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**The Kaleidoscope of Gendered Memory in Ahlam
Mosteghanemi's *Chaos of the Senses* and *Memory in the Flesh***

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Abstract

This study demonstrates how Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novels *Chaos of the Senses* (1998) and *Memory in the Flesh* (1985) reveal the complexity of Algerian history through gendered perspectives, specifically through narratives of *gendered memory*. In these novels gendered memory is expressed through memories of trauma, and personal and collective art, as well as narratives of national histories. Through the use of a kaleidoscopic methodology, this study analyses two antithetical gendered reactions to trauma that later interweave into a polyphony of perspectives, which help to redefine a new sense of the Algerian nation. Mosteghanemi's literary techniques of employing dual narratives, as well as her presentation of multiple modes of art and perspectives on nation, are shaped by trauma, which is patterned in the novels as a mosaic. This study analyses the mosaic of gender, trauma, memory, history and art as a way to define the role of gendered memory in presenting history. From the perspective of postcolonial literature and theory, Mosteghanemi's texts importantly reveal the role of trauma in the development of postcolonial discourse and what trauma discourse reveals about *actual* history in its relation to art and nation, thereby demonstrating the influence of trauma on literature, rather than simply a representation of trauma through literature, or mere *mimesis*. The novels further demonstrate the ways in which trauma can be expressed both as a literary project, and as a politicalized act of nation-building through literature. The novels' two main protagonists, the man, Khaled, who fails to process the trauma of the past, and the woman, Ahlam/Hayat, who displays greater resilience and will to overcome personal and national trauma, represent dual, gendered visions which are expressed through extended metaphors that plead for more political and historical awareness in contemporary Algeria. These gendered responses to the violence that occurred before, during, and after the Algerian War of Independence appear in the novels as the kaleidoscopic and polyphonic ways in which Mosteghanemi constructs her narratives. These narratives importantly refuse a binary opposition of male versus female and engage instead with the complexity of Algeria's specific postcolonial history, thereby avoiding exotic or reductive representations of Algeria. Ultimately, I argue that Mosteghanemi's work seeks to construct a bridge between contrasting, gendered narratives about past and present Algerian politics and historical traumas. Her work thus underscores the importance of analysing the trauma of other nations through their personal and collective, as well as gendered, memories, offering postcolonial literary scholars a new methodology for understanding different postcolonial cultures through their conflicting histories and traumatic experiences.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“I could have written in French, but Arabic is the language of my heart. I can only write in Arabic. We write in the language in which we feel.”

(Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 56)

Ahlam Mosteghanemi commands an eminent place in the history of Algerian literature. As the first Algerian woman writer to publish a novel in Arabic, her success marks a pivotal point for both the Arabic language as well as the canon of world literature. Since their publication, Mosteghanemi's novels, *Memory in the Flesh* (1985) and *Chaos of the Senses* (1998), have been re-printed over thirty times. Literary critics echo her popularity amongst lay readers with an acknowledgement of her path-breaking contribution to Arabic literature. In 1998, she received the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature for *Memory in the Flesh*. In the last decade, Mosteghanemi's work has been translated into English. The American University, Cairo, published translations of *Memory in the Flesh* in 2003 and *Chaos of the Senses* in 2007. Bloomsbury also recently republished *Memory in the Flesh* under a different title in 2013 and *Chaos of the Senses* in 2015. In 2016, Bloomsbury also released the third book in her trilogy, *The Dust of Promises*. However, my focus in this thesis will be on the first and second novels only, as the English translation of the third novel was published in late 2016.

Written in the late 1980s and early 1990s, *Memory in the Flesh* and *Chaos of the Senses* are an attempt to come to terms with the historical legacy of Algeria's colonial past; the traumatic memories through which the nation as a collective remembers the colonial period; and the specifically gendered dimensions of traumatic experience as well as its symbolic expression through art and narrative. Both novels offer a unique perspective on contemporary Algerian history. The novels, as they follow

three different but related characters, cover interlocking themes of trauma, memory and national reconstruction. *Memory in the Flesh* is told from the perspective of Khaled Ben Toubal, a former guerilla of the resistance in the Algerian war of liberation, who lost his arm in that war, and who has since moved to Paris to live in self-imposed exile, disgusted as he is by the corrupt state of government and the broken ideals of the revolution in his native Algeria. Established in Paris as a renowned painter, he is nevertheless sick with a sense of loss and nostalgia for his homeland, which manifests itself in his obsessive paintings of scenes around the bridges of his native Constantine. In the midst of his tortured exile in Paris, Ahlam (also called Hayat), the daughter of Khaled's revered revolutionary commander, Taher Abd-al-Malwa, who was killed in the War of Independence, unexpectedly enters his life. Since he last saw her as a little girl, she has grown into an alluringly beautiful young novelist. Khaled falls deeply in love with her. However, for Khaled, the romance represents more than that: Ahlam symbolizes his nostalgia for his motherland, as well as memories of his childhood in Constantine. His dreams of romance, however, are not fulfilled, as Ahlam always proves to be beyond his grasp. She does not share his vision for the future, and chooses her own path in life, eventually marrying a high-ranking officer in the Algerian military.

Chaos of the Senses continues this story, but while *Memory in the Flesh* is told from the viewpoint of the male narrator, Khaled, *Chaos of the Senses* is narrated by Ahlam. The sequel is set in Algeria in the 1990s, at a time of escalating political violence. In *Chaos of the Senses*, Ahlam is caught in a lifeless marriage with the high-ranking military officer, and falls in love with a mysterious journalist. The journalist's identity returns to Ahlam in two registers: he overlaps with a character from one of Ahlam's short stories; and he has adopted Khaled's name as a pseudonym to avoid police persecution. The second novel also explores Ahlam's relationship with other

significant male figures in her life—her father, who had been a revolutionary, and her brother Nasser, who has joined the Islamists.

Tracing the lives of the two protagonists, Khaled and Ahlam, the novels together take up the traumatic experience of the violent revolutionary war and its aftermath. While the first novel takes up the period of the war and directly after, the second novel grapples with the troubled legacies of the period of revolutionary idealism, which left behind a sense of political-existential crisis for those who lived through it.

Why Mosteghanemi?

Mosteghanemi is the first Algerian woman to write in Arabic (Valassopoulos 111; Moore 81). Her choice to write in Arabic is significant, as is her attempt to articulate questions of gender in an intensely patriarchal Arabophone literary culture in Algeria. Writing in Arabic, for Mosteghanemi, is an explicitly political act—to write in Arabic is to reject French as the language of empire. Dedicating her honour to the struggles of Arabic writers against the dominance of French, Mosteghanemi declared in her acceptance speech for the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in Cairo in 1998:

Through their [the judges'] tribute to me, they offer moral support to Algerian writers writing in Arabic who confront unarmed the onslaughts of Francophony and its diverse temptations, while they stand patriotically against the dubious and devious tendencies to which Algeria is exposed. ("To Colleagues of the Pen")

She ended her speech with a tribute to Naguib Mahfouz, himself a fervent advocate of modern Arabic as the only language suitable to the Algerian novel. Mahfouz, as mentor, draws attention to one of her major literary concerns as an Arabic-language novelist—to contest the Orientalist assumption that Arabic is a language not fit for the modern novel.

For Mosteghanemi, “Arabic is not to be recovered in the flesh of French; rather it must be recovered in its own skin and fleshed out more fully therein” (Tageldin, “Which *Qalam* for Algeria?” 491). This decisive choice in favour of Arabic is fraught with complexities.

