issues like asylum seeking, racism, immigration and globalization, the novel seems, thus, to denounce the model of nation-states as identitarian. Deterritorializing the national space, the novel further embarks on challenging the very pillars of na(rra)tions, showing how, in the postcolonial carnival, all mediums of signification and representation turned to be nothing but masquerades, mere dissimulations.

3. '*An act of concealment*': (Post)colonial Masquerades?

As seen with both Algeria and France, the postcolonial carnival-like condition ushered in nothing but dissimulations. Accordingly, central to the very postcolonial carnivalistic world of *The Dust* is a 'game of masks', in the author's terms, which has also long been part and parcel of carnivals, where people dressed up, put on face masks and costumes, impersonated any identity they desired and became in process someone else, giving birth to the masquerade. 'The masks of the clown', ascertains Bakhtin, 'grant the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others […] the right not to be

[374] Ibid., p. 208.

[375] Ibid., p. 257.

taken literally, not to be oneself'.[376] The masks, thus, very much like carnivals, in their distancing potential, yielded an empowering strategy for intervention.

Bringing the discussion of the masquerade in a postcolonial context, Cain rightly argued that the masquerade is not 'a singular term, but a strategy that is profoundly heterogeneous' and it is this very heterogeneity and plurality that 'mark the moments of instability within any postcolonial situation'.[377] This heterogeneity of the posctolonial masquerade is, indeed, so rampant in the world of *The Dust,* where everything seems to be but a mask that secretes, disguises and twists reality.

In exile, narrates Khaled while collecting Zayyan's stuff after his death and commenting on how he rendered exile as an imagined homeland, 'you gather about your fake imitations that you call a homeland […] You invert holidays and occasions, symbols and customs […] You treat a foreign land as though it were home, and home as though it were a foreign land.'[378] In his failure to find a room in, and in his attempt at recreating what Rushdie called 'an imaginary homeland', exile, strangers and the fake imitations become nothing but 'simulacra'.[379]

In the world of *The Dust*, the game of masks constitutes the linchpin of the postcolony, mainly amidst the Black Decade of the 1990s. The narrator himself masquerades

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[376] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*: *Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 163.

[377] Niti Sampat Patel, *Postcolonial Masquerades: Culture and Politics in Literature, Film, Video, and Photography* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. xiii- xiv.

[378] Mosteghanemi*, The Dust*, p. 221.

[379] See: Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Penguin, 1992). Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan press, 1994), shows how late twentieth century world is a world where signs and/or representations have become distant from, and bear little if any resemblance to, their origins. That is to say, the postmodern world has become surrounded not by real representations of entities, but rather by ones of simulacra and simulation, fake originals.

as Khaled Ben Toubal, as previously mentioned. Narrating the story of his masquerade to Françoise, he states: 'At a time when heads and pens have gone flying, we journalists haven't done well at finding pseudonyms to hide behind from our would-be murderers. We just choose whatever new name we happen across'.[380] A telling instance of this very game of masks becomes even more pronounced in Khaled's narration of the story of the Black Decade, where the Islamists targeted people who worked for the state to slaughter them:

> One morning I headed for the village with a colleague of mine. We prepared ourselves, of course, for unpleasant surprises by not taking any professional identification with us in the event that we came to a sham security checkpoint. The murdereres had taken to setting up bogus checkpoints as a way of hunting down people [...] Fake checkpoints were now rampant, and the terrorists who set them up had mastered the art of looking exactly like the security officials whose military uniforms and weapons they had stolen. One day, a ceratin elderly man approached a checkpoint that he felt sure was official. 'So', he said jovially, 'I see the bastards aren't here today!' In reply, one of the people manning the checkpoint shot him, saying, 'We are the bastards!'[381]

With the sham and fake checkpoints, with the Islamists disguising as policemen, with these moments of instability ruling the scene, postcolonial Algeria becomes preeminently a space for masquerades, which further shores up the spirit of the carnivalesque, of the world turned upside down.

In its potential to conceal, the trope echoes indeed the absent behind the present, the concealed behind the exposed and the unstated behind the stated, duplicating, thus, all narrations, meanings and scenarios. In the novel's adoption of the strategy, it is no wonder that everything seems to resist fixity, stability and definition. The title of the novel itself, *ʿĀbir Sarīr*, immediately evokes the unstated, *ʿābir sabīl.* However, Mosteghanemi takes the strategy to the extreme with her doubling of the names of her characters as Khaled of *The*

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[380] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 256.

[381] Ibid., p. 29.

Bridges becomes Zayyan, while Katherine becomes Françoise and, in the course of narration, Hayat metamorphozes to Nedjma.

In a postcolonial context, as Cain proceeds to argue: 'masquerade becomes a significant site for raising questions about representation, identity, historicity, power and subversion', because it is in masking and revealing that light becomes shed on such issues as the (un)truth of identity, the (in)stability of discourses, and the (un)certainty of narrations.[382] Tellingly, when Françoise learns that Khaled's name is but a pseudonym, and asking for his real-life name, he states: 'What difference does it make what my name is as long as you know who I am from the things I say and do?'[383] In so doing, not only does the author evoke the carnival's picture of the double, of the world turned upside down, but also empties proper names from all their meanings, casting doubt, thereby, on all systems of signification and identifcation. Applying myriad strategies of masking and of masquerading, as I will further tackle below, the novel unmasks the instability of all signifying practices, substituting them rather for ones of malleability.

4. *'They're nothing but myths':* The Malleability of Postcolonial Na(rra)tions

Hence, the trope of masquerade stresses the pliable nature of all postcolonial na(rra)tions, usually presented as fixed in official discourses. While in its adoption of three different narrators the trilogy pointed to the unreliability of language, and while in its emptying of proper names from all their meanings it casted doubt on their being a system of identification, the novel further engages in demythifying pillars to the concept of nation, like memory.

[382] Patel, p. xiii.

[383] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 256.

As seen with the Seine events, for instance, French official memory, being manipulative in its concealment of the Algerian massacre, proved to masquerade. A parallel trend is also found in Algeria's official memory when Khaled, narrating his childhood story with his father, brings to light another face to the freedom fighters' story in Algeria, usually masked in, and erased from, Algeria's national and official memory. Going back in memory to colonial Algeria, Khaled narrates how he was shocked to learn that his freedom fighter father used to receive his concubines from the mountains into his marital bed. Disapointed with his father, Khaled narrates: 'All at once, I'd come to see that […] freedom fighters aren't sinless, that the women who wear the malaya aren't above suspicion'.[384]

In this vein, the story of freedom fighters has, indeed, long assumed a sacred status in official narratives of Algeria, where they have been presented as the architects of the liberation war, as the fathers who birthed Algeria as a nation in the modern sense of the word. Overtly manipulating their memory for instrumental ends, power has, accordingly and exclusively, been monopolized by, and vested in the hands of, the FLN ever since independence. In *The Dust*, freedom fighters are, however, counter-narrated, presented, rather, as being 'not sinless'. This very trope has also emerged in scholarship on Algeria and on the liberation war, when, as counter to the asexual, and 'the sisters in combat' narrative dominating the official discourse, some sources testified to the fact that there were, indeed, marriages, even forced marriages, executions, rapes and virginity tests in some *wilayas* (districts).[385]

As previously seen, the rise of the concept of nations as a model substituting the ages-old system of empires in the 19th century was both enabled by, and consolidated through,

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[384] Ibid., p. 158.

[385] See Ryme Seferdjeli, 'Rethinking the History of the Mujahidat during the Algerian War: Competing Voices, Reconstructed Memories and Contrasting Historiographies', *Interventions,* 14.2 (2012), 238-255.

memory for its potential to link the past with the present and, hence, to legitimize power structures. However, with the ushering of high modernity and/or postmodernity, memory, at first presented as fixed, spontaneous and neutral, was vigorously challenged when the politics of mnemonic practices was brought into light.

Most famously, for instance, and a major contribution came from, Pierre Nora, the French historian who showed how memory was used for instrumental ends in the French national space in order to drive given interests in the present. According to him, *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) emerged to replace *milieux de mémoire* (places of memory), because memory no longer existed in people's lives and had, thus, to artificially and consciously be tailored. Sites of memory, as he writes:

> Arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and authenticate documents because such things no longer happen as a matter of course. When certain minorities create protected enclaves as preserves of memory to be jealously safeguarded, they reveal what is true of all *lieux de mémoire*: that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away. These bastions buttress our identities, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need for them. If the remembrances they protect were truly living presences in our lives, they would be useless. Conversely, if history did not seize upon memories in order to distort and transform them, to mould them or to turn them into stone, they would not turn into *lieux de mémoire,* which emerge in two stages: moments of history are plucked out of the flow of history, then re-turned to it- no longer quite alive but not yet entirely dead, like shells left on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.[386]

He, thus, shed light on the malleability of memory, torn between naturalness and constructed-ness and between real representation and mere simulation.

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[386] Pierre Nora, and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past,* trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 7.

Concentrating the efforts on the commemoration of the two World Wars, the Algerian war has, however, never been a site of commemoration in the French collective memory. Reduced to labels as *les évènements d'Algerie* (the Algerian events), *actions de maintien de l'ordre* (operations to restore civilian peace), and *operations de police* (police operations), it has for decades been conceived of as 'the war without a name'.[387] It was, rather, a *non-lieux de mémoire* (a memoryless site) or even a *lieux d'oubli* (a site of forgetting) in the French official memory.[388] Apostrophized to such reducing labels, the French-Algerian war was, however, a pillar to the consolidation of the nation in Algeria.

Unacknowledged until 1999, after almost four decades of French state concealment and denial, and in spite of the absence of national sites of memory that commemorate the event, the Seine became for Khaled and for many North-Africans a personal site of memory. Passing through the river, he narrates 'I began picturing the river banks on the morning after all those miserable creatures had drowned, leaving passers-by to interrogate their shoes'.[389] In the absence of national and official sites of memory, that which is supposedly entombed can, thus, still be recuperated as a personal site of memory, re-memory-ing as such the former.

That said, the novel is, hence, replete with instances of memory's instability. With the Seine events being stressed in Algeria's official records while being concealed in France's, with the Seine events being a non-national site of memory in France and a personal site of memory for Khaled, with *the mujahidin* being sinless in Algeria's official accounts and 'not sinless' in non-official ones, and with the Algerian war being a pillar of memory in Algeria and a non-site of memory in France, memory, thus, supposedly the axis around which the concept of nations is built, proved, thus, to masquerade, to be malleable in nature.

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[387] See John E. Talbott, *The War Without a Name : France in Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

[388] Richard L. Derderian, 'Algeria as a Lieu de Memoire: Ethnic Minority Memory and National Identity in Contemporary France', *Radical History Review,* 83.1 (2002): 28-43 (p. 30).

[389] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 52.

But there is more to the story of the malleable in the novel. In *The Dust*, the limits of narration seem also to extend to other forms of representation, like painting. Wandering with Khaled around the exihibition, and coming across paintings of bridges and partially-open doors, Murad sees them, rather, as 'a feminine symbol' putting: 'If I could choose a title for this exhibition it would be women'.[390] Painting, thus, supposed to imitate reality, to copy its subject, seems, hence, also to be malleable in the world of the novel that keeps consistently defying monophonies.

In a related manner, and in the face of the ambient malleable, photography was also non-immune. Commenting on Ben Talha massacre, Khaled tells the story of his colleague Hocine, who, taking a picture of a weeping woman he was told she lost her seven children in the massacre, learnt later that she was not their mother, but their maternal aunt. Similarly, yet more tellingly, the malleability of photographs was more exposed in Khaled's picture of a little boy hugging his knees to hist chest, wetting his trousers out of fear and leaning against a wall next to his dead dog whom the Islamists poisoned not to bark. Upon winning the prize, and believing the picture won because of the little child, Khaled's picture was presented in Algeria's media as 'Algerian Dog's Carcass Wins Prize for Best Photo in France', and as 'France Prefers to Honour Algeria's Dogs' in France's. Confused, and learning that the Algerian newspaper's title was written by an enemy masquerading as a friend, Khaled queries: 'Had they awarded me the prize for a photo of a little boy, or for a photo of a dead dog?'[391] Having photojournalism at the centre of the novel, and commenting prolifically on the ever-increasing role of visual media in contemporary life, *The Dust* comments also on the malleability of this pictorial turn, where photography, being the most powerful means of representation, proved also to be no innocent. When first emerged in the nineteenth's century,

[390] Ibid., p. 63.

[391] Ibid., p. 28.

it was celebrated as a means that provides an immediate rendition, a perfect duplication of reality. However, in the postcolonial carnivalesque world, ‘to speak of the photograph would be to speak of its multiplicity and malleability’.[392] Very much like language, photography can also masquerade, be tricky, malleable and, as often argued by Barthes, be a trap.[393] Added to photography, media in and of itself, with the covering up of the Seine events for decades, was a one more instance of this very failure, of this pliability.

The world of novels with a carnival approach, Dambudzo Marechera writes: ‘is complex, unstable, comic, satirical, fantastic, poetical, and committed to the pursuit of truth’.[394] It is no surprise, thus, that, amidst these pitfalls of representation, the characters in the novel are portrayed as froing and toing between questions and answers, making of the novel a site of a quest for truth. However, in such carnivalistic atmosphere, even the simplest questions defy easy answering; they have either manifold or no answer at all. Khaled absurdly queries:

> How can a mother cat carry her young between her teeth without hurting them? [...] Are there cats that are more motherly than women? [...] when I’d grown up […] my ‘cat questions’ got bigger […] How is it that […] a homeland will cast its sons and daughters into exile and diaspora.[395]

Overwhelmed with his questions, Khaled desperately resolves: ‘After all, answers are blind. Only questions see’.[396]

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[392] James Elkins, *Photography Theory* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 4.

[393] See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1981).

[394] Dambudzo Marechera, ‘The African Writer’s Experience of European Literature’, *Zambezia,* 14.2 (1987), 99-105 (p. 104).

[395] Mosteghanemi*, The Dust*, pp. 40-41.

[396] Ibid., p. 41.

This very state of irresolution is diffuse in the novel, and is foregrounded by the novel's epigram which reads as: 'Truth is a wayfarer, in whose way nothing can stand'. The epigram, which is a quote by Emile Zola, sets, thus, the tone of the narration and hints before the first chapter begins that the metaphor of wayfarer entails a quest for truth in the carnival of life, a truth that is yet so equivocal that it becomes inaccessible. In its setting of truth as wayfarer, the novel follows post-modern and/or postcolonial narrative conventions and perspectives in that it underscores the relative nature of truth. It is, it seems, a world of post-truth. With language, memory, history and space, among others, being malleable in nature, postcolonial na(rra)tions, accordingly, emerge as 'nothing but myths', in Zayyan's terms.[397]

5. *'A human ant'*: Of Mimicry, (Post)colonial *Mask*ulinity and Gender Masquerades

Shedding light on language, space, memory, photography, painting and their amenability with the game of masks, the novel further engages with gender masquerades in (post)colonial Algeria. Although central to Mosteghanemi's project from the very first novel in the trilogy, it was not, however, until *The Dust* that the very essence of the mechanisms that govern gender relations came full circle. While, as previously seen, *The Bridges of Constantine* narrated how women emerged as national signifiers in Algeria, as the constituent referents of national identity in masculinist imagi/nations given the colonial practices, *The Dust* disinters the paradigms of postcolonial *Mask*ulinity that contributed to the reification of this very perception of women, unweaving the narratives of the castrated man, along with his acts of masking and compensating which were laid over women.