Through the 1990s, Algerian cultural life was torn between the failing post-revolutionary *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) and the rise of a new Islamist movement, the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS). The ascendant Islamists launched attacks on scores of Algerian writers and intellectuals, ostensibly for choosing to write in French. Others, writing in Tamazight (“Berber”), or even dialectal Algerian Arabic, were not spared. In this charged political context, Mosteghanemi supported the use of Arabic, but at the same time “refused to oppose Algerians who wrote in Arabic to their felled Francophone and Tamazight-speaking compatriots” (Tageldin, “Which *Qalam* for Algeria?” 468).

Going beyond a refusal to “take sides” in a culture war, Mosteghanemi’s work embodies a far-reaching critique of Arabic literature and literary language itself. She both joins and challenges the male-dominated canon of Algerian Arabic literature. She uses Arabic not only to reinscribe Algerian nationhood outside the French language, but also to call for a new expressivity of Arabic that could admit to gendered experience and articulation. Working against both colonial and patriarchal French as well as patriarchal Arabic, Mosteghanemi uses the language to evoke new perspectives. In the process, she calls for an Arabic that could give full space to female perspective alongside male ones. In a perceptive observation on the changing ways in which the freedom of writers is curtailed and regulated in contemporary Algeria, Mosteghanemi writes in an autobiographical essay, “What is new in writing today is that the

suppression used to come from the authorities and the family whereas now it comes from the reader himself” (Faqr 87).

Even as she acknowledges the impact of French gender norms on Arabic-language literature in Algeria, at the same time challenging assumptions of any inherent link between the French language and Algerian women’s liberation (Tageldin, “The African Novel in Arabic” 480), Mosteghanemi refuses both the Orientalist patriarchy of French and the traditionalist patriarchy of Arabic. Her writing is an attempt to find an Arabic that is consonant with the demands, desires and aspirations of Algerian women.

Critics such as Ellen McLarney and Anastasia Valassopoulos have noted that Mosteghanemi takes up the question of patriarchy in Algerian society in a very subtle manner (26; 113). Rather than “recovering” submerged women’s voices, Mosteghanemi accesses the figure of the woman only through the haze of male recollection. Her novels depict in detail the complex workings of the patriarchal fantasy of sublime love—its ecstatic moments, its narcissistic pretensions, as well as the anxieties that underpin every gesture of romantic idealisation or sacrifice. Mosteghanemi’s work is distinctive in that it does not succumb to the temptation of constructing in the process a position of female counter-authority that may be accessed unproblematically by the writer. Mosteghanemi instead puts in question the stable enunciatory position from which to speak in the name of “woman.”

Ahlam’s existence is contingent on Khaled’s narration: it is only through his revelation that she is permitted to be in the textual world. It is Khaled who is in a position to categorise her, to define her very existence. McLarney notes a “female resistance against the dominance of the male voice,” reflecting on the manner by which Ahlam’s voice attempts to penetrate Khaled’s narration (25). McLarney’s point about Ahlam’s voice “penetrating” Khaled’s narration is significant; however,

Mosteghanemi's handling of gender relations in her novels is much more complex than merely showing moments of silent resistance. I argue that Mosteghanemi's work reflects the impossibility of equitable gender relations in contemporary Algeria. Her representation of eroticism, for instance, between the two main characters, avoids responding to patriarchal control and disciplining of women's bodies, but she also disallows a utopianism of liberated sexual bodies. Mosteghanemi instead adopts a strategy of showing sexual relations in Algerian society as they are and not as they could be, through the use of traditional, romantic gestures and imaginings to describe the relationship between the characters.

The representation of eroticism between the lovers is strained and confined to literary expression between the two, and for that reason it does well to capture the essence of the bond between the lovers. This approach, however, produces a distancing effect in the reader that is different from the evocative prose of the other parts of the book. It is as if her stilted prose marks the impossibility of such a love existing on the same affective level as the other experiences in the novel.

At the same time, this does not mean abandoning the question of history. As Mosteghanemi states in an interview, "the aim is to present a historical epic... the novels are also intended as beautiful love stories and reflections on life" (Baaqeel 148). Mosteghanemi wishes to convey an account of the historical, namely, "the entire history of the Arabs over the past half century, with their disappointments, complexity, victories, poetic power, and naivety" (Baaqeel 148). Critics such as Aida Bamia, however, have sought to separate questions of national history from those of gender—the latter being "not the issue but serv[ing] mainly the romantic structure of the novel" (86). On the contrary, I argue, *Memory in the Flesh* takes gender to be one of its central concerns. As Valassopoulos argues, Mosteghanemi's work attempts to "enact ways in

which the political and social are mediated, lived, performed and experienced through the personal” (111). As the personal becomes the site for an exploration of the inter-related questions of gender, nation and history, Mosteghanemi explores the affective dimensions of how Algerians today confront the legacies of their traumatic past. As a result, her novels are able to take up a dimension of historical experience that often gets buried under monolithic national narratives of struggle and liberation.

This question of history also allows one to circle back to Mosteghanemi’s formal device of using a male narrator. When pressed on her choice of a male narrator in *Memory in the Flesh*, she remarks that “history can only be narrated by a man; a woman cannot narrate that episode of history. Writing about the particular experience of the Algerian war gains credibility when the narrator Khaled is a man who experienced and suffered its agonies” (Baaqeel 149). Mosteghanemi is clearly aware of the politics of history, and by deliberately connecting her choice of male narrator to the practicalities of writing a “credible” story, she is able to throw light on the patriarchal assumptions of those who enjoy such narratives.

Postcolonial Feminism

By far the most significant aspects of Algerian society explored in Mosteghanemi’s novels are the far-reaching social effects of the Algerian War of Independence and the gendered experience of this trauma. In this study I enlist postcolonial and feminist theory to demonstrate how Mosteghanemi’s style and theoretical approach express not only the effects of the war, but how these effects are experienced differently through gendered perspectives. The application of postcolonial theory necessarily reveals violent anti-colonial struggle as Algeria’s troubled inheritance. Combined with feminist theory, postcolonial theory further allows the

interrogation of the importance of gender in terms of historical experience, an area too often neglected in the fervour of national independence. My study thus approaches Mosteghanemi's novels from a postcolonial feminist perspective that enables a constructive dialogue between feminist and postcolonial theory.

The persistent critique of second- and third-wave feminists has meant that feminist theory today cannot but consider other dimensions of social identity formation equally, such as class, race and sexuality (Valassopoulos 21). However, as Valassopoulos pertinently argues, in most discussions about Arab women writers and their status as feminists, Western feminist theory is described unproblematically as a coherent set of ideas that can be transplanted in every historical and social context. In what is also a caricature of Western feminism, "the arguments, disagreements and debates within Western feminist theory (mainly articulated through the rise of gender theory, third-wave feminism and post-feminism) are not voiced" (10). In discussing Arab women writers, then, the nuances of Western feminist discourse are buried under an ultimately Orientalist impulse to stage the encounter as one between a (Western) culture of individualism and civil liberties, and a decadent, stagnant Arab patriarchy that subsumes the individual under the demands of the community. Such criticism, paradoxically, has had the effect of limiting the possibilities of engaging with the writings of Arab women writers, their contexts, and their strategies of resistance and expression. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, "it is in the production of this 'Third World difference' that Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes" (335). The postcolonial critique of Western feminism has sought to dislodge the Orientalist paradigms that still frame the study of Third World women's writings. Postcolonial feminists have argued that Western

feminists' engagement with women in the formerly colonial world has focused more on presumptuously "speaking for" rather than "listening to" the latter (Valassopoulos 21). As Lila Abu-Lughod points out, there is an urgent need to rethink the "complex ways that the West and things associated with the West, [are] embraced, repudiated and translated [and] are implicated in contemporary gender politics" ("Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions" 3).