Very much like the narrator of *The Bridges* who was arm-amputated and who was enmeshed in feelings of subjection, of obsession with comparison, validation and evaluation,

[397] Ibid., p. 96.

the narrator of *The Dust* has his left-arm amputated and is entangled in feelings of inferiority and subordination. As soon as the narration unfolds, we learn that he is so overwhelmed with his feelings of insecurity and castration that he conceives of himself as 'a human ant'.[398] He constantly queries: 'Have I gotten to the age when I have to be worried about my manly competence, the age when I suffer a pathological fear of suddenly losing my potency at the moment when I need it most?'[399]

As he goes on with his na(rra)tion, the narrator traces the roots of his very predicament. 'There's some event in your childhood which', Khaled narrates, 'without your being aware of […] becomes the pivot around which everything else in your life revolves'.[400] Narrating the story of his infancy, Khaled brings to narration the story of his infancy with his father, an autocratic diktat who came to epitomize the cruelties of the patriarchal society at large. Telling the story of his infancy, Khaled reminisces how his father used to smuggle women into his chamber, as previously seen with the memory of the freedom fighters.

Thus, supposedly a leading freedom fighter in the liberation war who was receiving fellow fighters for war purposes, Khaled narrates how his father used to lock him, his step-mother and grandmother into one of the rooms, as he was rather receiving his mistresses from the mountains. Looking through the keyhole to see him coming with a woman in a black *malaya* (cloak), Khaled hurries in shock to inform his mothers of what he saw. Being helpless and submissive, they reply that 'it was the custom for freedom fighters to disguise themselves as women'.[401] Although saddened by what he saw, and being impotent just like his stepmother and grandmother, Khaled was in a way feminized, stripped of all agency. Thus, Colonial Algeria was typically a space for masquerades. Not only did some women

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[398] Ibid., p. 37.

[399] Ibid., p. 67.

[400] Ibid., p. 39.

[401] Ibid., p. 157.

masquerade in a *malaya* to hide their prostitution, but also did Khaled's father. His status as a leading freedom fighter also masquerades his abusive fatherhood and deceitful husbandhood. 'All at once I'd come to see that fathers lie', laments Khaled.[402]

As he goes on with his narration, we learn that Khaled's father was not only a cheating husband, but also an epitome of the mimic man in colonial Algeria. Narrating his-story with his patriach father, Khaled brings into account how his father had 'a penchant for liberated women' and how he 'had an abiding weakness for foreigners due to the fact that they were educated. His good looks […] enabled him to win the hearts of the fair-skinned and dark-skinned alike'. Having a penchant for liberated women, his father 'wrote his first poetry serenading a certain French teacher. And then there was the Jewish widow', as further stated in Khaled's imagi/nation.[403]

In this vein, Khaled father's predicament finds, in fact, lineage in the context of French Algeria, which, in its supposed act of bringing history, was aligned with masculinity while the colonized, deprived of power, land and authority, was associated, rather, with femininity.[404] This very predicament was best described by Djebar as 'the age of submission', as she writes:

> In Algeria, it was precisely when the foreign intrusion began in 1830 [...] that a gradual freezing up of indoor communication accompanied the parallel progressive French conquest of exterior space, an indoor communication becoming more and more deeply submerged : between the generations, and more and more, between the sexes […] At the time of the heroic battles, woman was watching, woman was crying out : the gaze-that-was witness throughout the battle, which ululations would prolong in order to encourage the warrior […] But,

[402] Ibid., p. 158.

[403] Ibid., p. 159.

[404] Malika Mehdid, 'En-Gendering the Nation-State: Women, Patriarchy and Politics in Algeria', in *Women and The State: International Perspectives*, ed. by Shirin M. Rai and Geraldine Lievesley (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

> throughout the nineteenth century, the battles were lost one after the other, further and further to the south of the Algerian territories. The heroes have not yet stopped biting the dust. In that epic, women's looks and voices continue to be perceived from a distance, from the other side of the frontier that should separate us from death, if not from victory. But for those born in the age of submission […] the scene remains, the watching women haven't moved, and it is with a retrospective fear that the men began to dream of that look. Thus […] the dialogue has become almost definitely blocked […] redoubling the immobility that makes of a woman a prisoner.[405]

This very age of submission instilled a lasting sense of defeat for men who were markedly castrated. Drawing on J. Desparmet's *L'Oeuvre de la France en Algérie Jugée par les Indigènes,* where he narrates how the Algerian man became inferiorised by the French presence, Lazreg writes that in the context of French Algeria, 'the devout Muslim should rarely venture out of his home. If he must he should lower his hood over his face and walk with his eyes averted 'just like a woman wrapped in her veil''.[406]

As further argued by Fanon, the colonial presence in Africa steeped in an array of psychiatric problems for the colonized, who happened to struggle with feelings of alienation, of traumas and the so-called inferiority complex. Enmeshed since childhood in a na(rra)tion of dichotomies between a dominant, civilized colonizer and a dominated, uncivilized colonized, the colonized happens first to lose his sense of self. He becomes not a man but 'a zone of nonbeing', 'an object in the midst of other objects', and object that was 'fixed', 'burst apart' and 'stumbled', 'indignant', 'burdened' by the white man's gaze. He becomes entangled in a sense of 'amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered (his) whole body with black blood'.[407]

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[405] Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, trans. by Marjolijn de Jager (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 141.

[406] Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence,* p. 53.

[407] Fanon, *Black Skin,* pp. 2-82-85.

Experiencing himself as a form of interpellation, he queries: ‘where shall I find shelter from now on’. In this very context, the colonized’s journey in the search for a shelter has ‘only one destiny. And it is white’, to borrow Fanon’s formulation. In order for him to do away with his supposed inferiority, he had first to see himself through the colonizer’s eyes and then to mimic the colonizer’s model by aspiring to ‘white culture, white beauty, white whiteness’. The colonized queries: ‘Who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man’. In doing so, the mimic man feels recognized. It is ‘a form of recognition’, a form of ‘total realisation’.[408]

Being a deficient man, Khaled’s father becomes driven by what Fanon further called ‘a lust for revenge’ to compensate for his feelings of unwholeness.[409] He becomes anxious and deseperate to prove his masculinity, that he is a man. He wants European women for the mere vengeful satisfaction of dominating a European woman. His manifest virility becomes, thus, a mask for his feelings of inferiority and emasculation, it becomes a mere *mask*ulinity. In process, he ruined his relationship with his wife, who became reduced to an object for reproduction.

6. ***‘Measuring my manhood in a different way’*: Women as a Site of (Re)covering**

In adulthood, Khaled narrates how he inherited his father’s marital bedroom upon marriage, with its smell and memories, the bedroom which was his father’s ‘kingly realm’ and which became Khaled’s ‘punishment’.[410] He constantly mourns: ‘Haunted […] a life that your father lived before you […] it […] had spoiled my relationship with my wife […] that I insisted she take birth control pills lest we become parents to […] one […] with hereditary

[408] Ibid., pp. 86-9-6.

[409] Ibid., p. 16.

[410] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 161.

[…] malformation'.[411] While he married thinking that a wife would 'do the housecleaning inside (him)', he realized that he had 'to resign from the role of the good, happy husband (he has) played for years'.[412] Being emasculated by the colonial presence, by his father's authority and inability to step up for his mother in childhood, Khaled becomes castrated. Stripped of all agency and bearing the latter on his disfigured arm, he engages in a plethora of attempts at 'measuring (his) manhood in a different way', in his words.[413]

Very much like his father, Khaled's acts of compensation start first with the European woman as a form of revenge. Throughout the narration, he tries to masquerade through sexual affairs as a refuge from the abyss of reality. The anxiety towards his own castration leads him to flaunt his virility in bed, the story of which starts with Olga, his Polish neighbour. 'There's always a first woman to whom you come as a timid boy', narrates Khaled, 'and at whose hands you learn to be a man'.[414] Being a symbol of the European woman at large, Françoise comes, however, to stand for France. She emerges in Khaled's narration as easy, vulgar, selfish and playful. Tellingly, thus, and during Françoise's narration of the Seine events to Khaled, he ponders:

> I felt an urge to embrace this woman, who was half Françoise and half France. I wanted to kiss one part of her, and to slap another. I wanted to cause her pain, to make her cry, and then to go back to my miserable hotel to cry alone.[415]

Khaled's compensation and revenge for his damaged masculinity takes, thus, the form of sexual conquests and violence.

The passage is, indeed, reminiscent of a trend in the Algerian novel of the 1950s, mainly in works by Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun and Malek Haddad, where the foreign

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[411] Ibid., pp, 161-162.

[412] Ibid., p. 163.

[413] Ibid., p. 75.

[414] Ibid., p. 38.

[415] Ibid., p. 50.

woman emerged as a symbol for France that had to be raped to reclaim masculinity, a trend that was detailed in Mosteghanemi's *Algérie*: *Femme et Écritures.* Discussing the trend in key texts in Algerian literary narrations, Mosteghanemi writes: 'for some writers, it is an apportunity to vent their frustration under the pretext that to possess a French woman, is to possess France and take revenge of this foreigner who emasculated the Algerian man and violated Algeria'.[416] For these heroes, sexual conquests with French women were but a reclamation of a masculinity impaired by the colonial presence, but a masquerade of the contradiction between their outer machismo and their inner castration.[417]

Added to violence and sexual conquests, Khaled's *mask*ulinity further takes the form of thingification, of objectification. Given his interpellation, the colonized's sense of self becomes also based on what Fanon called 'the dimunition of the other'. The colonized ponders: 'It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility', as stated by Fanon.[418] Being loose, Françoise, thus, still posed anxieties to Khaled and was 'a bad test for masculinity', in his words.[419] Being a bad test for his masculinity, Khaled wants, rather, a woman like Venus, the statute in Zayyan's living room's appartment: 'I wanted a woman like Venus [...] I wanted a woman [...] whose halves I could reform while I corrupted the other, measuring my manhood in a different way by each of her halves'.[420] She was the only woman both Zayyan and Khaled 'could live with without complexes or complications', as, in having both arms amputated, Venus was even more

[416] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, p. 79.

[417] This trend was also later manifest in a number of postcolonial novels of the Arab world, mainly in Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-shamāl* (The Season of Migration to the North), a classic of postcolonial Arabic literature that tells the story of Mustapha Said who promised to 'liberate Africa with (his) penis'. See, Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North,* trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 122.

[418] Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 164.

[419] Ibid., p. 75.

[420] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 75.

damaged than they both were. Their objectification of Algerian women was, thus, but a 'game of masks' for their deficient masculinity, but a *mask*ulinity.

The trope of Venus -the Greek goddess of beauty, love and fertility- is indeed of crucial significance to the novel, and to the author's literary project at large, as it brings into narrative the mythologization and the de-realisation of women in Algerian masculinist (imagi)nations. As hitherto seen with *The Bridges*, women emerge as an idea de-realised in his-stories with the imagi/nation. Similarly and before getting any glimpses into his story with Ahlam/Hayat, Khaled's narration in *The Dust* emerges as saturated with tropes of both de-realisation of, and anxiety towards, women. Telling at length stories of Salvador and Gala, of Natalia and Bushkin and of Qays and Layla, which, as the accounts tell us, were mystical, failed love stories, as these women were unpossessed for their lovers, resembling his predicament to that of Qays who was possessed by his mad love for Layla, the woman who could bewitch with one glance, the woman who was fire while he was her wood, and quoting Shawqi's adaptation of the story in his play, Khaled narrates: '*Lord, have mercy. I'm helpless before the power of a voice that, with a few words and half a laugh, launches a romantic attack on me'*.[421]

This very trope of fear of femininity becomes even more pronounced when Khaled embarks on narrating his story with Hayat/Ahlam and when she emerges as fetishized.[422] 'Never have I developed a passion for a woman's feet [...] because I didn't know any more how to define my relationship with her, I'd started relating to nothing but her feet', narrates

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[421] Ibid., p, 181, *Original Italics.*

[422] Fetishism was first theorized by Freud as a psychological condition where a non-sexual object or body part become sexually enticing as a substitute for the castrated female genitals in boys who, unwilling to recognize the threat of their own castration, refuse to acknowledge that their mother is penisless, and given this very implied anxiety, fetishism has long been reccuperated for feminist purposes for its subversive potential.

Khaled.[423] As early as the first chapter, she emerges as exotically mysterious, mystically obsecure and extravagantly a desired object of sexual possession. Being fetishized, she becomes further portrayed grotesquely as a woman with her 'shoes covered in blood', as a woman with 'her feet dyed with men's blood, in every desire a bit of masked violence' and also as 'a goddess who loved the smell of roasting human flesh and who, dancing around lovers' burnt sacrifices, refused to accept anything but their own bodies as offerings'.[424] She is also a woman 'devoid of mercy', 'a criminal by design', 'a charmer as if by accident', 'a difficult, seductive' and 'something that is so beautifully destructive'.[425] Ahlam/Hayat is even a woman with 'a magician's paraphernalia', 'a sorceress that [...] you don't know whether you have emerged from her hands rich or poor' and whether 'you come out of her magic hat a white dove, a frightened rabbit, or tear-stained coloured scarves'.[426] Images of blood, dance and magic, not only do they further contribute to the carnivalization of the novel, but also reveal problematic aspects of representations that emerge in the narrator's (imagi)nation of women and of femininity.

Added to these probematic womanly imagi/nations, images of Hayat/Ahlam as a woman 'with her back turned, who gives you the chance to envision her from behind', impregnate the novel and are, indeed, crucial as they further bring into narrative an episode of gender mechanisms in colonial Algeria that led to women's positioning as obscure objects of desire in masculinist na(rra)tions.[427] Whilst the colonial presence in and of itself forced a dominated/dominating paradigm and ushered in wretched masculinities, the situation was further exacerbated when women emerged as objects of colonial desire and when seclusion was adopted as a form of resistance, as previously tackled. Amidst this framework of

[423] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p, 3-4.

[424] Ibid., p. 8.

[425] Ibid., pp. 3-194-8-4-172- 290.

[426] Ibid., p. 207.

[427] Ibid., p. 4.

seclusion, there emerged an ingrendient of what Mosteghanemi called gender 'incommunicability', which, according to her, brought about an exacerbatedly gendered mapping of space.[428]

In this vein, while the establishment of French colonialism in Algeria resulted in seclusion, the outbreak of the liberation war put the '*mujahid'* (the male freedom fighter) face to face with the '*mujahida'* (the female freedom fighter), who, although 'desired', had to be but his 'sister' to legitimise her presene in the maquis.[429] Desire, as famously theorised by Lacan, is inaugurated by a sense of lack, by the absence of a sense of plenitude that forever dominated our lives after our entrance into language and after our encounter with the law of the father. In the postcolonial context of Algeria, this very sense of lack was, thus, embedded in the dominant (post)colonial na(rra)tion: First in the inferiority complex, previously detailed, and then in the mechanisms of seclusion and 'brothers and sisters' narrative.

The 'brothers and sisters' war narrative happened to emerge as a persisting narrative in postcolonial Algeria even with the end of war. The narrative was, as stated by Djebar, 'the only case where brotherhood is but cowardice'.[430] Persisting even after the end of the war in postcolonial Algeria, women emerged as unknown, obsecure figures for the deficient man, who emerged, in turn, as frustrated vis-à-vis women, as I will show later with Khaled's narration. Khaled's contention that he did not know how to define his relationship with his lover is, hence, very reflective of this very predicament. Envisioning her from behind comes to point to the many ways in which Hayat/Ahlam was not revered for what she was, but, rather, for the imagined idea of hers which was severely de-realised.

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[428] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, p. 260.

[429] Ibid., p. 261.

[430] Assia Djebar, *Les Alouettes Naïves* [The Naive Larks] (Paris: Julliard, 1967), p. 335.

The freedom fighter, and as stated by Cox, is ‘a pole of positive values, a reference to the war of independence and a marker of the regime’s legitimacy’.[431] Hence, although men emerged from the colonial encounter as deficient, the image of the national hero dominated the official na(rra)tion of postcolonial Algeria. It was a na(rra)tion written by men for men and about men, but it was simultaneously a tale where the nationalist hero was confined to the potent leader, the combatant and/or the soldier. As influentially argued by Connell, national narratives tend to be dominated by ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which is ‘always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities’ that ‘define successful ways of being a man; in so doing they define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior’.[432] In doing so, the postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion proved not only to proceed along lines of defined women’s roles but also of men’s. It was a tale built on ‘normative’ and/or ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which emphasized the manly virtues of courage, honour, strength and virility and that excluded ‘subordinated forms of masculinity’.[433]

However, not only is the restor(y)ing of subordinated masculinities subversive of the official na(rra)tions but also of the Arabophone, literary ones. In this vein, and as noted in Mosteghanemi’s *Algérie*: *Femme et Écritures,* while women emerged as an idea de-realised in both Francophone and Arabophone literatures, the latter happened especially to bear the (post)colonial brunt of subordination. In this vein and given the outbreak of the liberation war along with the rise of the literature of combat, Arabophone literature was predominantly preoccupied with the idealisation of the revolution and the national cause, the domonisation of the French coloniser and the mobilisation of the masses throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In this very context, men were imagined to be epitomes of the quintessential national hero, to be emblems of ‘normative’ and/or ‘hegemonic’ masculinities, with their postcolonial malaise

[431] Cox, p. 134.

[432] Connell, *Masculinities,* p. 3.

[433] Mosse, p. 186.

being utterly disregarded in Arabophone writings of Salah Kherfi, Mohammed al-Akhdar Assayahi and Abdallah Rkibi, among others. In Assayahi's poem *Qiṣṣat Thā'ir* [A Revolutionary's Tale], for instance, the freedom fighter is a quintessential hero who does 'shrill with the machine-gun' and who does 'stand still, never taking a bow'.[434]

It was not until the 1970s that Arabophone literature started to cope with the emerging, deficient masculinities with the rise of the genre of novels at the hands of Abdelhamid Benhedouga, Rachid Boudjedra and Tahar Wattar, among others. From Qaddur of Wattar's *al-Lāz,* to Malek of Benhadouga's *Rīḥ al-Janūb,* among others, the heroes emerge as subordinated within the confines of the postcolonial state which took over the national project and colonized all aspects of the na(rra)tion. The imagi/nation of the quintessential national hero continued, however, to plague women's narrations, epitomised mainly in Zhor Wanisi's writings, which remained especially entrenched in the official discourse of the ideal *mujahid* and *mujahida*, emerging, thus, as cut from the present of the na(rra)tion and its multiple forms of subordination. Mosteghanemi's na(rra)tion of the subordinated, antagonist masculinities becomes, thus, subversive not only of the image of the ideal national hero of the official na(rra)tion, but also the Arabophone, literary imagi/nation.

7. '*The woman wasn't Hayat. She must be Nedjma*': *Nedjma* Re-stor(y)ed?

As the narrator proceeds with his account, and very much like Khaled Ben Toubal's narration of his story with Ahlam/Hayat in *The Bridges of Constantine*, Hayat metamorphoses to Nedjma, the heroine of Yacine's classic of *Nedjma,* as previously seen. Telling the story of his bizarre encounter with Hayat in Paris after two years of absence, Khaled narrates: 'THEN SHE CAME. The doors of anticipation were unhinged as her light

[434] Mohammed al-Akhdar Assayahi, *al-A'māl al-shi'rīyya al-kāmila : Muḥammad al-Akhḍar al-Sā'iḥī* [A Compilation of Poetry: Mohammed al-Akhdar Assayahi] (Algiers: Assayahi Publishing, 2007).

came suddenly streaming in'.[435] As seen hitherto, both Zayyan and Khaled are driven by their love and desire for Ahlam/Hayat, who remains yet unpossessed. Upon Zayyan's death and when Hayat comes with her brother Nasser to bid him farewell, Khaled states:

> I convinced myself that the woman wasn't Hayat. She must be Nedjma, that beautiful, fugitive stranger who'd gone fleeing from poems and fallen into the clutches of history. A woman like her would have had the face of every woman, and every woman, and every name of the world.[436]

As previously seen, *Nedjma* is a classic of Algerian postcolonial literature where Kateb Yacine narrates the story of Nedjma, the woman who is portrayed as the object of love, desire and rivalry between four characters who are united and devided by their obsession with her.

As also seen with Yacine's his-story with the imagi/nation, the novel was, indeed, inspired by his real-life story with his cousin, lover and fiancée who was married off upon the events of May 1945 and his imprisonment. With the rise of his national consciousness and the intersection of the collective with the personal, the image of the nation became, thus, blured with that of women for Yacine. Being the desired woman who has, however, to be but a cousin-sister for the disillusioned Yacine, *Nedjma* can subsequently also be read as a story of the deficient man, of the desired but unpossessed and of the brothers and sisters narrative. This is especially true given the fact that the story of Nedjma, being torn between five men in her life -Mourad, Lakhdar, Rachid, Moustapha and Kamel- three of whom could potentially be her brothers, revolves mainly around a concept of incest, of the desired but forbidden woman/sister.

That said, *The Dust* draws clear parallel lines with Yacine's story. Very much like *Nedjma*, the novel locates constructions of masculinity and femininity in the colonial legacy, in the deficient man, his orphanhood and his acts of compensation. Very much like *Nedjma*,

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[435] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 164.

[436] Ibid., p. 261.

Hayat is depicted as *la femme fatale*, the object of male love, desire and rivalry, the woman-mother and the woman-nation. Very much like Nedjma who was torn between five men in her life, Hayat is analogously torn between Zayyan, Khaled, her husband, her brother Nasser and her father Tahar. While Yacine's novel and literary project revolved around the demonstrations of May 1945, *The Dust* and Mosteghanemi's project all revolve around those of October 1988, both watershed events in the history of Algeria, with the former signalling the rise of national consciousness, and the latter marking the failure of the national dream, as previously seen.

The analogy becomes even more pronounced when Mosteghanemi brings into the novel Amar Medienne's *The Twins of Nedjma,* a book that chronicles Yacine's death in the carnival of life. In this very work, Medienne, Yacine's best friend and companion in his transportation from France to Algeria, narrates how Kateb Yacine's death bizzarely coincided with that of his cousin Mustapha Kateb, Nedjma's brother. Dying just one day after Yacine, and being transported together to Algeria, Medienne narrates how Nedjma came, ironically, to bid farewell not to Yacine, the man who made her story into a classic of literature, but, rather, to her brother Mustapha.

Very much like Nedjma, and upon escorting his body to Algeria, Hayat comes, both cold and careless, to bid farewell to Zayyan, who spent his life painting to and about her, the person who made of her a legend. He queries:

> Hayat […] are you still Hayat? and the reason was that since she entered this place she had become 'Nedjma': Nedjma, the object of passionate love, the desired, the revered, the woundress, the causer of sorrow, the wronged wronger, the ravished, the savage, the loyal traitoress, the virgin after every rape, the daughter of the black and white eagle over whom everyone fights, and around whom alone they come together. She is the wife that bears the name of your enemy, the daughter you didn't conceive, the mother who abondoned you. She

> is the woman whose love was born intermeshed with the homeland, synchronous with its tragedies. She is none other than Algeria.[437]

With Hayat's metamorphosis into *Nedjma,* Mosteghanemi marks, thus, her deliberate restor(y)ing in masculinist literary na(rra)tions and their symbolic conception of women, a trope which ever since *Nedjma,* has continued to reign Algeria's imagi/nations.

However, amidst her intervention, Mosteghanemi pushes the symbol one step further. Unlike Kateb Yacine's works where his lover and cousin emerged only and solely as a symbol of Nedjma, Nedjma emerged in *The Dust* with her real-life name, as Zuleikha Kateb. Coming to bid farewell not to Kateb Yacine but to her brother Mustapha Kateb, as narrated in Medienne's book, she was not Nedjma but 'Zuleikha Kateb who, now in her seventieth year, might well have forgotten after all those years that she was Nedjma', in Khaled's words.[438] In restoring her real-life name, *Nedjma*, the classic of Algerian masculinist literature becomes, hence, both demythified and re-stor(y)ed over five decades of its first birth.

While in setting her as a symbol, Yacine forgot that Nedjma was also Zuleikha Kateb, Khaled and Zayyan, along very similar lines, and in setting Hayat as a symbol, object and a national referent, happened to forget that she was also Hayat Abd el Mawla, a woman who was a subject of her own. Setting her as a magician, Khaled forgot that this very magician can at anytime move the rug from under his feet. Defining her as the goddess Venus, he forgot that, in spite of being armless, '(n)ever once have they been able to get her statue to bow, or her amputated hands to clap in applause for a ruler or monarch'[439], as narrated by the author.

Frustrated with her callousness while standing in front of Zayyan's coffin, Khaled narrates:

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[437] Ibid., pp. 261-263.

[438] Ibid., p. 268.

[439] Ibid., p. 195.

> I nearly shouted at her, 'Don't be Nedjma! Keep him here with a kiss! Keep him here with more tears! Say you loved him! [...] He isn't afraid of anyone anymore, nor is he in danger of anything […] His closed eyes keep the secret, and his rib cage, where he held you as his little bird, is forlon and cold since you left it. So cover him up. and give him a kiss of the sort that brings the dead back to life.[440]

Thus, the novel reverses the story of the sleeping beauty along with its patriarchal trope of the prince kissing the princess to save her. In *The Dust*, Nedjma, the princess, had, rather, to kiss the prince to save him. Vexed over Zayyan's death without possessing Hayat, Khaled further narrates: 'When you are born atop a rock, you're doomed to be a Sisyphus whose lofty dreams doom you to to a lifetime of towering losses […] We who climbed the mountains of illusion'.[441] The analogy of Sisyphus who, as the myth tells us, kept futilely whirling a rock up only to have it whirl back down upon reaching the top of the mountain, points, thus, to the futility of defining the nation on the axis of women.

Trying so hard to possess her, Khaled learnt that he was the possessed. 'She was the type that stares right through you until you turn into a painting yourself. At a certain point, it seemed to me that she wasn't a bridge any more, but that I'd been transmuted into a bridge'.[442] Commenting on Zayyan's painting of Nostalgia, which is also a painting of Hayat, he states: 'It made me think of the artist Rene Magritte, who drew a pipe and called the drawing, this is not a pipe'.[443] Very much like Magritte who subverted links between words and things, Mosteghanemi, along very similar lines, subverted all links between women and nation, between women and men's imagi(nations). As narrated by Khaled, 'Hayat, whose name means life, was a woman who was the very converse of what her name signified'.[444]

[440] Ibid., pp. 268-269.

[441] Ibid., p. 213.

[442] Ibid., p. 242.

[443] Ibid., p. 243.

[444] Ibid., p. 212.

Being the converse of what her name signified -Hayat which means life in Arabic- she becomes, thus, death itself for her lovers. In doing so, Mosteghanemi disinters the dangers of positing the nation on the thorny site of women.

Depicted first as castrated, Khaled becomes further depicted as frustrated by the very end of the story. While on the plane transporting Zayyan's coffin, Khaled narrates how, although they did not exchange a single word and although he did know nothing about her, he was still spellbound by a Constantinian girl sitting to his left, a woman in whom 'there was something of the other'.[445] He narrates:

> The passenger to my left was a mysterious woman, like a house whose windows open towards the inside. I enjoyed sitting next to her unsettling femininity, which stirred up the accumulated residue of emotion inside me. Then a crazy thought flashed through my mind: What if love were sitting to my left? I'd never been able to resist the allure of a quiet woman, or a beauty of a femininity which surrounds itself with mystery.[446]

Describing her, again, as quiet, taciturn and modest, Khaled confirms he feels whole only by reducing women, and, hence, that his story with Hayat is less about her and more about his fractured masculinity. The narration deliberately echoes a passage from Abdelhamid Benhedouga's *Rīḥ al-Janūb,* where the village's teacher ironically narrates:

> I love a girl […] who does not know me and whom I do not know, I loved her just because of what I heard about her […] who knows? I might fall in love with all the girls of the village. How idiotic.[447]

In her intervention in, and unweaving of, *mask*ulinist narrations, Mosteghanemi restor(y)ed, hence, women's subordination in the imagination to a story of fractured, compensating masculinities, one of *mask*ulinity.

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[445] Ibid., p. 290.

[446] Ibid., p. 290.

[447] Benhedouga, *Rīḥ al-Janūb*, p. 88.

In spite of his attempts to make the new Constantinian girl fit his mould, Mosteghanemi keeps peppering the novel with acts of resistance and of subversion. Tellingly, when the stewardess came down the aisle distributing newspapers, the girl, at first taciturn and silent, pronounced her first words by requesting *al-Watan* (The nation) and *al-Hurriyah* (Freedom), two famous newspapers in Algeria. Requesting *al-Watan* and *al-Hurriah* becomes, thus, a pointer to her defying of all preconceived ideas about her, to her not fitting the mould of his compensating imagi/nations. Frustrated with being left only with *al-Shaab* (The People) and *al-Mujahid* (The Freedom Fighter) newspapers, Khaled queries: 'Even if I could find an umbrella to shield me from the drizzle of desire, where could I get a face mask to keep out seduction's pungent's perfume?'[448] Looking for an umbrella and a face mask to shield him, Khaled confirms his imagi/nations of women are but 'masks in the carnival of life'.

Conclusion

Against the gendered-ness of masculinist na(rra)tions, the novel restor(y)es, thus, Algeria's literary imagi/nations. In its adoption of the 'game of masks in the carnival of life', it signals the discontent with the postcolonial condition, which (en)gendered but unhomely, damaged, segregating and carnival-like nations. The carnivalesque and the masquerade, highlighting contradictions inherent to postcolonial and nationalist discourses of what it means to be masculine or *mask*uline, home or away, a territorialized or a de-territorialized nation, a homeland or a hostland, among others, further subverted all claims to truth and reality, which were but slippery concepts. In so doing, and in its attempt at restor(y)ing Algeria, the novel seems, thus, to assert that no story attempts to put forth a fixed imagined community, but to suggest its very indeterminacy against all dominant and established

[448] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust,* p. 290.

discourses. This very restor(y)ing will be pushed further in the last novel, *Al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (Black Suits You), which weaves more versions of the (re)imagined community into the national fabric. Versions which are, indeed, inflected by the new ambient shaping forces of the rise of the digital frontier and the Arab spring, among others, making of Algeria, thus, a nation beyond itself, a nation that is constantly being imagined and re-imagined.

Chapter Five: *'Marwana… is not on the map of the Algerian cities'*: Remapping the Postcolonial Algerian na(rra)tion in *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (Black Suits You).

Introduction

This chapter will analyse *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (Black Suits You), the fourth and last novel by Ahlam Mosteghanemi which weaves more versions of the (re)imagined community into the Algerian na(rra)tion. Between the very first novel, *The Bridges of Constantine* (1993) and *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (2012), and with the changing world of transportation, media, communication, digitalisation and the wave of political uprisings in Algeria and the Arab world at large, to name but five, postcolonial Algeria underwent a plethora of changes in the socio-political, economic and cultural fabrics. It became a nation beyond itself, a nation that is constantly being redefined.

A sequel to the trilogy of *The Bridges of Constantine, Chaos of the Senses* and *The Dust of Promises*, the novel testifies to these very forces that caused the definitions of the nation to change and/or fail in the 21st century. Counter-narrated as a-territorialized in the previous novel, *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* further re-territorializes the nation to create a nation of a woman's own. The chapter will, thus, show how the studied novel sets the nation in motion as a new tool of discursive resistance against old questions of nation and narration. In so doing, it emphasizes fissures in all taken for granted boundaries between nations, narrations, class and gender definitions, reducing them to fragile fault-lines that can be contested.