The feminist critique of nationalism and postcolonial theory, however, has sought to show the ways in which forms of patriarchy have remained in place—even been strengthened, on occasion—despite the professed egalitarian principles on which the newly independent nation-states were founded. As Anne McClintock has argued, the progressive ideals of newly independent nation-states were often articulated through a gendered imaginary, so that women came to be represented as the repository of authenticity and purity, through which the nation articulated its principle of historical continuity, against the representation men as the progressive agent of national modernity, embodying its progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity (359). Even as the postcolonial critique of feminism must be taken up, it is equally important to emphasise its inability to account for its own male-centric institutionalisation as well as theorisation. For instance, Gwen Bergner has brought to light the underlying symbolic economy of exchange which supports Frantz Fanon's thinking on the role of women in the Algerian revolution (80); along these lines, Meyda Yegenoglu has also argued that, contrary to Edward Said's treatment of representations of sexual difference as a sub-domain of Orientalist discourse, recognizing sexual difference is of fundamental importance in understanding the subject position of the colonised (2).

Caught in this theoretical impasse of subordinating gender to hierarchies of power, it is doubtful whether postcolonial theory and the political project of

decolonisation alone will be able to dismantle existing structures of patriarchal power. As Gayatri Spivak asserts, “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 287). Cautioning against a valorisation of the colonial subject as subaltern, Spivak renders subalternity conditional and contextual. Against the tendency to articulate all forms of power under the totalising sign of “colonialism,” she calls instead for a critical approach that takes into account discrete, yet interrelated, forms of power in postcolonial societies. She notes, “Between patriarchy and imperialism... the figure of the woman disappears, not into some pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (306). Caught between these two forms of power, the Third World woman finds herself in a position of the doubly-oppressed, occupying a position that cannot be encompassed by postcolonial theory or feminism alone.

It is thus evident that both postcolonial and feminist theories are constructed around critical exclusions. While feminism continues to struggle with its Western-ism, postcolonial theory, too, has had to reconsider a number of its critical theoretical premises. Consequently, I adopt what Kinana Hamam describes as “an intersectional approach that attempts to draw on the productive aspects of postcolonial and feminist theory” (10). The problems in feminist and postcolonial theory notwithstanding, through a dialogical coming-together of these two approaches, it becomes possible to simultaneously critique the Orientalist blinders that constrict the feminist perspective without, however, abandoning the notion of the constitutively gendered formation of the social. Concurrently, I borrow from postcolonial theory an emphasis on the historical effects of the nation-state formed in colonial contexts—on one hand, its tendency

towards homogenising cultural memory, on the other, its potentialities in spurring creative social thought. In doing this, however, I contest the nationalist impulse that orients much research in postcolonial theory. Such an approach attempts to frame the postcolonial moment as one of gaining national independence, speaking implicitly in the name of a nation that has “found again” its independent voice, which had been cut off momentarily by the colonial interregnum. Such a narrow interpretation of the complex realities of colonial difference either reads all forms of violence or injustice in the formerly colonial societies as emerging from colonial violence alone, or tends to make the question of gender secondary to the apparently more urgent task of national reconstruction. Often, in such frantic pursuits of the national past, gender is one of the questions that falls by the wayside.

The specificities of political and cultural context have meant that Arab feminist activists and writers have developed a unique agenda of political priorities, feminist practice and theorisations of gender. To capture the specificities and commonalties in gendered experience and expression, I adopt the postcolonial feminist emphasis that “women’s experiences cannot be contained within a single narrative of oppression. In other words, it [postcolonial feminism] constructs women’s identities and narratives as historically specific yet contestable and changing in interrelated ways. This shows that women in postcolonial cultures are interlocked within plural power axes such as race, class, and gender, all of which constitute their lives and responses” (Hamam 11). My approach thus affirms the plurality of perspectives, their irreducible polyphony, and the possibility of dialogue and collective reconstruction.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, I additionally explore the centrality of the themes of war and trauma in Mosteghanemi’s novels. Algeria’s liberation war is a definitive traumatic moment. For her, the war was more than a struggle through which a

nation won back its freedom. I have drawn on the conceptual apparatus of trauma studies to theorise the relationship between the “originary” experience of trauma—the Algerian War of Independence—and its “subsequent” narrativisation as memory. While Elaine Scarry and others’ studies of the relationship between trauma, art and recovery are particularly productive in situating Mosteghanemi’s novels as an attempt to heal the traumatised subject—the Algerian citizen—Cathy Caruth’s understanding of the traumatic event as *aporia* allows us to theorise the problematic question of referentiality and representation in narratives of trauma through the concepts of latency and belatedness (162; 92).

At the same time, I argue that the field of trauma studies has been concerned almost exclusively with Western experiences of trauma. Situated in the post-colony, I theorise here the specificities of a collective experience of trauma, and emerging historical realities of colonial oppression and resistance. Thus, even as Mosteghanemi’s novels offer a deeply personalised perspective on historical events, they are nevertheless expressions of a collective experience. Mosteghanemi’s work, I argue, takes us beyond the Eurocentric theoretical concerns and interpretative resources currently available in the study of trauma and memory. Her novels are a critique of not only the paradigm of reference, but also the trajectory of recovery and cure that Western trauma theory establishes for the relation between trauma and text.

Approaching Mosteghanemi

Anastasia Valassopoulos and Lindsey Moore are among the few scholars in anglophone academia who have critically engaged with Mosteghanemi’s novel, *Memory in the Flesh*. While both readings adopt a broadly postcolonial feminist approach, they do so with varying emphases. Even as both approaches take as their

starting point the intersectionality of postcolonial and feminist theory, Valassopoulos argues for a stronger emphasis on the former, while Moore affirms the significance of the latter. My approach takes up both Valassopoulos's ideas of the relationship between the protagonists as a literary strategy of allegory and Moore's feminist focus on the specifically Algerian context in Mosteghanemi's novels.

Valassopoulos's project looks to move away from a purely feminist emphasis and interpretation: "it is possible to conceive of many productive contexts within which to study and analyse contemporary Arab women's writing without recourse to tried and tested feminist methods" (4). She describes her reading of Mosteghanemi as one that "does not fall either into the trap of the book as national allegory or as an ineffective feminist intervention into male representations of female characters" (123).

Thus, on the one hand, Valassopoulos marks divergent postmodern concerns about the ethics of the encounter with the radical Other. According to her, "Khaled and Ahlam are strangers, yet somehow not only bound by a set of events in the history of Algeria (a history or set of events that is impossible to ignore), but also bound in the knowledge that the history they share has been differently negotiated by each of them" (117). On the other hand, she resists the nationalist reading that interprets Ahlam as the embodiment of the nation. In Valassopoulos's reading, the interpersonal dynamic between the protagonists emerges as a complex relationship in which "both characters struggle with interpretations of each other" (121). Valassopoulos's strategy of reading the work of allegorising as a two-way activity is particularly innovative. As many postcolonial scholars argue, the national allegory is not so much a formal choice that is available to authors as it is a structuring form that is constitutive of the postcolonial imaginary (Moore 82; Prasad 158-160). At the same time, by foregrounding the multiplicity of allegorical narratives and fantasies of the nation, she is able to read these

as an inclusivist, participatory project, characterised by a two-way process of constructing allegorical narratives of the nation.

In my own reading of Mosteghanemi, I maintain a stronger feminist emphasis, arguing that this two-way process is also an unequal, gendered relationship. The key point for Mosteghanemi, I argue, is not just to show the difference in the national allegory of men and women, but also to show how one comes to be legitimised as national past, while the other becomes subterranean, unable to participate in the work of national remembrance in a collective spirit. In this sense, my approach differs significantly from that of Valassopoulos—I find the dominance of one narrative as legitimate national history to be a problem arising out of the embedded patriarchy of the postcolonial political order, rather than out of a skewed orientation of interpretation. Thus for the character of Khaled, Ahlam embodies his fantasy of the nation, while she sees him as an archetype of the bygone revolutionary generation. Even as each allegorises the other, they do so in remarkably different ways: through his love for Ahlam, Khaled re-enacts his fidelity to the ideals and sacrifices of the war; instead, Ahlam attempts to come to terms with the trauma of those years, while fully living in the present. The unequal gender and power relations between them are made clear by the narration of their encounter being told through Khaled's perspective.

Lindsey Moore, in contrast, foregrounds the ways in which women in the Arab world continue to be oppressed *as women*. At the outset, she accepts the argument that the term feminism remains contested in Arab Muslim public discourse. It is dismissed as an elitist theoretical tendency of “foreign” origins, and regarded as an extension of the West's project of cultural imperialism. Even as she shares a wariness towards privileging gender as an analytical category (at the cost of marginalising questions of

race, class, religion) Moore nevertheless emphasises the many ways in which “women have been subject to constraints and forms of violence *as women*” (4).

Consequently, even as she calls for a flexible, contextually-defined and non-totalising definition of what constitutes feminist practice, Moore is equally interested in showing the historical inequalities in the Arabophone literary sphere that exclude women writers—at times subtly, but sometimes blatantly—by infantilising and discouraging them. Thus, against a theoretical perspective that calls for a limiting of the critical powers of feminist discourse in order to foreground the national/colonial question, Moore turns her attention with even greater urgency to the ways in which Arab women claim a voice—doing so in “self-reflexive ways that do not simplistically equate acts of speaking, writing, or viewing with presence, authority, or truth” (8). Calling for a texturing of the national narrative with psychological and emotional truth rather than tired repetitions of the *people as one* thesis, Mosteghanemi draws attention to the libidinal potential of writing to redefine the nation (Moore 82). Against the monolithic image of the nation and its people, Mosteghanemi’s work opens up the possibility of representing the nation in all its polyphonic diversity. Simultaneously, by showing these new dimensions of voice and literary expression to be subordinated, she also gestures towards the fundamentally hierarchical character of the present national imaginary.

In the work of both Valassopoulos and Moore, however, the postcolonial feminist orientation is argued primarily as an extension and redrawing of the limits of feminist thought. For both, the theoretical impetus is towards remedying the residual Orientalism of feminist theory, in order to articulate a more inclusive and nuanced notion of feminism. As Valassopoulos states, “what I argue for is an evolving and

revolving cycle that informs as well as transforms the idea of Western and other feminisms” (16).

While their contribution in this regard is indeed valuable, my own emphasis is slightly different. As I argue in subsequent chapters, given the significance of the nation-state imaginary in postcolonial countries such as Algeria, the question of reconstructing national memory of the traumatic War of Independence is a central aspect of Mosteghanemi’s work. In addition to the responsibility of sharpening the critical apparatus of feminist theory, the postcolonial feminist intervention also requires us to take up with equal urgency the question of national reconstruction, and the possibility of rethinking gender relations within the national community. Extending Valassopoulos’s interpersonal approach, I focus on Mosteghanemi’s explorations of collective experience and memory. Further, I follow Moore’s suggestion of turning attention to the libidinal aspects of this collective act of remembering. Through Khaled’s wounded sense of masculinity, and Ahlam’s troubled relationship with him as a father figure, I trace Mosteghanemi’s perspectives on the complex relationship between personal and collective remembering and their re-enactment.

Thus my theoretical approach extends the critical apparatus of both postcolonial and feminist models, and enables new ways of thinking about questions of nationalism, national culture and shared memory. As I describe in the following section, this study presents a critical approach that affirms the importance of a multiplicity of perspectives, as well as the limits of imagining national memory as a grand narrative of coming into being. Arguing against such a grand narrative, my approach demonstrates how national narratives are always multiple—“unity” is to be found not in a single, all-encompassing narrative, but in an evolving dialogism that accommodates multiple perspectives, memories and stories.

Kaleidoscope as Theory and Metaphor

The kaleidoscope, with its emphasis on seeing and focus, and as made out of bits of mirror and coloured paper, is essentially a play on perspective—as one changes the perspective of their gaze, different colours and patterns appear. The shifting patterns reveal the phenomena of the refractive and splitting effects of light that combine to form a kaleidoscopic vision. The motif of the kaleidoscope also resonates with the history of mosaic art in the Arab world, thereby drawing attention to the specificity of Algerian art and history that the novels treat. Pierre Bourdieu likened the structure of Algerian society to a “kaleidoscopic mechanism” (93-94), where each social group is subject to intense cultural interpenetration. Each group draws from a common corpus of cultural practices and meanings, even as they give it a distinctive personality through variations in emphasis.

My theoretical framework turns to this notion of the “kaleidoscopic” mechanism to read Mosteghanemi’s representation of Algeria’s traumatic colonial and postcolonial history and its continuing patriarchy. I will show how she adopts a narrative technique that, so to speak, replicates these effects through the devices of language, such as layered narratives, metonymy, and fragmented stream-of-consciousness narrative. The fractured patterning of the narrative allows one to situate the questions of trauma, gender, memory, art, and nation in a way that does not simplify the complexity of the antagonisms and contradictions involved. In a kaleidoscope, every shift in perspective generates a new configuration of views. Through a similar shifting perspectival approach, I show the different roles men and women played during the Algerian War of Independence, but also the ways in which their “recollection and transformation” and

their “frame of interpretation and the acts of transfer” might also be gendered (Hirsch & Smith 22).

Mosteghanemi’s novels are ultimately a meditation on questions of collective memory and its narrativisation as national pasts. She offers the reader a perspective in which the relationship between the real and allegorical word becomes blurred—even as she references real places, people and historical events, she also brings them together as elements in an allegorical narrative. In this play between the real and the allegorical, the narrative becomes elusive, forcing the reader to interpret and in the process reconstruct their vision of the nation’s past. My kaleidoscopic theory of reading opens up new ways of thinking about literary representations of contemporary Algerian society. I argue that Mosteghanemi is concerned with a creative overwriting of the past into new, palimpsestic narratives that can contend with the fissures in present-day Algeria. In this way, she is able to bring together discontinuous, fragmented memories, symbols and narratives in a re-imagining of the collective idea of the nation.

Why these two novels? The novels deal with contemporary events, and delve extensively into Algeria’s long and traumatic twentieth century. Furthermore, the novels take up the question of gender and patriarchy in Algerian society from various perspectives. While earlier critics’ insights are useful to my work, this study considers *Memory in the Flesh* in tandem with *Chaos of the Senses*, unlike previous critics. I argue that the full scope of Mosteghanemi’s imagination becomes evident only when these two novels are read together, in conversation with each other, thereby establishing a dialogic novelistic universe in which Mosteghanemi situates characters, events and experiences. I argue that not only are the two novels significant in themselves, together they open up to new levels of interpretation. These aspects of her work, I argue, are brought forth most clearly through what I call the kaleidoscopic mode of reading. To do

justice to her literary imagination, one cannot read these texts in isolation. Mosteghanemi's overall intention of exploring the complex social realities of postcolonial Algeria is fully elaborated only when the two novels are seen as two literary voices and perspectives coming together in a dialogic engagement. While *Memory in the Flesh* turns to the unresolved questions of the past, *Chaos of the Senses* takes up the mundane everyday through which the real effects of this troubled legacy must be confronted.