The chapter will draw on the performative potential of reterritorialization to show how all maps, previously fixed, totalized and naturalized, can in fact be reconceptualised as heterogeneous, shifting and cross-cultural. It will first show how, in its focus on Marwana as a marginal city and/or a site of cultural heterogeneity within Algeria, the novel lays bare homogenous cartographies of Algeria from within. It will then move to show how today's

maps are being further challenged from outside by ceaseless migration flows and constant social acceleration, substituting national cartographies for choreographies, and national roots of identity for transnational routes. The section will then show how the *ḥarrāga* (illegal immigrants), offshoots of a nation in a constant state of remapping, are exerting more pressure on the closed, bounded imagi/nation.

It will then engage with the ways in which the traditional model of the nuclear family, marked by dichotomous, exclusive spaces of men breadwinners and women home-makers, which constitutes the linchpin of the Arab state(s), is being vigorously blurred and how this very shift is posing threats to the traditional definitions of masculinity. It will then show how this very materialist approach to gender redresses a bias in literature towards Arab women which attributes their status to religious texts, thereby subverting the so-called gendered orientalism. The section will then move to show how the novel resumes the restor(y)ing of the literary na(rra)tion, which, failing to cope with modernity, relegated the image of the modern woman to the margin of the nation.[449] In opposition to such exclusions, the section will conclude by showing how the novel, with its definition of Marwana as a feminine space and its focus on the Aurés mountains, the site where the first shot of the Algerian liberation war was fired, remaps an alternative cartography of the Algerian nation in the feminine.

1. From Mapping to Remapping?

The restor(y)ing of the Algerian imagi/nation continues, thus, with *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki*, a novel which narrates a failed love story between Hala al-Wafi, a young Algerian

[449] The modern woman, also refered to as the New Woman, was first coined by Sarah Grand in 1894 and was then imported to the Arab World by Qasim Amin in 1899/1900. It refers to new a mode of being for women as an offshoot of modernity. See: Fakhri Hagghani, 'The "New Woman" of the Interwar Period: Performance, Identity, and Performative Act of Everyday Life in Egypt and Iran', *Al-Raida Journal* (2008), 32-41.

singer, and Talal, an older Lebanese self-made entrepreneur who fell in love with her upon seeing her on a television show. Born in Algeria to an Algerian, Berber father and an Arab, Syrian mother and upon the assassination of both her father and brother amidst the Black Decade of the 1990s, Hala left for Syria where she embarked on a singing career and became a famous *Nedjma* (Star). Having at its centre Hala who is of both Berber and Arab origins and commenting at length on her displacement and positioning in a global and/or transnational world, the novel restor(y)es the fixed, homogenous map of Algeria narrated at the official, pedagogical level both from within and outside.

Usually dismissed in the Algerian media as a non-Algerian story due to its hybridity, the novel tells, however, a complex version of nationalism, a version which is not reduced to a monolithic narration of authenticity, but which attests to the nation's different, resilient and ever-changing heritage. This version is sketched through the story of a Berber family that comes to epitomise a newly dispossessed section of *ḍaḥāyā al-irhāb* (victims of terrorism) in post Black Decade Algeria. Unable to both reconcile memory and assent to Bouteflika's policy of general amnesty, they quit Algeria for Syria where they started anew and became, thus, not just of mixed, but also of uprooted stems, representing a rhizomatic nation, a nation which, very much like a rhizome, resists fixity by growing anywhere upon uprooting, as will be discussed below.

Unlike the rooted, hierarchical and tree-like nation narrated at the official discourse of Algeria as Arab, Muslim and territorial, the rhizomatic nation narrated at the performative level of the novel is a-territorial, a-hierarchical and irreducible to any structure. In the context of Algeria, this very perception of nation can be conceived of as an offshoot of internal heterogeneity, of people's uprooting/migration, the rise of global and/or transnational media in Algeria, the rise of the digital age, the free-flowing of information, the compression of space and the transcendence of distances, among others. Thus, already marked by internal

differences as epitomised by the Berber family of al-Wafi, these factors further altered the face of Algeria, causing more fractures to the essentialised map narrated at the pedagogical level of the nation.

Both the product of, and in engagement with, the aforementioned forces, the novel narrates, thus, the story of an Algeria beyond itself. At its very centre are spatial, hybrid tropes which set the tone for the narration of a nation in motion before even the first chapter begins. The chapters, for instance, are entitled as *al-ḥaraka al-ūlā* (The first movement), *al-ḥaraka al-thāniya* (The second movement)…The events elastically shift from Algeria to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, France, Brazil and Italy…The characters have transnational-based businesses, are constantly travelling for work, for family visits and holidays. Immigrants and *ḥarrāga*, themselves epitomes of the rhizomatic nation, are portrayed as ceaselessly marking new territories of belonging on lands afar. In these very new territories, they are constantly performing their Algerian-ness, coming in contact with other cultures and, in the process, drawing new contours of identity.

In this vein, mapping was markedly implicated in the colonial/imperial history, as best argued by Brian Harley: 'as much as guns and warships, maps have been the weapons of imperialism.'[450] Historically speaking, ever since 1648's peace of Westphalia ended the feudal hierarchical system of authority and substituted it for territorial sovereignty and it substituted the church's power for the state's, the territorial state became the most quintessential model in political organisation. Subsequently exported to the rest of the world between the 15th and 20th centuries through colonial expansions and their staging of spheres of influence, the world started to be divided into geographical, territorial units.[451]

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[450] J. Brian Harley, 'Maps, knowledge, and power', in *Geographic Thought: a Praxis Perspective*, ed. by George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 129.

[451] For a detailed background on the issue, see: Jeremy Larkins, *From Hierarchy to Anarchy: Territory and Politics before Westphalia* (London: Palgrave, 2010).

With the later emergence of nationalism and upon independence, most states took over these arbitrarily mapped territories, given the need to both imagine and cultivate an enveloping image of the nation-state model. In its adoption of the map to reinforce an essentialist view of the world, to reify differences within mapped territories and to falsely set the national space as closed, nationalism proved to proceed along similar lines to colonialism and provided a take-over rather than a rupture with the colonial spectre. Maps are, thus, a construct, serving to exert power and control over space. They operate as vessels of power structures. They are 'auxiliaries of modern historiography […] they have become […] techniques by which states operate to substantiate themselves'.[452]

It is no surprise, therefore, that postcolonialism draws on the performative potential of remapping to contest all hegemonic discourses, whether colonialist or nationalist. The engagement with, and the creation of, revised maps serve to resist the spectre of (post)colonial cartographic representation and signal, as best argued by Huggan 'a paradoxical alliance between internationalist and regionalist camps where the spaces occupied by the "international", like those by "the regional" do not so much forge new definitions as denote the semantic slippage between prescribed definitions of place'.[453] It is, thus, this very slippage in Algeria's official map that will be highlighted in this chapter to show how, while a tool of domination, the map can also become one of resistance and subversion.

2. '*It is both small and invisible*': On the Margins of the Nation and the Remapping of Algeria from within

[452] Abdelmajid Hannoum, 'The Historiographic State: How Algeria once Became French', *History and Anthropology,* 19.2 (2008), 91-114, p. 108.

[453] Graham Huggan, 'Decolonizing the Map: Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism and the Cartographic Connection', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature,* 20.4 (1989), 115-131(p. 124).

The slippage of the national map begins, thus, with the story of the remote, marginal city of Marwana, which is situated in one of the North-eastern villages of the rocky highlands of the Aurés. With the massif at the centre of the na(rra)tion, the novel delves into the life of the *Chaouias* living in the mountains, with men in their long flowing burnouse and flutes chanting *qasba* songs and women with their peculiar agricultural rituals, tribes and rites, epitomising, thus, a site of difference par excellence. The *Chaouias* are in fact the second largest group of the Berber population, which also comprises the *Kabyles*, the *Mzabites*, the *Chenoua* and the *Tuaregs*, a group whose existence has long been obscured in Algeria's official national narratives. Although Algeria as a nation clearly is markedly diverse due to its cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic makeup, often it has been presented as seemingly holistic, fixed and homogenous. It is narrated monolithically as Arab and Muslim, as founded on the *mujahidin* and the martyrs, a narrative which alienated the Berbers, Christians, Jews, women and youth altogether from the national map. Defined as such, differences were essentially reduced to mere relics of the past that are anything but signifiers of identity.

This very genealogy of Algeria's map finds roots in the French colonial history in Algeria and its mapping and manipulating of space, culture, ethnicities, religions and differences at large. Historically speaking, and upon landing on the Sidi Ferruch shore on the 14th of June 1830, the French embarked on discovering, advancing into and annexing the territory, an advancement that was coupled with the large-scale processes of settlements and the appropriation of land.[454] Mapping the space was, however, just one strategy of colonial

[454] For a detailed background on the genealogy of the Algerian map, see: Zahia Rahmani, Jean-Yves Sarazin, *Made in Algeria: Généalogie d'un Térritoire* [Made in Algeria: The Genealogy of a Territory] (Vanves: Hazan, 2016).

rule. As best argued by Cohn, 'the establishment and maintenance of these (colonial) nation-states depended upon determining, codifying, and representing the past'.[455]

Parallel to these practices of expansion and settlement was, thus, a decades-long ethnographical manipulation of the past, best epitomised in the narration of a divided Algeria between the Berbers and the Arabs who emerged as acutely discordant in the French imagi/nation. This antagonism was, according to the French narration, manifest from their very early encounter as illustrated so well by the episode of *al-Kāhina* (the priestess), the woman leader who led the Berber resistance and fight against the Arabs, who captured the French imagination and who was appropriated to suit their ends.

According to the French story, Berbers and Arabs were mainly unharmonious given their differences. Algeria, as narrated in the French imagination, was from the very onset divided between violent, ruthless and fanatical Arab Muslims who descended from Islamic conquests of the 8th century CE, and good, blond-haired, blue-eyed Berbers who were Iberians and Celts, that is of European origins. Referred to as a 'divide and rule policy', such narrative, while it defined Algeria as a European territory and justified, accordingly, French colonization, created a breach between, and a lasting reification of, Arab and Berber essences, each at the opposite end of the spectrum from one another which had lasting effects on the trajectory of Algeria's founding narrative.[456]

As previously argued by Fanon, postcolonial stories tend to counter the main claims of their colonial counterparts. Accordingly, while the Berbers internalised the dichotomy, other nationalists had their narrations and policies shaped in direct response to it in what became known as the '*Vulgate*' (the Kabyle myth). Thus, the nationalist movement was from

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[455] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 3.

[456] Abdelmajid Hannoum, 'Historiography, Mythology and Memory in Modern North Africa: The Story of the Kahina', *Studia Islamica,* 85 (1997), 85-130.

its very onset marked by dichotomous narrations of the nation amongst the leadership of athe first organised anti-colonial group of Messali Hadj, known consecutively as the ENA (l'Etoile Nord Africaine: the North African Star), PPA (Parti du Peuple Algérien: The Algerian People's Party) and the MTLD (Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques: Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties) in 1925, 1937 and 1946 respectively.

While a fraction identified with the Pan-Arab ideology and narrated an imagi/nation based on Islam and affiliation to the Arab world, another faction voiced a plural, secular na(rra)tion that acknowledged the Berber/Arab dichotomy. With the domination of Messali Hadj and the persistence of the narration of Algeria as 'Arab-Muslim' throughout the anti-colonial struggle, tensions between these two factions were, thus, not defunct and resulted in the 1949 Berberist crisis and/or movement. In spite of the impossibility of an 'uncontaminated identity', and although the Berberist crisis proved early on that the Algerian nation narrated as such was but an 'impossible unity', to borrow Bhabha's formulation, it resulted paradoxically in a more than ever urgent need to cement an enveloping picture of the nation, a people-as-one narrative.[457]

With Messali's essentialist definition being taken over by the Tripoli Charter of the 1962 and all post-independence leaders, parallel oppositions were also manifest in 1962 upon independence through Krim Belkacem and consecutively in 1963 through Hocine Ait Ahmed and his Front des Forces Socialistes (Socialist Forces Front) that resisted the carried monolithism. In this context, it is no surprise that the Berber resistance persisted by the 1990s, following the democratization of politics, resulting in 2001's 'Black Spring'. This resistance also appeared at the performative level of the narration, where the Berber consciousness was strongly manifest in writings of Nabil Farés, Kateb Yacine, Mouloud

[457] Bhabha, *Nation and Narration,* p. 1.

Feraoun… and in pop culture like Lounes Matoub and his famous song 'Assagui Ligh' (today I am).[458] In divesting differences in favour of homogeneity, the postcolonial national map proved, hence, to 'resemble colonial discourse as a narrative in which the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognized totality'.[459]

Claimimg to be of coherent origins, the problem with the national map becomes, thus, not with other nations but within the nation itself, as asserted by Homi Bhabha: 'The problem is not simply the selfhood of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population'. Bhabha further remarks that, 'once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its 'difference' is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within,' the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people'. It becomes, rather, 'a question of the otherness of the people-as-one', as he further writes.[460]

However, and as suggested by Brand, 'because they are not organic systems, ideologies (which underpin national narratives) are innately flexible and hence can and do change'.[461] Following decades of denial and resistance, of storying and counter-storying, and under the presidency of Abdelalziz Bouteflika, Algeria started to reconcile and ease its attitude towards the Berber question. While in 2002 the Berber language was acknowledged as a national language, more attempts at assimilation were enacted following the 2011's Arab Spring and the wave of uprisings in the Arab region. In one of his speeches, Bouteflika

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[458] See: Fazia Aïtel, *We are Imazighen: The Development of Algerian Berber Identity in Twentieth-century Literature and Culture* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2014).

[459] Huggan, p. 117.

[460] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 301.

[461] Brand, p. 19.

asserts: 'Amazighity runs in our blood. Our race is Amazigh'.[462] This reconciliation was not only enacted at the official discursive level, but also the constitutional, as manifest in the 2016's officialization of the Berber language and the establishment of *Yennayer* (the Amazigh new year day) as an official holiday in Algeria.

The nation narrated in the novel is, thus, a modern, more tolerant Algeria, an Algeria that is revising, reconciling and restor(y)ing its past. It is a modern Algeria, which, after years of disproof, is mapped through Marwana, the habitat of the *Chaoui* people, which, as tellingly narrated in the novel, is 'both small and invisible, like a musical note, it is not on the map of Algeria's cities, but on that of the solfege'.[463] It is an Algeria that is mapped through Hala, who, as further narrated in the novel, is a descendent of *al-Kāhina*, the Berber warrior queen. In so doing, it puts forth a degree of heterogeneity that challenges all previous monolithic definitions and denotes, hence, a regionalist semantic slippage in the national map and in the people as-one narrative.

But there is more to the story of defining Algeria through *al-Kāhina,* the woman who, albeit widely believed to be Berber, does in fact defy fixity and symbolise 'a myth of origin', in Hannoum's words.[464] *Al-Kāhina* can be, as argued by Hannoum: 'a Berber, an Oriental, mixed Byzantine, a Jew, a Christian, or a pagan'.[465] Far from reducing Algeria to a pure-roots narrative, the novel, thus, further complicates Algeria's genealogy by defining Hala as being of a Syrian mother. The importance of the latter lies in the fact that Syria was the cradle of the ideology of Arab nationalism, as put in the novel: 'Ever since the Emir AbdelKader, it has

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[462] Bens News, *Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 'l'Algerie n'est pas Arabe'* [*Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 'Algeria is not Arab'*], Youtube,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdR8AqFT1cw [accessed 18 April 2019].

[463] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* (Beirut: Hachette Antoine, 2012), p. 65.

[464] Hannoum, 'The Story of the Kahina', p. 127.

[465] Ibid., p. 124.

always been indwelled […] by the Algerians, they were let in with no visas'.[466] With references to Syria, which symbolises the birth of Arab nationalism and the figure of Emir Abdelkader who symbolises the birth of anti-colonial nationalism in Algeria, the novel seems to draw on the seeds of Algerian nationalism to denounce its detours in postcoloniality.

Historically speaking, the rise of Pan-Arabism, a belief in the cultural and political unity of the Arab world, emerged in the Arab East- in Syria more specifically- by the mid-nineteenth century as a reaction to the growing dissatisfaction with Ottomanism in the area. It resulted in the overthrow of the Ottomans following the so-called Arab revolt by the end of the First World War and the establishment of Emir Faisal Ibn Al-Husayn's first Arab Kingdom in Syria. The ideology was gaining momentum by the 1950s, following the Egyptian president Gamal Abd-el-Nasser, known as the prophet of Arab Nationalism, and his relentless efforts at putting the ideology into practice, culminating in the 1958's fusion of Syria and Egypt as the UAR (United Arab Republic).

Although Algerian nationalism was from the very onset influenced by the ideology, the identification reached a peak with this Nasserism of the 1950's when Ben Bella himself, FLN leader and later the first Algerian president, referred to Nasser before the declaration of the liberation war. By the closing years of the war, Algeria aimed to increase the political unity of the Arab world. After the 1967 defeat of the Arab armies in the Six-Days war against Israel, the ideology was aborted and state-nationalism(s) in Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia and Algeria…triumphed over Pan-Arabism. With the Arab-states giving precedence to their national interests, Arab-nationalism became a shadow of its former self, and the ideology which originally championed the unity of all Arab states under one single polity and flag was substituted for a mere solidarity and rhetoric of identification.

[466] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad,* p. 194.

Thus, while in the very ancient times, and as we learnt from Ibn Khaldun's writings, the Arab world was marked with 'no opposition between Arabs and Berbers;…no divided "race"; rather […] Berber tribes, Arab tribes, Arabized Berbers, and Berberized Arabs' and that it was 'a world where a family from Southern Arabia could move to Spain, and after six centuries return nearer to its place of origin and still find itself in familiar surroundings', to borrow Hannoum's formulation, most Arab states replicated and inherited territorial divisions in their entity.[467] In her interview on France 24 Arabic, Mosteghanemi states:

> I was born in a very politicised house [...] my father was an activist […] and [...] belonged to a generation that was highly influenced with Arab-Nationalism which was subsequently the ideology that he wanted to put into practice after Algeria`s independence and which was also the ideology I was raised on.[468]

This very stance is also maintained in her autobiography *Shahiyyan Kafirāq* (As Lovely as Farewell). The farewell is in fact the farewell of Pan-Arabism, as stated by the author: 'Today, no one will consolidate our dream in unity; for they got every single nation of ours divided'.[469] The author laments, thus, the end of Arab-Nationalism and its substitution for state-nationalism(s) throughout the Arab World.

The novel denounces, thus, the official map which deviated from its original path and replicated the colonial mechanisms of centralization, exclusion and division. Against the official map's definition as purely Arab, the novel restor(y)es the national space as being the offshoot of Berber-Arab encounters and of the history of affiliation to Arabness. While the former definition is absolute and essentialist, the latter is emergent and resilient.

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[467] Hannoum, 'The Historiographic State', p. 96.

[468] Qābil Linniqāsh maʾa Nawfar Rammoul [Open to Debate with Nawfar Rammoul], Qābil Linniqāsh, Hiwār maʿa al-Kātibah Aḥlām Mustaghānmī [Open to Debate, a Conversation with the Writer Ahlam Mosteghanemi], Youtube, 27 October, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4wJ2VCGfEU [accessed 24 April 2019].

[469] Mosteghanemi, *Shahiyyan*, p. 10.

The slippage becomes, thus, not just in the people-as-one narrative that denies heterogeneity, but also in the essentialist and absolute image that relies upon roots instead of routes.

3. From National Cartography to Transnational Choreography: Remapping the Nation from Outside

Testifying to the slippage in Algeria's essentialist national map from within, the novel further attests to the challenges causing fractures to Algeria's texture from outside in today's global and/or transnational world. Starting from marginal Marwana to voice Algeria's heterogeneity, the novel proceeds to postulate its elasticity. Leaving Algeria, and although displaced and scattered, Hala and her family are readily reachable and available. They are maintaining contact not just with Algeria, but with numerous places at a time in a highly interlinked world by means of a diversified range of sociality like phones, television, internet and instant messaging. Hala's mother, for instance, is able to maintain transnational connectivities through television channels, watching different news coverage of the war in Lebanon and Iraq, among so many others. The protagonist Talal is himself a Lebanese self-made entrepreneur who became rich in Rio de Janeiro and who maintains business connections in more than one nation –in France, Lebanon and Brazil- among others. In spite of the long distance between them, Talal places a telephone call to send flowers to Hala via a worldwide flower delivery service after seeing her again on a magazine page, where he learnt that she is named Hala, that she is a singer and that she is heading to Beirut to promote her debut album.

While the author has previously taken the issue of diaspora and migration as the major factors causing such post-national understandings of the nations, in this novel, she focuses more on the issue of globalisation and the rise of the new media in Algeria and the Arab

world at large. While prior to the 1990s mass media in Algeria was under the tight control of the government with the ENTV being the one and only broadcasting channel, the twentieth century saw the proliferation of new satellite channels, the liberalization of politics and of the media sector.[470] This 'allowed transnational media corporations to gain access to the Maghreb's airwaves', and, accordingly, Algeria became open to the world and, more importantly, to the Arab world and had access to a number of channels like Aljazeera and MBC, which favoured transnational politics.[471] Subsequently, local issues became, and as asserted by Lynch 'reframed—cast in terms of a wider grand narrative'.[472] The impact of the latter is that it 'deterritorializes political discourse and places it within a shared transnational symbolic space [...] promoting transnational, rather than state-centric, political identities'.[473]

While Pan-Arabism was, as argued by Adeed DaWisha, frivolous without its ultimate goal of Arab unity, and while it was long cut off in most Arab-states' discourses, the rise of the new media revived a long buried ideology and fostered a sense of unity, solidarity and identification in the Arab region.[474] More importantly, while the Pan-Arabism of official na(rra)tions envisioned a holistic image of the area based on common language and culture, the new media enabled the opening of Algeria and the Arab world beyond themselves, displaying and simultaneously accustoming their many differences which remained for decades contained in official narrations and within borders, mainly at the level of dialects.

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[470] Ratiba Hadj Moussa, 'New Media, Community and Politics in Algeria', *Media, Culture & Society,* 25.4 (2003), 451-468 (p. 451).

[471] Philip Dine, 'Sport in Algeria: From National Self-assertion to Anti-state Contestation', in *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism, 1988-2013*, ed. by Patrick Crowley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), (p. 215).

[472] De Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 35.

[473] Erik C. Nisbet and Teresa A. Myers, 'Challenging the State: Transnational TV and Political Identity in the Middle East', *Political Communication*, 27(4) (2010), 347-366 (p. 352).

[474] Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair-New Edition with a New Chapter on the Twenty First Century Arab world* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 12.

Thus, while the trilogy, with its comments on the war in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon… has previously drawn on the dream of Pan-Arabism, in this novel the different cultures of the different peoples of the region are performed, with differences in their dialects being perceivable, readable and homely to most, if not all, readers. With the inclusion of the different dialects from the Arab World, Mosteghanemi showed, thus, how Arabic language, emerging from the colonial history as archaic and from the anti-colonial, nationalist and FIS narrations as consecrated, is, rather, changing, desacralised, resilient and capable of narrating Algeria, its past, present and future.

Corroborating Calvin's argument on the importance of transnationalism, Patrick Crowley asserted that a transnational perspective on Algeria helps 'to rethink the nation as a bounded entity and to break free from dominant national paradigms while not neglecting the vertical importance of a nation's history'.[475] Thus, although the novel has Algeria at its centre, it simultaneously draws on the transnational perspective to Algeria as posited in the 21st century, as being in a constant state of flux, open, dynamic, in ceaseless contact with other cultures, as ever-changing and ever drawing new contours of identity. While transnationalism was in and of itself an offshoot of globalisation and although the two are usually used interchangeably, the transnational model was more welcome in theorisations on globalisation which was condemned as homogenising. While globalisation is seen to be 'posited as a homogenous entity with […] a centrifugal point pulling everything towards

[475] *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism, 1988-2013*, ed. by Patrick Crowley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 2.

it',[476] transnationalism is, however, 'less scripted and more scattered' and favours, rather, lateral and non-hierarchical worlds, inter rather than over or across.[477]

This very 'inter' world of the novel is not just manifest in the elasticity enabled by the different media and the different means of sociality, but also in the events' locations which flexibly shift from Asia to Europe, from Europe to Africa and from Africa to Asia...As mentioned earlier, the novel opens with Talal seeing Hala on television while preparing for his trip to Paris. As the narration progresses, we learn that Talal and Hala are in Cairo, Egypt, where Hala is having a concert and where they are later having dinner and a first chat on the Nile River. They are later in Beirut, Lebanon for the release of her album, and just shortly in France having intimate dinner in a restaurant overlooking the Seine and then in Vienna, with Hala catching a last-minute flight just to join Talal for dinner…

This trans-national dynamism resembles to what Deleuze and Guattari famously called a rhizome. Writing against all systems of cartographies, hierarchies and roots, they influentially wrote:

> We are tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They have made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes.[478]

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[476] *Transnationalism and Resistance: Experience and Experiment in Women's Writing*, ed. by Adele Parker and Stephenie Young (New York: Rodopi, 2013), p. 3.

[477] Marga Munkelt and others, 'Introduction: Directions of Translocation-Towards a Critical Spatial Thinking in Postcolonial Studies', in *Postcolonial Translocations: Cultural Representation and Critical Spatial Thinking*, ed. by Marga Munkelt and others (New York: Rodopi, 2013), p. 29.

[478] Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998), p. 15.

With a logic of multiplicity, they wrote, thus, in favour of thinking rhizomatically. In biological terms, a rhizome is a type of a root that grows under the soil in a lateral way without a centre, and if uprooted, is capable to begin again and to produce new root systems.

Accordingly, they favoured a rhizome-like map that is 'open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification'. It is a map that 'can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, re-worked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on the wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or a meditation'.[479]A rhizomatic map is, thus, unlike the rooted, tree-like national map, a-hierarchical, a-centred and fluid. It is unlike the closed, excluding and constraining national map, open, inclusive and liberating.

Commenting on the map of migration, Van Houtum queried: 'How justice can be done to visual representation in the mapping of the bordering of migration?'[480]According to him, the static map of migration imagined as a territorial container crisscrossed with thick, linear and straight arrows and lines supposed to indicate the routes of migrants is inaccurate as 'it excludes the moving and mobile people inside what is imagined to be a fixed and static state-container'.[481] Corroborating Deleuze and Guattari's model, he argued that the map of migration should be of a zigzag, rhizome nature that enacts choreography of space instead of cartography. As he writes:

> We can do without such territorial mapping of people in this time and age. A […] ground-politics is expressed in the question typically asked when meeting another for the first time: Where are you *from*? Perhaps, following the logic of zigzagging and endless becoming, the emphasis should not be on the where and the belonging, which involves a fixation with mapping the other, but on the coming to be and the

[479] Ibid., p. 12.

[480] Henk Van Houtum, 'Remapping Borders', in *A Companion to Border Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Wilson, Hastings Donnan (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 405.

[481] Ibid., p. 408.

> longing to be: where are you coming from? In other words, the focus should not be on the *roots*, but the *routes* of migrants.[482]

Following the footsteps of Talal and Hala between Africa, Asia and Europe, along with the map they created in process, the novel draws, thus, a rhizomatic map enacted by routes instead of roots, and creates a choreography of space rather than a cartography. It creates a zigzag map that is markedly at odds with the fixed official map drawn at the official level of the nation and, in so doing, further attests to its internationalist slippage.

Thus, although the author has previously deterritorialized the nation, redefining it rather as both a-territorial and ideational, as seen in the previous novel, in this novel she moves from map-breaking to map-making. As suggested by Huggan, 'the range of geographical locations […] suggests a desire […] not only to deterritorialize, but also to reterritorialize (the) increasingly multiform cultures'.[483] The importance of the shift from map-breaking to map-making lies in the fact that it creates something new and operates as 'a locus of productive dissimilarity'.[484] It is this very dissimilarity which allows a room for subversion, resistance and intervention.

Central to the rhizomatic nation is not just the idea of motion, but also of regeneration.[485] While the tree-like, rooted nation risks utter breakdown and destruction upon uprooting, the rhizomatic nation is of a renewable structure. Tellingly, in its chronicling of post Black Decade Algeria, the novel testifies to the rise of a new dispossessed group of *ḍaḥāyā al-ʾirhāb,* epitomised by Hala and her mother. Losing both her husband and son to terrorism, Hala's mother fled to Syria for her inability to live in harmony with her Islamist neighbour, who killed her two family members and who managed to benefit from

[482] Ibid., p. 408.

[483] Huggan, p. 124.

[484] Ibid., p. 124.

[485] Deleuze, p.10.

Bouteflika's amnesty law. In spite of the amnesty measures, Hala's mother is, however, 'unready for forgiveness […] she refused to accept the blood money the government paid to the victims of terrorism. How can she possibly accept money for crimes, which, according to the civil concord law, did not happen'.[486] By showing the absurdity of having to live together with ex-Islamist militants, the novel denounces, thus, Bouteflika's measures to end the Black Decade as inadequate.

Although the measures, which encompassed amnesty for the repentants and blood-money payments for the victims, were initially only sanctioned to those Islamists not guilty of rape, murder or terrorism, they ended up being applicable to all repentants. Although granted peace and ended a decade of blood, slaughters and murders, the measures have, however, sacrificed justice and left so many blank pages in Algeria's history. As further stated by the novel: 'Added to the absurdity of the crime, the nation asks now for that of forgiveness. And after the duty-to-remember, now we are faced with the need-to-forget because this time, the murderer is Algerian and not French'.[487] Unable to reconcile memory, the family left Algeria for Syria, where Hala pursued a singing career and where they managed to start anew. They became, thus, epitomes of the rhizomatic nation that grows again beyond borders.

The rhizomatic nation is, thus, unrooted and in a constant state of flowing. This very flowing is also exemplified by Algeria's youthful population, which, unceasingly pressing for recognition and change by (illegal) immigration, is exerting more pressure on the idea of the nation as a container. In this vein, 1980s Algeria was characterised by a markedly high birth rate, which resulted in a population of youth of which a high of 60% were under the age of

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[486] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad,* p. 194.

[487] Ibid., p. 194.

20.[488] Narrated as founded on, the *mujahidin* and the martyrs, the younger generation was, however, both alienated by, and insensitive to, the narrative. This alienation was further nurtured by the decline in oil revenues and the ensuing economic crisis which left large segments of the youngsters, although educated, with no job prospects, high unemployment rates, low wages and endless impasses.

The result was, thus, a dispossessed youthful population of Islamists, *ḥīṭīst* (wall-leaners), or *ḥarrāga,* voiced in the novel through figures of Hala's brother Ala, their neighbours Amar and Nadir, who are all trapped in a series of dead ends. Ala, for instance, was easily seduced by his jobless Islamist neighbor Amar and was later killed at his hands. The Islamists, as argued by Roberts, 'have found support […] among frustrated urban youth since the early 1980s. Their success in capturing the political reflexes of urban youth has enabled them to win the support of the urban poor in general'.[489] Along similar lines, Willis argued that it was not surprising that 'the majority of those who came out onto the streets in October 1988 came from the vast and growing pool of idle and discontented youth'.[490]

Nadir, on his turn, was no better as he died as a *ḥarrāg*. In a telling conversation with Ala, they state:

- What led you to the mountains man!
- I don't know what was wrong with me I was bored!
- If you really are bored then cross the sea…at least you might get to paradise, live in France or Spain and eat *la paella* on a daily basis bro!
- You will be eaten by fish before you get to eat *la paella* I swear!