The Politics of Translation

In addition to my own extensive knowledge of the critical conversations surrounding these texts, a keyword search through the major academic journal databases reveals a striking dissymmetry. While there are a proliferation of articles on Algerian francophone novelist Assia Djebar (more than four hundred), and approximately seventy-five about the writing of Egyptian writer Nawal al Sadawi, thus far only ten English-language articles on Ahlam Mosteghanemi are listed. Mosteghanemi's reception in the West, then, presents a paradox—the publishing industry presents her as a bestselling author of love in the aftermath of war, while academia has not devoted much attention to her work and its critique of the Algerian present. This is not simply a matter of oversight. I argue that Mosteghanemi remains relatively invisible in the Western academy because her work fails to meet expectations of an Orientalism still embedded in Western critical perspective and also because she is neither a feminist activist-informant on the horrors of Orientalist patriarchy, like al-Sadawi, nor is her exploration of questions of history and identity couched in a post-structuralist understanding, as in the work of Djebar. Rather, Mosteghanemi's work raises difficult questions about Algerian society, religion, culture and history, and attempts a nuanced

and far more ambivalent engagement with them. Even as she is acutely aware of the inequalities and everyday violence of Algerian society, she is nevertheless unwilling to jettison all aspects of her Algerian Arab Islamic cultural heritage. This creates an ambivalent relationship with questions of modernity and feminist subjectivity, as they are framed in Western academia. Notably, her exploration of gender constructions in Algerian society—with its emphases on the complexity and affirmation of dialogism—ultimately does not fall in line with a simplistic notion of women’s “liberation” and the realization of feminist subjectivity. For Mosteghanemi, notions of trauma, recovery and memory are the key signposts that allow her to construct a narrative that can provide a gendered commentary on Algerian history, politics and culture.

In consideration of feminist subjectivities, Indian feminist Tejaswini Niranjana suggests that translation both shapes and takes shape “within the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism” (2). As Bassnett and Trivedi argue, “For too long translation was seen as purely an aesthetic act, and ideological problems were disregarded” (6). The ideological aspect of the process of translation of postcolonial novels into English is critical in the West’s reception of these Arab feminist writers, because it ensures that the complex engagements of Arab feminists, within their local context and with each other, are reduced to so many “struggles” by Oriental women to become fully modern, “feminist” subjects.

For instance, in their enthusiasm to embrace Assia Djebar as a post-modern francophone writer, the *Academie francaise* have failed to acknowledge her deep misgivings about the burdens and anxieties that emerge from writing in the language of the colonial oppressor. In doing so, they have chosen to arrest the critical force of her work by fixing her identity as a “postmodern” writer. As Miriam Cooke argues, Djebar’s work ends up producing the paradoxical effect of “re-exoticising” the Orient,

by opening up for it the French-language cultural milieus and social spaces that it had hitherto been unable to access (142). Even as her entry into the *Academie* in 2005 as the first francophone writer from the Maghreb marks a widening of the notion of “francophone,” it is also the beginning of a new regime of language imperialism that “fixes” her place as a representative of “the Maghreb” in the francophone world. Precisely in the moment when world literature is being redefined in the face of the postcolonial critique as a reconstituted Orientalist project of literary production, the francophone academy can only admit her as a writer from the Maghreb, who most importantly writes in French.

Djebar is at pains to assert “*une autre Histoire*” (another history) of the French language that acknowledges the historical role of French in destroying indigenous languages and cultures. Adopting a position of an “insider and outsider” to *la langue* of French, she states, “The French language—your own, ladies and gentlemen—turned mine, at least in writing... French is thus... perhaps the target of my utopia, I will even say; tempo of my breathing from day to day: what I would like to sketch for you, in this instant in which I remain a silhouette poised on your threshold” (Tageldin, “Which *Qalam* for Algeria?” 472). In contrast to Djebar’s nuanced position of insider and outsider, Pierre-Jean Remy began his response speech, notably, by situating Djebar within the typical Orientalist frame: “Algerian and Muslim, especially Muslim women—born in a time when silence was the voice of the women of your country, the little girl who was born in Cherchell 150 kilometers west of Algiers—might seem light years away from the *Academie*” (“Response”). Remy proceeds to construct a narrative of Djebar’s life as a long and winding road to the true home of the French language—the *Academie* itself. The dominant theme in his speech is her struggle to become truly French: “[You are] so close to us, because you wanted. You wanted, despite the voices

of the past that have continued and continue to haunt you; other voices, another language, your mother's singing" (Remy). He ends his speech with "Welcome among us, among us, Ma'am!" (Remy). She comes to the *Academie* always as a representative of francophone literature and culture from a former colony, returning to its imperial centre. The magnanimity of his welcome is offset by a studied deafness to Djebbar's call for a reconstituted, decentred French literary tradition. For Remy, she comes to the *Academie* always as a representative of francophone literature and culture from a former colony. She must bear the burden of implicitly representing the silenced women of the Orient, yet in doing this also affirms the glory of the imperial centre and its glorious culture. On the one hand, Djebbar affirms the uniqueness of her personal journey as a French writer—with her location and history in a former colony of France—and the troubled engagement with her legacy that it sets off. On the other, Remy sees her "arrival" in the halls of French literature as having been possible despite, rather than because of, her uniquely situated personal and intellectual biography.

Mosteghanemi's work, however, is a complex deliberation on questions of national memory, language and gender. Her subtle abstinence from a more overt critique of the position of women in the Arab world; her disguising of Ahlam's existence as shadowed behind that of Khaled; and indeed, her accomplishing all of this in the Arabic language, substantially differentiates her from other Arab women writers. At the same time, her discursive strategies serve to alienate her from Western audiences. Mosteghanemi's texts do not readily support a conception of the Arabic woman as being oppressed and subservient, thereby not appeasing any prevalent discourses on the nature of the non-Western woman that has "not yet" experienced the fruits of Western feminist thought.

At the same time, however, Mosteghanemi has been interpreted by the Western publishers of her translations as a writer of Oriental romance and nostalgia set in a contemporary milieu. A look at the titles of her translations, first by the American University of Cairo Press (AUCP), and then Bloomsbury, give a glimpse of the dynamics at work. The first book of Mosteghanemi's trilogy was translated by AUCP as *Memory in the Flesh*, while Bloomsbury chose the more nostalgic-romantic title, *The Bridges of Constantine*. While AUCP has not translated the third book in the trilogy, the Bloomsbury edition is entitled in a similar vein, *The Dust of Promises*. Market forces play a significant role in such processes; decisions about translating, editing, publishing, distributing and course adoption are all made with economic as well as literary factors in mind (Amireh, *Going Global*, 4). The novel's title, in this sense, is of course critical in influencing popular impressions about her work, to the extent that the title evokes a sense of the content of the work. The Bloomsbury titles consciously, and incorrectly, situate these novels by "the first Algerian woman writing in Arabic" as a sentimental voice, one that is implicitly subdued, submissive and incapable of political consciousness.

In terms of market forces, recent work on translation has focused on the importance of patronage in translation practice. Currently, patronage takes the form of publishing houses, universities and funding agencies, which are in turn dependent on a readership, a critical establishment, or governmental and/or non-governmental selection committees. This institutional and ideological apparatus works together to determine what is translated. The publisher's demands emerge in part from considerations of audience and reception. As Maria Tymoczko argues, "Not only will factors such as the belief system or the values of an audience affect the translation strategy, but the nature of the audience itself will determine translation norms" (31).