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[488] Michael Willis, *The Islamist Challenge in Algeria: A Political History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 109.

[489] Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria, 1988-2002: Studies in a Broken Polity* (New York: Verso, 2003), p. 128.

[490] Willis, p. 109.

- I'd rather be eaten by fish than worms.[491]

Nadir, planning to go as *ḥarrāg*, prefers, thus, be eaten by fish rather than worms. This expression was, and is still to date, prevalent in Algeria and it emphasizes the fact that these youngsters prefer to die trying to leave rather than staying in Algeria. He is, as stated by the novel: 'not scared of the sea. He trusts it more than the homeland he is leaving behind'.[492] Dispossessed and alienated from the nation, these youngsters took refuge in illegal immigration and challenged the idea of the nation as a closed container.

With Algeria's crises of the Black Decade, Islamism and the *ḥarrāga,* the novel engages in a remapping of the Arab Spring of 2010. As narrated in the novel: 'before the phenomenon of self-immolation, we had experienced that of drowning […] despair has tailored […] modern coffins, made of the cloth of illusions'.[493] Setting the issue of illegal immigration as a forerunner to that of self-immolation, which hints at 2010s Arab uprisings, the author seems to draw parallel lines between Algeria's crisis of the 1990s and that of the Arab spring. This is so much so because a number of similarities can be drawn between the two events and mainly between those illegal immigrants escaping the 1990s economic crisis and those self-immolated protesters grieving the 2010s deteriorated conditions. While the unrest in Algeria started with the 1980s economic crisis following the decline in oil revenues, the Arab spring was later ignited with Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor setting himself on fire when the police impounded the merchandise he made a wage from. Having economic underpinnings at their hearts, the uprisings in Algeria or the Arab World echoed the oppression most citizens in most Arab states have been experiencing.

[491] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad,* p. 93.

[492] Ibid., p. 194.

[493] Ibid., p. 233.

Not only does the novel set Algeria's *ḥarrāga* of the 1990s as forerunners to the Arab World's self-immolators of 2010, but also narrates the 1982 Hama and 1997 Ben Talha massacres in Syria and Algeria, respectively, as precedents to the Arab spring. As regards Hama's, the novel states that:

> Her mother lived the same tragedy in 1982 when her […] father was slaughtered […] He was laying amidst a pool of blood, with […] his beard drenched with his blood. His beard was his only suspect as the army entered Hama to cleanse it from the Islamists and ended up wiping the city from existence.[494]

Very much like Ben Talha's, Hama's massacre implemented fear that delegitimized the Islamists in Syria and empowered the existing, ruling regimes, a mechanic that was also manifest later in a number of massacres in the Arab uprisings, which remaps the history of the Arab Spring and reveals long episodes of subordination in the Arab nation.

1. '*Marwana is a feminine name*': A Map of a Woman's Own

However, this becoming, or this animating force of the rhizome, was especially commensurate with women, along with their struggle for the crossing of the traditional and gendered expressions, for their seeking alternative, more inclusive nations that transcend the boundaries framing the limits of their freedom, and more importantly, for their articulating of a feminist cartography that challenges all constraining patriarchal spaces. Very much like Berbers and youth and as seen throughout the previous chapters, women have long been exerting pressure on their apostrophising in the national imaginary, both at the pedagogical and performative levels of the nation's narration.

In this vein, the 21st century testified to a (r)evolution in Arab women's role in the imagi/nation that was gaining momentum since the 1960s, with the modernisation of state systems, globalisation, infrastructural development, education and employment, among

[494] Ibid., p. 192.

others. These factors altogether resulted in the (r)evolution of/in women's status. However, in spite of the changes that are altering the text(ure) of the nation and/or the image of women in the imagi/nation in the 21st century, the nation remained entrenched in its own philosophical embarrassment and/or in the spatial polarity between public versus private, and/or in the temporal dichotomy of the past versus the present of the imagi/nation. Telling the story of this very clash between modernity and gendered traditionalism, *al-Aswad* denounces how, in spite of the changes, the polarity is not only maintained, but also made more acute and/or at odds in the 21st century.

This very clash is best manifest in the heroine Hala, a modern, independent woman singer with economic, social, political and sexual consciousness in the transnational, rhizomatic world of the 21st century, who happens, yet, to struggle with the continued gendered traditionalism of her society, very much like Ahlam/Hayat in *Chaos of the Senses*. Being of a small, conservative village where 'love is an act of sinfulness' and nearing her 27th birthday, *al-Aswad* narrates how Hala is seen by her village as a spinster and is pressurised to marry. Breaking up with her ex-fiancé Kader, she becomes subject to constant shaming and belittling from everyone in the village including her mother, who constantly blames the breakup on her: 'What issue got you to breakup with him? Do you think that men will compete to marry a woman who is working in teaching and whose father is a singer?'[495] She is also subject to strict regulations on her behaviour and sexuality, as best epitomised by the virginity rules which 'were watched out by her father, brother and a tribe of men'. Very much like Kabylia which, as we learnt from Bourdieux's writings, is a place subject to strict honour codes, the Aurés region is a tribal and a peasant sector of the Algerian society, where notions of honour are of a sacred character.

[495] Ibid., p. 22.

The choice of Marwana's village as a setting of the novel becomes, thus, significant not just for the visibility of the *Chaouias,* but also for its epitomisation of Algeria's acute tensions between notions of modernity and traditions. It epitomises Hisham Sharabi's notion of the neopatriarchal state, which happened to be a state in contradiction for its incomplete transition to modernity. According to Sharabi, modernity in the Arab world was incomplete, for it was met with patriarchy, the form of traditional society, making of the Arab state a neo-patriarchal one, neither modern nor traditional.[496] It is also an epitome of Elham Mena's notion of the Arab state as being 'a state in trap', for it chooses to adhere to a system of power that is characterized by being modern yet traditional in nature, as it disregards the ceaselessly ensuing social changes.

In this vein, the denunciation of the continuing dichotomy of values is a rampant theme in women's Francophone literary narrations. Whether in Assia Djebar's *La Soif* (The Mischief), *Les Alouettes Naïves* (The Naive Larks), in Aïcha Lemsine's *La Chrysalide: Chroniques Algériennes* (The Chrysalis: Algerian Chronicles) or in Djamila Debèche's *Aziza,* among others, the heroines, and very much like Hala, find themselves in a neither modern nor traditional world. As previously seen, while the modern, new woman emerged in Algeria as early as the 1950s, the type was either denied and reduced to a symbol as best epitomised by *Nedjma*, or voiced as sexually licentious in masculinist literature that was unable to cope with modernity and remained enmeshed in fears of change, as was replicated in Khaled's imagination of the nation and/or in his *madona* or *putana* dichotomy.

This very *madona* or *putana* dichotomy failed to cope with the imagi/nation of the modern woman mainly at the sexual level, where the modern woman equated the loose,

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[496] Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

whore of the nation. This was the case with texts like Rachid Boudjedra's *L'insolation* (The Insolation), Malek Haddad's *L`élève et la Leçon* (The Student and the Lesson) and Mouloud Feraoun's *Les Chemins qui Montent* (The Paths that Rise), among others. In the latter for instance, Dahbiya proposes to her lover Mokrane:

> I am your wife [...] I will keep no secret from you. I swear on our love […] that I will always be just for you. Come against your wife, caress me. Take me again, I ask you. Isn't it that I do not blush anymore in front of you.[497]

Femme et Écritures denounced this stereotypical treatment as both ill-considered and unreflective of the new, woman in Algeria.

However*, Femme et Écritures* was also dissatisfied with the treatment of the modern woman in literature by women writers like Assia Djebar and Djamila Debéche, among others, who, although succeeded in indexing the modern woman at the political, economic and social levels, failed to deal with the image at the sexual level and, very much like masculinist literature, portrayed women as loose, falling in the *madona* or the *putana* dichotomy.[498] The dissatisfaction was, thus, mainly with the issue of the modern woman and virginity which lies at the heart of the novel.

As denounced in *Femme et Écritures,* in Djebar's *La Soif,* for instance, Nadia thinks that being virgin 'is not serious'.[499] Similarly, in Aïcha Lemsine's *La Chrysalide*, Faiza 'transformed Fayçal's desire into an act that she herself wanted [...] Faisal gave in. Faiza took'.[500] Mosteghanemi remarked, thus, that these writers did but twist the struggle and the

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[497] Mouloud Feraoun, *Les Chemins qui Montent* [The Paths that Rise] (Seuil: Paris, 1957), p. 16.

[498] Mosteghanemi*, Femme et Écriture*, p. 183.

[499] Assia Djebar, *La Soif* [The Mischief] (Paris: R. Julliard, 1957), p. 50.

[500] Aïcha Lemsine, *La Chrysalide: Chroniques Algériennes* [The Chrysalis] (Paris: Des Femmes, 1976)

image of this woman, oftentimes portrayed as 'an accomplice with the foreign woman by her social and political choices', or 'opting for the Western way of life'.[501]

Femme et Écritures continued to register that the only exception to the Algerian na(rra)tions was Abdelhamid Benhedouga's *Rīḥ al-Janūb,* which did justice to the image of the modern woman. In this novel, Nafisa was depicted as a young, modern woman who was dreaming of a man laying by her side:

> That night, Nafisa [...] felt a new sensation that she had probably experienced in the past, but it was not that exciting [...] and she [...] was in need of someone to caress her body, or a virile hand, which would go through some sensitive places.[502]

However, when the man she was dreaming of sneaked into her room driven by the same desire as hers, she screamed: 'Get out of here, criminal! Bastard'.[503] According to Mosteghanemi, Benhedouga distinguished between 'desires and reality' by not treating the problem 'the occidental or the Egyptian ways'.[504] The sexual problem, as she insisted, should be raised 'the way it genuinely appears in contemporary Algeria'. Djebar and Lemsine's treatment 'does nothing but discard the essence of the problem'.[505]

That said, the novel redresses all the above-mentioned remarks. It is, indeed, a sequel to the trilogy, which attempted to reformulate the literary na(rra)tion, mainly through Yacine's *Nedjma,* the novel that imagined the nation on the axis of women. While *The Bridges of Constantine* reconciled the intertwining of women and nation and their reduction to mere symbols of mother/lands in Khaled's narration of Algeria which replicated dominant Algerian narrations, *Chaos of the Senses* signalled *Nedjma's* passage from the invisible,

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[501] Mosteghanem*i, Femme et Écriture,* p. 225.

[502] Benhadouga, *Rīḥ al-Janūb,* p. 118.

[503] Ibid., p. 125.

[504] Mosteghanemi, *Femme et Écritures*, pp. 208-209.

[505] Ibid., p. 209.

symbolic realm of masculinist narrations to that of voice and narration through transgression. In *The Dust of Promises* and the last novel of the trilogy, she restor(y)ed *Nedjma* as Zuleikha Kateb, her real-life name, as a new cartography of identity. In its turn, *al-Aswad* restor(y)es *Nedjma* as Hala, whose name means moon's light in Arabic, a modern woman singer who is no longer a symbol but an actual *Nedjma* (star) in the transnational, rhizomatic world of the 21st century.

In this vein, the restor(y)ing of the symbolic na(rra)tion of *Nedjma* as a modern yet non-licentious woman is carried through deliberate intertextualities with *Rīḥ al-Janūb,* which, according to *Femme et Écritures*, marked an exception to the Algerian narrations as to the imagi/nation of modern women. Fascinated with her life as a new star, with the life the wealthy Talal offers her and upon their meeting in Italy, the novel narrates how Hala 'decided to hide her amazement. Only poor people get amazed. She will behave as if she were Sissi the Empress'.[506] The passage is, in fact, a porposeful replication of *Rīḥ al-Janūb*, where the heroine Nafisa, very much like Hala, born in a village and surrounded by her family's tight control and upon a simple visit to Algiers:

> She found no affinity between this […] simple life that her family and all the villagers lived, and between the hectic life of the city which she experienced during her short stay with her aunt in Algiers […] How to compare her life in the village with that of Sissi the Empress.[507]

Along lines similar to Benhedouga, the novel critiques, thus, the continuing dichotomy of values in most Arab nations.

Unlike Kateb Yacine's 1956 image of *Nedjma* where the woman was apostrophised, unheard, the object of desire and possession, in this very novel, she is the epitome of the new woman and an agent of change par excellence. She is carving out life as an independent

[506] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad,* p. 247.

[507] Benhadouga, *Rīḥ al-Janūb*, pp. 37-38.

worker and earner, present in public life and at a number of social and charity events…Sitting next to her cousin Jamal with her hair let loose, in a modern dress, high-heels and full make-up, he becomes 'confused between his cousin […] and the *Nedjma* sitting by his side in high heels'.[508]

As to her relationship with Talal and ever since he saw her on television, he was confident that Hala will be his and became so focused on 'possessing this far-away *Nedjma*'.[509] Given the *madona* or the *putana* dichotomy plaguing Arab and/or Algerian women, and upon their meeting in the hotel and learning that Hala was virgin, Talal was 'astonished for some time […] suddenly, she appeared as different and desired in her ambiguity and first hesitation'.[510] Although the novel denounces the gendered-ness of the notions of honour and virginity in Algeria and the Arab world at large, Mosteghanemi intervenes in the dominant literary narrations by restor(y)ing the image of the modern woman at the sexual level. Although enmeshed in love and desire, Hala 'has long resisted his tempting manhood. Some desires are just born to be buried'.[511] Thus, very much like Nafisa in Benhedouga's work, Hala zealously guards her virginity as she is aware that 'she will have to account for her sin alone'.[512] With Hala's replication of Nafisa's distinction between desire and reality, Hala wins the power struggle with Talal over her body, defies his expectations, and in so doing, subverts the image of the sexually licentious modern woman in Algerian narrations.

Failing to possess Hala's body, Talal further attempts to control her career. Throughout the narration, and being the underprivileged village girl, Hala's economic class

[508] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad*, p. 73.

[509] Ibid., p. 18.

[510] Ibid., p. 217.

[511] Ibid., p. 277.

[512] Ibid., p. 278.

was empowering to Talal who 'found her underprivileged status reassuring'.[513] He constantly attempts at restraining, threatening and hindering her opportunities in the pretext that it is in her best interest. Upset over Hala's refusal of his tutelage, of his provider role, Talal humiliates her by throwing money to her face. The novel, thus, puts, 'everyone she seeks refuge in attempts to possess her. Whenever she flees from one tyrant, she falls into the masked grips of another'.[514]

In this vein and while the 21st century ushered in the (r)evolution in women's roles in the imagi/nation, and as argued by Anderson, there is a marked 'asymmetry' in the speed of gender role change, as she notes: 'When one studies life-course behaviour over the past, say 50 years, one is struck by a massive gender-asymmetry: all the while that women have adopted a new life-course, men have barely changed at all'. One can, thus, notice, as she adds: 'a masculinisation of female biographies, in terms of educational attainment, postponed marriage and family formation and lifelong attachment to employment'.[515] This asymmetry is posing, accordingly, threats to the family/nation structure which has experienced change, with the traditional model of the nuclear family, marked by dichotomous, exclusive spaces of men breadwinners and women homemakers, being vigorously challenged. It is posing threats to traditional definitions of masculinity and resulting in 'patriarchy in crisis'.[516]

Within the framework of the very (r)evolution, Hala is, as the novel narrates, 'a woman whose femininity lies in her masculine qualities'. She is also a woman with 'a scent of masculinity; her only fault is that she had acquired male traits […] and […] now she has

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[513] Ibid., p. 250.

[514] Ibid., p. 307.