While I take up later in this study some instances of the mistranslation of words that have shaped the reception of Mosteghanemi in Western academia, here I address the politics at work in popular translations of Mosteghanemi's novels, as evident in the book covers that have been designed for them. The cover of *The Bridge of Constantine*, for instance, depicts a woman in a black veil set against a pattern of traditional tiles with geometric patterns. Clearly, this reflects none of the political themes of the novel, instead choosing to appeal to the deeply stereotyped assumptions about Arab women that are prevalent in the Western reader's reception of the text—namely the veil and the supposedly “Islamic” geometric tile patterns. In this way, “cultural products, including Third World women's texts... in the process of moving across national/cultural boundaries, are transformed by the reception context, their meanings reproduced and reshaped to fit local agendas” (Amireh 3). Relocated from the specifically Algerian context in which the Arabic novel was written, read and discussed, Mosteghanemi's place in the English-language market already seems fixed: as a woman who has broken the shackles of patriarchal Arab Muslim society by “learning” how to write, she “arrives” only as a sentimental “voice,” not as a “proper” writer.

In the case of postcolonial writers, the question of an international audience—neither primarily former colony nor colonizer—is in turn related to a marked trend towards the internationalization of literature (Tymoczko 31). This attempt to render Mosteghanemi's perspective on Algeria's postcolonial history as nostalgic romance, I argue, is not just a fleeting marketing strategy. Rather, it is an attempt to depoliticise the most critical aspects of her work. The translation, as such, is a negation of her political choice to write in Arabic. Moreover, her construction in Anglophone literary circles as a romantic writer forecloses any critical engagement with the most difficult political questions raised by her with regard to colonialism and gender. I situate myself against

such a tendency to view Third World women as fetishized markers of “cultural authenticity.” Rather, my kaleidoscopic reading looks to re-negotiate the idea of cultural authenticity, placing under question established notions of trauma, memory, gender and nation, all of which have been mobilised in different ways to reproduce a *grand narrative* of national healing and unity.

Against such a tendency to view Third World women as markers of “cultural authenticity,” whose texts provide “windows” into other cultures, there is a need to “focus on the text of reception and to analyse the process set in place where these voices travelled to other contexts” (Amireh, et al., 2). My study thus situates itself as one such attempt to understand the complexities and complicities through which Mosteghanemi articulates her understanding of Algeria’s traumatic past, without reducing her to the status of a mediator through which recent social and political realities may become somewhat more comprehensible to Western understanding. Rather, I attempt to elaborate the specificity of the context out of which her concerns emerge and the literary expression she gives to them.

This study argues that the particular polyphonic and kaleidoscopic ways in which Mosteghanemi constructs her narrative engagement with Algerian history importantly refuse a binary opposition of male versus female, and engage instead with the complexity of Algeria’s specific postcolonial history. This approach affords the reader a nuanced position from which to read, so that exotic or reductive representations of Algeria are avoided. Mosteghanemi’s work, I argue, ultimately seeks to construct a bridge between contrasting, gendered narratives about past and present Algerian politics and historical traumas, all of which, I argue, gesture towards the importance of analysing the trauma of other nations through their personal and collective, as well as gendered, memories, to allow postcolonial literary scholars a new methodology for

understanding different cultures through their conflicting histories and traumatic experiences.

In the chapters that follow, I analyse the multivalent aspects that inform my overall kaleidoscopic theory: namely history, gender, trauma, memory and art.

In **Chapter Two** I outline critical historical considerations that frame my analysis of Mosteghanemi's novels. I argue that even as Mosteghanemi's historical approach adheres broadly to a pro-resistance perspective in her construction of the Algerian national past, she nevertheless undertakes a highly complex representation of the same, which forces the established national narrative to interrogate itself. Through a series of memories, or flashbacks, and juxtapositions, her novels engage with the knotted questions of trauma and gendered memory that must be reconciled in any attempt to examine such a bitter and unrelenting conflict. She presents a highly personalised depiction of this period of uncertainty through the eyes of two different generations: those who fought or lived through the war, and those who struggle with its immediate aftermath. In the process, her novels are dense with historical references to places, events and personalities from the War of Independence and after. Beyond the explicit historical references, Mosteghanemi also draws on a selected range of themes and metaphors (emphasised with varying accents throughout her work) through which she explores various aspects of the traumatic national memory of the War of Independence and the violence of the postcolonial Algerian nation-state that succeeded it.

In **Chapter Three** I argue for a concept of gendered memory, through which Mosteghanemi's novels may be read as an attempt to articulate the gendered aspects of any collective experience of trauma, and its subsequent expression in the form of memory. I elaborate some theoretical considerations about my kaleidoscopic mode of

reading, tracing its trajectories through postcolonial theory, trauma studies and feminist theory, to develop a conceptual framework that critically engages with each of these disciplines. Even as I contest the male-centric bias of postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, I also align myself with the postcolonial critique of Eurocentric feminist theory and its residual Orientalist prejudice. At the same time, I argue that these two theoretical disciplines enable a critique of trauma studies, as they call it to account for its implicit bias against non-Western cultural experiences of trauma and its difficulties in articulating gendered difference. Mosteghanemi's novels, I argue, must be understood as exploring the complex relationship between trauma, national history and collective gendered memory. In this chapter, I also take up three literary metaphors in Mosteghanemi's novels that are particularly significant in reading her postcolonial feminist critique of trauma and national memory, including the bridge and the mutilated body.

Chapter Four reveals how Mosteghanemi's novels deconstruct national narratives, facilitating a collective process of healing, as Algeria processes its traumatic colonial and revolutionary past. Central to this healing process is a reassessment of traditional gender roles in the wake of traumatic memory, and a rewriting of gender, following the work of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth on memories of trauma, and Judith Butler's theories of gender as a social and historical construct. This chapter focuses on how memories of trauma can constitute both a sense of Algerian identity and nation, and demonstrates how Mosteghanemi rewrites and revises the multi-faceted, fragmented memories and history of Algeria through gendered perspectives, as her novels' protagonists attempt to retrieve a sense of Algerian identity as a new, collective national memory. I argue that Mosteghanemi's use of the themes of trauma, cultural and personal memory, nationalism, and art, when viewed through gendered perspectives,

present a kaleidoscopic narrative technique, through which Mosteghanemi challenges traditional Algerian national narratives and collective memory, participating in her country's healing process.

Chapter Five considers the way that Mosteghanemi makes use of gendered memory in relation to art in the two novels. Her two protagonists, Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, are male and female, respectively, and their ways of expressing and remembering trauma through their production of art are markedly different. Furthermore, the ways in which they remember trauma, through their different gender perspectives and experiences, as well as their respective choices for producing art (painting and writing), necessarily help to shape their understandings of the present as well as the future for Algeria. An argument that was begun in the previous chapter is thus extended in this chapter to demonstrate how Mosteghanemi is able to deploy a unique kaleidoscopic mode of narrative construction that allows her to explore questions of the gendered character of traumatic memory and more specifically its problematic representation in art. This chapter further demonstrates how art, and acts of creating art, can also be gendered, according to subjective experience and memory. Understanding Mosteghanemi's purpose in deploying gender as a way of exploring history, trauma and art ultimately demands recognition of the autonomous agendas of women writers in contemporary Algeria.

Chapter Six analyses Mosteghanemi's polyphonic narrative strategies, arguing that her work is concerned with the ways in which Algeria's traumatic past is currently being dealt with by its citizens. Mosteghanemi's narrative structure, used to frame the present, is initially constituted out of a plurality of positions, parallel, yet sinuous, and intermittently interwoven in and out of accord with each other, yet nevertheless progressing towards a future that is emerging out of a kaleidoscope of qualitatively

differentiated experiences of trauma. Drawing on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, I foreground Mosteghanemi's strategy of meta-narrative and designate it a "polyphonic layering" that critiques the prevalent discourse in modern Algerian Arabophone literature, with its tendency to allegorise the nation in the figure of the woman. I argue that deploying the meta-narrative techniques of polyphony or dialogism to represent the gaps and antagonisms that constitute the Algerian present offers the reader a dual narration of her novels as a means through which to express the trauma of the revolutionary period in Algerian history, and the crises of identity and purpose that haunt the post-revolutionary generation, for the purposes of forming an idea of the history of the nation as an act of active "remaking." This work of remaking the nation must necessarily be a collective endeavour that can accommodate the pluralism of conflicting world views, which constitutes the present political situation in Algeria. Algeria's future can only be forged through a collective expression of trauma and a reconstitution of the past.

Conclusion

Mosteghanemi's work shows that it is only by taking hold of opposite perspectives simultaneously that the contradictory aspects of the past can be represented. As a woman writer in Arabic, she provides a feminist critique of Algerian national memory. This critique poses new and difficult political, ethical and, most importantly, aesthetic questions that have until now been more or less invisible in the canon of Algerian literature and criticism.

Mosteghanemi's work gives us a vision of an Algeria whose national identity is not held together by a dominant narrative that silences all voices of difference. Her work opens up the possibility of contemporary Algeria, reckoning with its inherited past

of revolutionary violence in a way that accepts the multiplicity of experiences and subject positions. This is possible only when the icons and imaginaries of collective national identity become genuinely multivalent in meaning, and are not built on a disavowal of the constitutive difference that marks the formation of any society. Importantly, her critique calls for a radical stock-taking of the present that is able to acknowledge its deep-seated patriarchal past and make space for hitherto silenced voices. This work ultimately argues that the gendered memories of the protagonists in Mosteghanemi's two novels present a rich, new, kaleidoscopic narrative of both history and memory in late twentieth century Algeria, that gestures towards a new, collective configuration of the nation. In the chapter that follows, I take up the first of these narratives to show how Mosteghanemi presents history as a starting point for furthering discourses on nation.

Chapter Two

Historicising Ahlam Mosteghanemi

“Isn’t history the one thing that prevents the future from being?”

(Mosteghanemi, *Chaos of the Senses* 140)

Introduction

This chapter examines the way that Mosteghanemi presents Algerian history from the start of the War of Independence in 1955 to 1988, the period covered in *Memory in the Flesh* (MIF) and *Chaos of the Senses* (COS). Providing a historical overview of the struggle for Algeria’s independence from France, represented in the novels through a series of memories, or flashbacks, this chapter highlights some of the difficult aspects of historiography that must be considered when examining such a bitter and contentious conflict. I show how the novels present a history of the Algerian battle for independence and the continuing struggle to maintain a peaceful and prosperous independent state. The novels are a highly personalised depiction of the bitter past and the troubling present, through the eyes of two different generations, represented by the novels’ two main characters, Khaled and Ahlam: those who fought or observed the war first-hand, and those who struggle with the immediate aftermath of an independent, but not yet peaceful, Algerian state.

The novels further explore the importance of the city of Constantine, which functions both as a literary and historical fact as well as a focal point of resistance, leading up to and through the Algerian War of Independence. The city is a locus of remembrance for Khaled in the post-independence years. The novels additionally provide fictional perspectives of the collective memories of Algeria’s painfully dramatic recent history. The overall contribution of the novels is not so much the recounting of the terrible events of a brutal war and ongoing terrorist activity; these aspects of history

are mentioned but are not the main focus of the narrative. Instead, Mosteghanemi's main concern is to describe the legacy of suffering which remains after the battle for independence has been won, and to demonstrate how past suffering still affects those who have inherited the daunting task of building a free Algeria against such an extreme and bloody backdrop.

In this chapter, I map the historical context that constitutes a backdrop to Mosteghanemi's novels, beginning with a brief historical reconstruction of recent Algerian history. Subsequently, I take up Frantz Fanon's theory of violent decolonization to suggest Mosteghanemi's divergence from his theory in certain key respects. I then look at how Mosteghanemi's politics are reflected in her writing and introduce the significance of the Khaled-Ahlam pairing that strings the trilogy together. I also lay the groundwork for a more detailed exploration of Mosteghanemi's ideas on collective and personal memory in subsequent chapters. Finally, I take up the historical and poetic significance of the city of Constantine in Mosteghanemi's novels. My objectives are twofold: on one hand, this historical contextualization will serve to clarify actual motivations and inspirations behind the dominant themes Mosteghanemi covers in her novels—trauma, gender and memory. On the other, it will allow a reading that reveals a new layer of sedimented historical meaning in the mosaic of symbolism, artefacts, and settings that Mosteghanemi presents in her novels.

A Brief History of the Present

Under colonialism, Algeria was governed as an integral part of France by the French Ministry of the Interior and not, like many other African territories, as a protectorate. Under this system there was a governor-general, appointed by France, and three prefects who represented the departments of Algiers, Oran and Constantine at the

central government in France (Horne 33). Citizens who had come from France to settle in Algeria, given somewhat pejorative names, such as *petits blancs* or *pieds noirs* (Prochaska 698), had many privileges which were not available to the indigenous population, including voting rights and access to the centralised French education system. This is the regime which produced the character of Khaled in Mosteghanemi's novels, with his indigenous Islamic heritage and thoroughly French education and sensibility.

On May 8 1945, as France celebrated its liberation at the end of the Second World War, Muslim protesters organised a surprise demonstration in the town of Sétif, in order to stage their own national celebrations, including the waving of the Algerian flag, which was forbidden by the authorities. This sparked a violent incident which quickly escalated, drawing in citizens from areas surrounding Sétif in eastern Algeria, and resulting in the brutal deaths of some 100 European settlers at the hands of the protesters. There was a swift military response from the French, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Muslim citizens. Actual numbers are disputed, with the French reporting 1,500 deaths, the Algerian army claiming 6,000 to 8,000, American sources between 7,000 and 40,000, and some Algerian journalists as many as 45,000 (Ruedy 149). These events were noted by all concerned as “a line in the sand, a point of no return” (Evans & Phillips 52), as well as a clarion call for outright violent resistance against the French. These extreme variations in estimating the number of deaths are evidence of the polarisation of the different parties involved in the war, and the desire of each to record for posterity a version of events that places this or that faction in a positive light. *Memory in the Flesh* comes down firmly on the side of the local Muslim point of view, quoting via Khaled's memory the highest figure of “forty five thousand martyrs” (Mosteghanemi 209).

Many leading Muslims were imprisoned at this time, and this is also echoed in Khaled's personal experience. This shocking chain of events marks the beginning of Algerian resistance to French colonial rule and simultaneously the radicalisation of the novel's main character. Khaled recalls that as a young man, sixteen years of age, he witnessed how thousands of martyrs fell and tens of thousands of prisoners were taken on 8 May 1945, forcing criminals and revolutionaries together in cramped conditions (16-17). This experience incenses him, as it did many young Muslim Algerians, and sets him on a path of resistance which leads to him joining the freedom fighters and fighting against the French colonial oppressors.

In the years immediately following the massacre at Sétif, it became increasingly obvious that the Algerian population could not hope for an improvement in their human rights through peaceful means. Electoral procedures in Algeria were carefully manipulated by the French to ensure that leaders sympathetic to French rule were selected for important offices. Techniques amounting to fraud and vote-rigging in the 1947 elections were obvious to all and caused much disquiet; they were interpreted as evidence of French contempt for the Algerian people, and the application of double standards, permitting practices which would never have been allowed in Europe (Horne 72). These political factors are not discussed in any detail in the novels, but they form part of the novels' assumed background to Algerian resistance in this period.