[515] Esping Anderson, 'A Jobless and a Childless Europe', in *Women at Work: An Economic Perspective,* ed. by Tito Boeri and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 271.

[516] Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women : Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), p. 133.

forgotten how to return to her female self'.[517] The blurring of gender lines is of crucial importance for the Arab nation-state rests on this very binary. Disrupting the presumably mutually exclusive binaries, the novel calls into question all boundary lines between nations, narrations, class and gender definitions, reducing them to rather fragile fault-lines that can be contested and confirming accordingly that 'every boundary line is a myth', to borrow Harris's words.[518]

Against Talal's attempts at curtailing her work and possessing first her body, Hala further controls her career when she chooses to sing in a live concert in Munich with a bunch of international artists. Previously singing to defy the Islamists, today she is singing to defy patriarchy, the other face of terrorism. Taking off the black dress that Talal loves on her, she wears a golden dress and becomes a *Nedjma* who was 'more shining than he was'.[519] Defying his expectations, Talal: 'preferred her cheating with another man than with success. Success makes her more beautiful, puts her higher […] Today she is a free woman'.[520] The story becomes, thus, a modern rendition of Cinderella's. While for the latter the implication was that marriage was the only choice a woman had, the modern rendition stresses alternatively work and career as the most primary factors for women's empowerment in today's world.

It is worth reiterating the fact that Mosteghanemi follows a materialist approach to gender inequities in the imagined community, which helps remap a serious bias in literature on Arab women which attributes their status to religious texts, laying to rest the so-called gendered orientalism. Commenting on the *Time* magazine's cover of Bibi Aysha who had her nose mutilated by her Taliban in laws, and denouncing the sudden concern about Afghan women, Abu Lughod queried: 'Why was knowing about the culture of the region-and

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[517] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad*, pp. 84-135.

[518] Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 22.

[519] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad,* p. 110.

[520] Ibid., p. 326.

particularly its religious beliefs and treatment of women-more urgent than exploring the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the United States' role in this history?'[521] According to Abu Lughod, instead of materialist explanations, experts were being asked to give religious or cultural ones, making of Islam as the prime cause of the oppression of women in the West.[522] Although the tradition, as she continued to argue, has a long century, the media in the 21st century has made the stories believable.

Along similar lines, the novel denounces the so called gendered orientalism. Commenting on the media's interest over Hala's story upon her concert in Paris, it further states:

> The media embraced her story as she became a symbol of women`s resistance against the Islamists and […] the Arab traditions. All that was needed for her to become famous was to feminise the tragedy and have it peppered with Islam, terrorism and the Arab traditions.[523]

Chronicling at length a bunch of Arab women stories of oppression which are not a-historical nor a-political but rather deeply rooted in a given context, Abu Lughod writes: 'If we were to listen and look, we might be forced to take account of contexts that are not as disconnected from our worlds and our own lives as we think'.[524] Mosteghanemi's materialist approach throughout her four novels subverts, thus, the prevalent stereotypes on Algerian and Arab women at large, confirming they do not need saving.

That said, against the patriarchal his-tories of the nation, the novel draws on a feminist genealogy voiced by *al-Kāhina,* who, as put by Hannoum, 'although (her) ethnicity is

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[521] Leila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 31.

[522] Ibid., p. 88.

[523] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad,* p. 73.

[524] Abu-Lughod, p. 202.

unknown, one thing is sure. She is a female'.[525] Against the nation's patriarchal space, the novel feminises Algeria by its focus on Marwana which is 'a feminine name'.[526]Against the nation's monolithic narrations, the novel pluralises the nation by its focus on the different, the marginalised and the dispossessed, namely the Berbers, the youth and women. Against the backdrop of the nation's rest on the exclusive gender binaries, the novel blurs all gender lines and puts them in a constant state of flux. Against the official na(rra)tions which model identity on roots, the novel redefines it as based on routes. With its focus on the Aurés, it redraws an alternative path to the nation that is not locally embedded but rather transnationally open to the (Arab) world. Most importantly, against the static official map of Algeria, the novel draws a rhizomatic map that is of a zigzag nature, shifting away from the changeless to the always transitional, changing and indeterminate. In so doing, the novel creates a map of a woman's own that functions as a locus of difference from masculinist imagi/nations.

Conclusion

The novel sets, thus, the nation in motion as a new tool of discursive resistance against the nation and its narration(s) through remapping that allowed the author to free herself from the corset of gendered, fixed and closed narrations. With its celebration of the marginalised, the plural and the always changing, map-making allowed the contestation of all boundary lines, revealing slippages, fractures and faultlines in their fabrics. In so doing, it drew a new map that operates as a zone of slippage interrupting the dominant postcolonial na(rra)tions which were marked by episodes of exploitation and unequal power relations while skating over the essentialisation of the imagi/nation.

[525] Hannoum, 'Historiography, Mythology and Memory', p. 124.

[526] Mosteghanemi, *al-Aswad*, p. 65.

Conclusion: '*A story that was my own*': An Afterword on Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Algeria's Postcolonial Na(rra)tions as Unfinished.

This thesis started by contending that Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novels are direct restor(y)ings of Algeria's na(rra)tions both at the official and literary levels of the imagi/nation. As to the official, my research has shown that Algeria's postcolonial na(rra)tion, which was restor(y)ed against *l'Algérie Française,* was not insensitive towards the pillars around which it was imagined. Narrated as a finished imagined community at the official level, the studied novels narrated a rather 'unfinished community' that is fragile, open and yet in the making given Algeria's continued troubled relationship with its own imagi/nation.[527] Against the backdrop of Algeria's official na(rra)tion which appears at its most finished, Mosteghanemi's novels become sites of slippage that exposed the na(rra)tion as unfinished.

More importantly and of central importance to the study, the novels, which are also direct restor(y)ings of Algeria's postcolonial literature, become sites of slippage interrupting the dominant literary na(rra)tions, which were, very much like the official na(rra)tion, marked by episodes of exploitation and subordination given Algeria's thorny colonial history that resulted in a dividing cut between Francophone, liberal and Arabophone, conservative literatures. While both Francophone and Arabophone narrations manifested a retrogressive link between the idea of woman and nation, Arabophone literature emerged from the colonial history as especially cut off from, and disengaged with, the emerging nation. Confined to a bunch of works of drama, short stories, poems and biographies which bore the brunt of conservatism with writings of Salah Kherfi, Mohammed al-Akhdar Assayahi, Abdallah Rkibi and Zhor Wanisi throughout the 1950s-1960s, it was not until the 1970s that Arabic language started to be liberated with the rise of novel-writing, albeit very modestly as the genre

[527] Bensmaïa, p. 24.

continued to subordinate women, except for Abdelhamid Benhedouga whose writings managed to free both women and Arabic language from the clutches of sanctity.

With Arabophone novel-writing being a male preserve, Mosteghanemi's novels become, thus, a watershed event in the history of women's Arabophone literature, a contribution and/or a legacy that becomes even more significant given her awareness of the unevenness of, or deliberate intervention in, the field. In this very context and given the etymology of the word nation *natus* 'to be born and/or birth', Mosteghanemi's restor(y)ing(s) of the na(rra)tion(s) gave birth to an imagi/nation that functioned as a site of difference from dominant literary narrations in Algeria.

With Arabic language emerging from the colonial history as archaic and from the anti-colonial, nationalist and FIS narrations as consecrated, her arabophone narrations gave birth to a new understanding of the language that is rather decolonised, desacralized, transgressing, liberating, resilient and capable of narrating Algeria, its past, present and future. Narrating the (post)colonial history of subordi/nation along with its brunt on the emerging na(rra)tion, its men and women in Arabic becomes a landmark event in the history of women's Arabophone literature in Algeria, hitherto marked by conservatism, conformity and simplification. In so doing, Mosteghanemi repudiated the (post)colonial shackles, became an agent of change and paved the way for other Arabophone women voices to break free from the Arabophone, conformist versus Francophone, liberal dichotomies. The tactics of disruption, transgression, masquerading and remapping showed how the author attempted at producing episodes of resistance against the dominant wor(l)ds, while steering clear of substituting one narration for another.

The study started first by showing how the author adopted the technique of disruption in *The Bridges* to mark a hiatus in official and literary his-stories of the postcolonial

imagi/nation vis-a-vis women and language, the two main axes around which national identifications befell given Algeria's turbulent history in (post)coloniality. Disruption, the first paradigm of discursive resistance, engaged in the restor(y)ing of the postcolonial na(rra)tion by replicating the very terrain upon which subordination was enacted and then reconciling its very presuppositions.

As to women, the thesis showed how the novel adopted a male voice to reproduce and then disrupt the very ways in which women emerged as bridges to the postcolonial imagi/nation in Algeria. Being objects of colonial desire, they were first imagined as prostitute-like women who needed saving, an imagination which, although marred upon landing in Algeria, turned to a set of practices both reformulating and reifying the na(rra)tion. Of central importance to the chapter was the issue of organized prostitution brought about by the French. Establishing a series of brothels and prostitution houses throughout the Algerian territory while paradoxically adopting regulating measures to curb the issue in France, the colonial presence happened to both detriment and politicize women along with their bodies.

From prostitution to different other episodes of *keshf*, women emerged accordingly as objects of national desire through antithetical episodes of seclusion. From the very rise of national resistance, women were bastions of counteraction in the battle against the colonizer. Although they were at the very onset of anti-colonialist resistance part of the struggle, they were later excluded from the movement which was overtly male-dominated. In spite of their revolutionary war-efforts that culminated in the official independence in 1962, seclusion continued to haunt women, halting their progress in the imagi/nation throughout the different nation-building phases.

The seclusion reached its peak in 1964 following the institution of *Al Qiyam* (values) organization, which infringed women's rights and launched their public harassment. With the 1976 constitution having little to offer for women's narration, the promise of equality evaporated

in the ensuing decade of the 1980s when women's agency was largely circumscribed. Although it started with the 1981 official decision which compelled women to travel accompanied by a *waliy* (male guardian) and which was later nullified in response to feminist activists' protests, the repression began to cement with the introduction of the 1984 Family Code during the term of president Chadli Bendjedid who, in an attempt to appease the 1980s wave of Islamists, sacrificed women. Bearing the stain of the post/colonial his-story, they have had their symbolic roles so reified in the na(rra)tion that they emerged as de-realised, sacrosanct sites of the imagi/nation.

Named as Ahlam (dreams) in her *mujahid* father's his-story which echoes the FLN's official story, the study showed how *The Bridges* denounced the many ways in which the imagi/nation of the postcolonial na(rra)tion was from the very onset intertwined with that of gender and how women were both apostrophised and derealised in the na(rra)tion. The study proceeded to show how the heroine was similarly cast into a de-realising, objectifying mold in her lover's na(rra)tion, where she was imagined as a mother/land of Constantine. An imagi/nation that is both widespread in, and deliberately replicative of, canonical literary na(rra)tions, mainly by Kateb Yacine and Malek Haddad whose narrations stem from their real-life experiences with colonial Algeria, the study showed how the literary narration was similarly gendered, partitioned along retrogressive gender lines and as inhospitable to women as the official.

In so doing, the thesis showed how *The Bridges* testified to the many philosophical pitfalls of the postcolonial na(rra)tion as being both gendered and contradictory in nature. Being male-narrated and built upon existing patriarchies, it was further caught in a dyadic, temporal struggle between its present and past given its fervent need to give the illusion of both continuity and vertical unity against the manifest discontinuities and horizontal diversities. In so being, the na(rra)tion ironed out its dual confusion around the imagi/nation of women, who had to emerge either as a-historic, fixed mother/lands, or as bad whores of

the nation. A utopian kingdom of the imagi/nation, the mother/land becomes but a pointer to the failed attempts at bridging the past and the present of the postcolonial na(rra)tion.

In so doing, *The Bridges* established the very terrain upon which Mosteghanemi's na(rra)tions engaged in restor(y)ing the mother/land of impossible continuities. The restor(y)ing started first with a disruption that assumed the form of a reconciliation of his-story, whereby Khaled realised the tragedy of his own memory of, and his-story with, the mother/land. In so doing, Ahlam/Hayat who assumed the contours of the mother/land, very much like Kateb Yacine's heroine Nedjma or Malek Haddad's Ourida, hitherto idealised, became restor(y)ed as a 'hypocrite' father/land, 'a cure that turned fatal' and a 'myth' of the imagi/nation.[528] Previously set as a mortar that brought the imagi/nation together, she was disrupted as a fragile pillar that caused the na(rra)tion to fall apart.

As to language, the study showed how the novel chronicled the many ways in which language emerged, very much like women, as a bridge to the imagi/nation and how it proceeded to intervene and reconcile major episodes of subordination and domination in Algeria's linguistic his-story both at the pedagogical and performative levels of the na(rra)tion. Substituting Ottoman Algeria's plural tongues for a monolingual, linguistic na(rra)tion through decades-long episodes of Frenchification, Arabisation emerged, accordingly, as the kernel of anticolonial and national imagination. Starting with the first organised resistance groups of the PPA and MNA, the ENA, or the AUMA and stretching to the FLN's official narration in the 1964 Algiers Charter and all successive programs of nation-building, the postcolonial imagi/nation reified a centralized linguistic na(rra)tion of Arabic wholeness and pushed French, Berber and regional dialects to the margin.

Added to the linguistic centralism of Arabic was an ingredient of seclusion that was especially characteristic of the anti-colonial group of the AUMA, which both resisted and

[528] Mosteghanemi, *The Bridges*, pp- 210-235-135.

countered the French policies of *keshf*. A linguistic imagi/nation of seclusion that was also taken over by the nationalist movement and that served as an instrument of legitimacy for the FLN in independent Algeria, language emerged not only as the sole, official language of the narration, but also as a consecrated pillar of the imagi/nation.

Whilst the official narration was reifying a linguistic na(rra)tion of wholeness and holiness, the postcolonial na(rra)tion in Algeria was, rather, one of resilient (dis)identifications with the imagination. Supposed to be a pillar of the imagi/nation, it was, rather, and very much like women, too fragile a referent, subject to constant contestations, renegotiations and restor(y)ings. Dichotomized as an official versus a foreign language at the pedagogical level, Arabic was, however, more of 'a dream' for writers like Haddad and a language of 'deadwood' for others like Yacine, while French was an 'exile' for the former and 'a war-booty' for the latter, complicating, thereby, the national story with language.

In these con/texts, and with a parental background that resembled that of Haddad, the novel intervened by restor(y)ing French as 'a habit' and Arabic as the language of the 'heart' that is consecrated against Yacine's dominant na(rra)tions.[529] Restor(y)ing language as such, the novel further engaged in desacralizing Arabic by recuperating the mother-tongue as being the language of the *Omayma,* the mother, a site of identification that was long ousted for being mixed with French, or for being something 'intimate' spoken within the confines of the house and which has, hence, to be hidden from the Other within the framework of seclusion, just like women.[530]

With the disruption of the two pillars of the nation, women and language, there came also the disruption of the national myth of unity, coherence, continuity and closure. Reduced to a simplistic na(rra)tion of colonization, resistance and liberation at the pedagogical level of the

[529] Ibid., pp. 61- 62.

[530] Ibid., p. 210.

imagi/nation between the 1962-1988, the novel voiced a na(rra)tion where nothing was post par excellence, as quoted in the epigram of the introductory chapter. From internal divisions in the nationalist movement, to early power struggle, failed policies of nation-building and irreconcilable identifications with, and differences in, the na(rra)tion, among others, the finished imagi/nation was, thus, restor(y)ed as unfinished.

Disrupting masculinist na(rra)tions as such, the study moved to show how the author proceeded with the restor(y)ing of the imagi/nation in *Chaos of the Senses* through the paradigm of transgression, the second act of discursive resistance that gave an averse account of identification with the mother/land in her-story with the gendered na(rra)tion. The transgression assumed the form of a performative contradiction against Khaled's very imagi/nation, throwing, thereby, an element of chaos into masculinist understandings of the mother/land mainly vis-à-vis women and language.

The counter story of subjectivity started with the heroine narrating herself not as an object but a subject of her own desire. Unlike Khaled's imagi/nation of the passive, silent mother/land of *Nedjma,* Ahlam/Hayat's was essentially founded on the imagination of Scheherazade, the seeing, speaking, thinking and desiring subject who is able of self-narration. With the na(rra)tion of her desire, there came also a na(rra)tion of her free, playful body, sexuality and pleasure, hitherto suppressed in Khaled's imagi/nation. Whilst Khaled's desire was fixed in the time and space of the mother/land and was reduced to '*the economy of the same*', hers was cyclical, diffuse and resisting to closure.[531] While his pleasure was aroused by the memory of the mother/land before first sight, hers was aroused by touch which brought about a chaos of her senses. In so doing, she transgressed the very symbolic order or the law of the father, and altered its very terrain of na(rra)tion and representation.

[531] Irigaray, p. 26.

With the transgression of the symbolic order of objectification and the moving from the symbolic realm to that of narration, there came also a transgression of language or what the author called ‘a linguistic usurpation’ that resisted boundaries, hitherto unbreachable, on Arabic language. Unlike Khaled’s imagi/nation of Arabic which was, very much like his own imagi/nation of women, characterized by the sacralized as he was unable to lay bare his-story with his lover in Arabic while he used to write freely in French, hers was transgressive, daring and accommodating of sinfulness. Consecrated in his-story with the imagi/nation as being the language of the Quran, God and religion, Arabic was, rather, transgressed as the language of the body, sexuality and desire. With Khaled’s linguistic complex corresponding to a trend rampant in Algeria’s official and literary na(rrat)ions, Arabophone literature emerged as dissociated from the emerging na(rra)tion, bore the badge of conservatism and was unable to cope with the emerging nation. While by the 1970s Arabic started to be desacralized with the rise of novel writing with writings of Abdelhamid Benhedouga, Tahar Wattar and Rachid Boudjedra who started to liberate Arabic language from those very clutches, women’s Arabophone literature, best voiced by Zhor Wanisi, continued to lurk behind the emerging imagi/nation.

Crossing both cultural and geographical borders, exile was a site of empowerment for Mosteghanemi, a site which enabled transgressions, agency and resistance, unlike the case of Wanisi and other women writers who remained entrapped not only in the AUMA narration but also in the political chaos of the 1990s, the restraints placed, censorship and the state’s monitoring of free expression. In this very context, Mosteghanemi’s transgressive na(rra)tions marked, thus, a hiatus in the Arabophone, conservative and conformist versus the Francophone liberal and contestant na(rra)tion. Giving an account of a heroine who narrates her body, desire and sexuality and who stands on the the mother/land’s very edges of the forbidden in Arabic, becomes a site of slippage not just against language, but also against the dominant

imagi/nations of women in Arabophone literature that tended to portray idealist, saintly heroines who are mostly and heavily invested in moralizing lessons, given the religious frame of reference associated with Arabic.

With Ahlam/Hayat's revolutionary words, there came also an antipodal, womanly world of the mother/land, which started first and foremost with the transgression of the na(rra)tion of the mother, previously elevated to sainthood in Khaled's imagi/nation. Unlike the utopian kingdom of the impossibly idealized mother, hers was an anti-utopia of the silent, reliant and cold mother whose passive and/or tame femininity did but pay lip-service to the patriarchal wor(l)d. In so doing, she violated the mother/land's dominant position as a symbol of the quintessential imagi/nation against the modern woman, considered to be the Other of the nation. Reduced to a na(rra)tion of a mother/land and to her procreation roles in masculinist na(rra)tions, she proceeded to dissociate herself from motherhood and narrated herself as being both unconcerned about, and indifferent to, her sterility.

Identifying against the mother/land as such, she registered a relation of dissociation with all the motherly sites of tradition, mainly those of the Turkish bathhouse along with the veil which were altogether rebelled at. As to the bathhouse, the chapter showed how, unlike her mother who had it hailed as a woman's place where she can celebrate her body, meet other women and gossip away from man's gaze, it was, rather, transgressed as a space of 'the dark' for the heroine for epitomising the very structure of women' subordination.[532]

Added to the mother/land and her bathhouse, the study further showed how the heroine proceeded to transgress understandings of the veil as being a site of the mother/land. Narrating colonial episodes of *keshf* and unveiling that resulted, very much like prostitution, in the politicisation of the woman along with her body, the chapter showed how the politicisation

[532] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos,* p. 186.

exacerbated in the context of the FIS by the 1990s when *a fatwa* was issued to kill unveiled women who were understood as the Other of the nation. Masquerading in a veil to meet her lover and making a strategic use of the veil which was supposed to be a pillar of the imagi/nation of the mother/land, the study showed how *Chaos* transgressed further essentialist definitions of women as veiled/unveiled, pointing, thereby, to the perils of positing the na(rra)tion on slippery signifiers of women, their veils and bodies.

Transgressing the mother/land's sites of tradition which were pillars of Khaled's imagi/nation, the study showed, additionally, how Hayat/Ahlam trespassed his very imagi/nation of time. Unlike Khaled's imagi/nation of her which was fixed in the time of the past, hers did body-forth the nation's temporality in a feminine mode of experience. Very much like cyclical menstruations, pregnancies, fertility and menopause phases, Ahlam/Hayat's temporal imagi/nation was cyclical, shifting and resisting to closure.

Thus, while *The Bridges* reconciled and/or disrupted the official imagi/nation of coherence from 1945-1988, *Chaos* further transgressed its very foundations of women and language which were being even more fossilised by the 1990s given the FIS's more reductive imagi/nation. In so doing, it pointed to more cracks in the na(rrat)ion, which, far from being finished, proved to be rather re-imaginable.

The study moved to show how the restor(y)ing of the postcolonial imagi/nation continued with *The Dust of Promises,* which adopted carnivalism and masquerading as paradigms of discursive resistance, first by turning dominant imagi/nations upside down and then by utilising the trope of the mask and/or the masquerade to signal further instances of instability in the na(rra)tions, literary and official. As to the official na(rra)tion, the study showed first how the third novel of the trilogy forged a parallel world to denounce the postcolonial na(rra)tion, which was of a carnival attitude, marked by the reversed and the

turned-upside-down. As to Algeria, the turned-upside down was especially exacerbated by the 1990s and early 2000s, during the ten-year power struggle between the military and the Islamists, which culminated in bloody slaughters, tortures and atrocities and became infamously known as the Black Decade. The carnivalistic condition resulted in a wave of immigration to France, which manifested, however, similar carnivalistic attitudes as to its own na(rra)tion and/or imagi/nation.

Very much like the carnivalistic homeland, France was a site that did also segregate, exclude and deceive, mainly due to its own history of suppression, concealment and reconciliation vis-à-vis its narration of the Algerian colonization at large. Recuperating the Seine events of 1961, where hundreds of North Africans were thrown into the Seine as a colonial memory of violence and racism to comment on postcolonial unresolved issues of racism, im/migration, refugism and citizenship prevalent in 1990–2000 France, the study showed how France, very much like Algeria, purported marginalizations, subordinations and exclusions. Placing strict measures on immigration, refugism and asylum procedures, the study highlighted contradictions in the French na(rra)tion as to its own discourses of human rights and those of civil rights, along with its own discourses of globalization and its practices of imposing borders between people and nations. Narrating a carnival-like world where everything was born upside down, the study showed how *The Dust* subverted all of the official, established na(rra)tions, proving they were, rather, very much like the spirit of the carnival in and of itself, changing, disputable and open.

Subverting the established na(rra)tion through the carnivalesque, the study proceeded to show how the novel adopted the trope of masquerading to highlight further cracks in the na(rra)tion. Very much like a proper carnival setting where people disguise, impersonate different identities and confuse, the study showed how photography, space, language and history, among others, wore a mask that concealed. Memory in and of itself, supposedly a

pillar of the Algerian imagi/nation proved also to be malleable in nature as was best manifest in the story of the not 'sinless' freedom fighters, presented hitherto as sacred in the official na(rra)tion.[533] In so doing, the study highlighted major episodes of instability in all systems of identifications and significations, which proved they were but dissimulations. Thus, while *The Bridges* disrupted the narration of coherence and while *Chaos* transgressed its supposedly solid foundations, *The Dust* brought into narrative further moments of instability, restor(y)ing the postcolonial imagi/nation, yet again, as unfinished.

The study moved to shed light on the trope of masquerading and its relation with gender in the postcolonial imagi/nation by digging deep into Algeria's (post)colonial history, unweaving the braids of the very narrations that govern gender relations. It showed how the French presence in colonial Algeria resulted in an array of psychiatric problems for the colonized man, who was first forced into 'the age of submission' upon his loss of the exterior space to the French, his subsequent relegation to the space of the anterior and who had, as such, to venture out lowering his hood over his face in shame.

Upon their encounter, the colonized was further forced into a vexing dichotomy between a dominant, manly colonizer and a dominated, effeminate colonized who could not but lose his sense of self and become a fixed, indignant object with an overwhelming sense of interpellation and castration. In order for him to part with this very state of unwholeness, the colonized, epitomised by the narrator's father, engaged in a process of assuming the white culture through miming the colonized's model, practices, language and mainly through dominating a European woman whose love yielded a sense of both revenge and recognition.

Inheriting his father's colonial complex of castration which was further exacerbated by the postcolonial imagi/nation that was no different for being one of domination, subordination

[533] Mosteghanemi, *The Dust*, p. 158.

and dispossession and bearing the latter on his disfigured arm, the narrator became reduced to 'a human ant' and engaged, accordingly, in a process of *mask*ulinity, a process of re/covering through the objectification of women as a mask for castration.[534] Amidst the narrator's *mask*ulinity, his lover Ahlam/Hayat became reduced to an obscure object of desire, stripped of all subjectivity, voice and agency as it was his only way to feel whole. She became, also, entrapped in a series of symbols, mainly of the mother/land as epitomised best by her metamorphosis to Nedjma, the heroine of Yacine's classic of *Nedjma*. Nedjma, disrupted from the ideal mother/land to 'a myth' of the imagi/nation in *The Bridges* and transgressed as Scheherazade in *Chaos*, became further restor(y)ed not as Nedjma, but as Zuleikha Kateb, the woman whose real-life story of love, desire and dispossession with the castrated Yacine resulted in her imagi/nation as a pillar of the nation, a pillar that proved to be both slippery and fragile.

In so doing, the thesis showed how the novel restor(y)ed women's apostrophisation in the official and literary na(rra)tions, Francophone or Arabophone, to a story of (post)colonial *mask*ulinity, castration and dispossession. The na(rra)tion of subordinated masculinities becomes, in its turn, an act of restor(y)ing the dominant imagi/nations of the national combatant hero not only at the official, but also the Arabophone, literary field which, bearing the (post)colonial brunt of conservatism and influenced by the AUMA religious teachings, fell in the trap of idealising not just women but also men, failing as such to cope with the emerging masculinities in the postcolonial na(rra)tion.

The study concluded by showing how remapping was employed as a fourth strategy of discursive resistance in *al-Aswad Yalīqu Biki* by engaging in drawing different cartographies of the imagi/nation, its genealogy, narration, language and gender roles. It showed how the author

[534] Ibid., p. 37.

drew on the motif of the map in an attempt at the restor(y)ing of the fixed, closed imagi/nation both from within and outside.

It started first by showing how the novel highlighted a crack in the official cartographic imagi/nation of Algeria as homogenous by telling an account of the marginal Marwana, the habitat of the *Chaouia* who constitute the second largest group of the Berber population and whose story has long been denied in the na(rra)tion, given the French colonial policies of division and the subsequent counter nationalist practices of holism. Denied at first as such, the chapter showed how the novel further testified to Algeria's changing attitude towards, and reconciled the imagi/nation of, itself by acknowledging its Berber genealogy through the nationalization and later officialization of the Berber language in 2002 and 2016, respectively, among so many other measures of inclusion and assimilation. In its attempt at annihilating the map's rethoric of the pure origins, the novel further restor(y)ed Algeria's absolutist story of Arabness as one of affiliation and identification by drawing on episodes of Arab nationalism, its rise and failure, drawing, hence, a complex narration of nationalism that attested to the imagi/nation's rather resilient, complex map.

Subverting the map from within by shedding light on the regional, internal and absolutist cracks, the study further showed how the novel attested to the challenges causing fractures to Algeria's texture from outside in today's world as a result of both globalization and the rise of transnational media in Algeria. Telling an account of an Algeria that was not only internally heterogeneous but also in a constant state of flux, with ceaseless contacts with other nations, cultures, languages, among others, and with a spatial imagi/nation that elastically shifts from Asia to Europe, from Europe to Africa and from Africa to Asia, the chapter showed how the novel drew an alternative map to the imagi/nation that is rhizome-like: a-hierarchical, a-centred and fluid. Within the framework of this very transnational map, Arabic language, first desacralized by the insertion of the Algerian dialect, by being associated to a non-religious

framework of the body, desire and sexuality, and by the imagi/nation of non-idealist heroes and heroines in the trilogy, became further desacralized by the inclusion of a number of dialects from the Arab world.

The study proceeded to show how Algeria's container-like map was further challenged by the issue of illegal immigrants, infamously referred to as *ḥarrāga,* a group of dispossessed youth who were alienated first by Algeria's official map that was founded on the freedom fighters narration and second by the economic failures of the postcolony, where they were left with different impasses, preferring, therefore, to die trying to escape and to exert pressure on the bounded imagi/nation. The novel, as the study moved to argue, remapped the Arab spring by setting Algeria's chimera of the Black Decade and the *ḥarrāga* escaping the 1990s economic crisis as a forerunner to the Arab spring and its self-immolators who were grieving the 2010s deteriorated conditions, revealing as such long histories of subordination in the Arab na(rra)tion.

The study moved to show how the novel remapped the nation in the feminine first by drawing on the feminist figure of *al-Kāhina* as an alternative genealogy to the imagi/nation and then by blurring all gender lines and setting them as contestable. Usually reduced to a dichotomous, exclusive imagi/nation of male breadwinners and female homeworkers, the novel narrated, rather, a heroine who acquired masculine attributes in the new, transnational nation, who was with a scent of masculinity and who crossed both spaces seamlessly. The postcolonial official na(rra)tion, disrupted, transgressed and turned upside down in the trilogy, became further remapped, restor(y)ed, again, as being anything but finished.

Remapping the official na(rra)tion as such, the chapter proceeded to show how the novel restor(y)ed the literary na(rra)tion through the story of Yacine's *Nedjma*, again. The heroine Nedjma, objectified in Yacine's account and previously disrupted as a myth,

transgressed as Scheherazade and restor(y)ed through her real-life name as Zuleikha Kateb in the trilogy, respectively, became further restor(y)ed as a real- to-life *Nedjma* (star). Depicted as an independent earner and worker, pursuing a singing career and present in public life, the study showed how the novel remapped the symbolic image of women in the literary na(rra)tion to one of (r)evolution in the transnational world.

These disrupted, transgressed, carnivalised and re-mapped na(rra)tions, in their turns, attempt, however, at no closure of the imagi/nation, but at the insertion of the author's story of dis/identification with the imagi/nation, 'a story that was (her) own', in Mosteghanemi's words.[535] Revealing cracks in the hegemonic na(rra)tions, official or literary, the tactics helped the author free herself from the corset of the dominant na(rra)tions in Algeria while eluding reification and essentialisation, which bespeaks the unfinishedness of the imagi/nation.

[535] Mosteghanemi, *Chaos*, p. 72.

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