Various resistance groups began to mobilise in Algeria, including the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), which formally demanded an independent Algerian state on November 1, 1954. A rival group, the *Mouvement National Algérien* (MNA), pursuing left-wing political ideals, came into conflict with the FLN as well as the French authorities, resulting in a rather confused and increasingly brutal landscape of violence between different resistance groups. The military response by the French grew

ever greater, often killing ten times more Algerian nationals than the number of European settlers killed by resistance fighters. French military authorities put their casualties at nearly 18,000 dead; with another 10,000 European casualties (Hall 26). In contrast, Algerian casualties were estimated at about 300,000 dead (UNHCR 38).

The resistance movement gained in strength, often resorting to guerrilla tactics, such as the bombing of public areas of Algiers by female resistance fighters in September 1956. The French responded with torture and imprisonment as well as military action. This pattern was repeated across most of North Africa, as neighbouring countries also took up arms against colonial authorities, aiding each other in their respective struggles. Amidst a campaign of escalating violence and retribution, French wartime leader Charles de Gaulle was called upon to settle things down in 1959. Unexpectedly, he pursued a strategy of “gradual accommodation to the idea of Algerian independence” (Ruedy 178). A counter-resistance movement, the *Organisation de l’Armée Secrète* (OAS), was formed by the European settlers in Algiers who were loyal to France and did not want to see any change from the colonial status quo. In the end, despite an attempt to oust de Gaulle and a failed referendum, a ceasefire was agreed and Algerian independence was eventually confirmed by the whole Algerian electorate on July 1 1962.

In his analysis of the Algerian War of Independence Jo McCormack describes it as “one of the hardest wars of decolonisation ever fought,” one that had a fundamental impact on the nationalist identity of both states involved (1). Although there are disputes over the number of people that lost their lives during the war, and indeed in the aftermath as the nation transitioned from colonialism to an independent nation, there were millions of casualties, and the scale of the war for decolonisation was far greater than any similar war of its era, because it ultimately led to the 1991 civil war and

enduring violence (Alexander 6). Contrary to the dreams of utopia that had inspired revolutionary fighters during the war for liberation, the history of postcolonial Algeria has been characterised by deepening ethnic conflict and stagnation in the social and economic dimensions of life. Independence did not bring the promised liberation of women from traditional patriarchal structures; the apparatus of the nation-state only provided it with a more contemporary guise. Similarly, class differences and the marginalisation of minority ethnic groups remain unresolved problems. Through the 1980s and 1990s, intensification of state repression was met with an increasingly fundamentalist, populist Islamist movement. This has resulted in deepening social antagonisms and a highly volatile political situation, with increasingly violent attacks on activists, intellectuals and people of all political persuasions.

In reference to the chaos of the war for liberation in Algeria and the civil turmoil that ensued and endured into the 1990s, James McDougall states that “violence weighs so heavy in this history that it seems to repeat itself endlessly, with past tragedies on perpetual, grotesque replay as each new moment unfolds” (1). Beginning on 8 May 1945, when protestors for Algerian independence murdered European settlers in Setif, and French forces killed anywhere up to 45,000 Muslims in response, the Algerian struggle to secure independence brought about a turbulent post-independence history, during which the civil war of the 1990s saw violence and brutality against civilians in the wake of multiple failed attempts at democracy via elections (Stora 210-212). Martin Evans and John Phillips suggest that the extent of violence emerged out of a growing disenchantment with corruption in the military and government as young Algerians began to feel alienated, therefore perpetuating political instability and social problems (261). This was a historical alienation that was felt by many in the 1950s (Evans, et al., 62) and grew over time.

The Temptations of Violent Decolonisation

One of the earliest theorists of the colonial experience, Frantz Fanon, developed his theories within the context of his participation in the FLN's struggle against French occupation. For Fanon, the violence of colonialism was not to be found exclusively in the occupation of territory and the expropriation of economic and natural resources, but instead in the effects of normalised racism and violence on the psychology of the colonized. According to Fanon, the exercise of power in colonial rule is characterised by a systematic use of violence. Unlike the condition in the coloniser's "home country," where antagonisms between the exploited and the authorities are resolved through ideological methods, in the colony the agent of the government "does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with the clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonised subject" (Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 4). Consequently, colonial society is characterised by the compartmentalised existence of two "sectors"—the native and the European.

Subscribing to a narrative of radical rupture and discontinuity, Fanon argues that the process of decolonisation cannot but be a radical event that establishes a new beginning for a substantive national existence of a people. It is not simply a question of political independence. Decolonisation is necessarily a violent event—the demolition of the compartmentalised, unequal world established by colonialism, which can be established "only after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists" (Fanon xxix), who are locked in a relation of mutual exclusion and hostility rather than complementarity. Fanon's theory is not an unqualified embracing of revolutionary violence. Rather, the question of violence in popular revolt is reframed as emerging out

of the conditions of colonialism, which is constitutive of the colonised subject as a pathological formation. Subscribing to a narrative of radical rupture and discontinuity, Fanon argues that the process of decolonisation cannot but be a radical event that establishes a new beginning for a substantive national existence of a people.

For Fanon, decolonisation can only take the form of a struggle for national liberation. At the same time, Fanon observes that underdeveloped countries emerging out of colonialism suffer from two major weaknesses. One of them is the systematic exploitation of its resources and general “mutilation” by the oppressive foreign regime, but another, more insidious weakness is of “the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, of its spiritual penury, and of the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in” (Fanon, “National Culture,” 121). In Fanon’s opinion, a deeply harmful transformation takes place in the transition from colonised territory to independent nation: the leader who inspires the trust and loyalty of the people before independence “embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity” (122), but as soon as the battle is won he aligns himself with the bourgeoisie.

Fanon also rejects the idea of Arab brotherhood on the basis that the category only reflects a compartmentalised worldview of colonial discourse, which operates through racial and continental, rather than national, categories (154). However, Fouzi Slisli has raised questions about Fanon’s characterisation of the Algerian resistance as a Marxism-inspired national liberation struggle, but from a completely different perspective. In a complex work on the culture of resistance amongst the Algerian peasantry, Slisli suggests that Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* seeks to describe what is in fact a combination of two systems of organisation—one Marxist, and the other Islamic (97). Arguing that anti-colonial resistance did not have to wait for revolutionaries like Fanon to teach them about freedom, Slisli notes that anti-colonial

resistance was already active in the Algerian countryside through the course of the nineteenth century, and even as late as the 1940s and 1950s. Drawing on a deeply embedded warrior tradition, this resistance was entirely Islamic in its ideology, culture, organisation, and even in name (99). Fanon understood the role of the countryside in the Algerian war in Marxist terms, as the peasantry's support for the revolution. In a break from the Marxist tradition, Fanon went as far as to name the peasantry the truly revolutionary class under colonial conditions: "it is clear that in colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him, there is no compromise, no coming to terms with colonization" (Fanon, *Wretched*, 85-86). While Slisli is sympathetic with Fanon's implicit break with Marxists' suspicion of the peasantry's inherent conservatism, he argues that this conservatism must be understood through the Islamic concept of *jihad*.

According to Slisli, a number of anti-colonial rebellions throughout North, East, and West Africa developed around similar but independent ideas of *jihad*, and modes of resistance which must be understood as constituting a pattern of renewal and revitalisation that is distinctly Islamic and traceable to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. For Slisli, the peasants were guided by an authentic anti-colonial ideology based on the social and political mandates of Islam. Moreover, this ideology was able to mobilise both peasant and urban masses against oppression. In this sense, Slisli argues that Fanon's distinction between Algerian peasants and urban-dwellers was false (105).

At the same time, Slisli is sympathetic towards Fanon's understanding of Algerian culture. Even as he notes that Fanon's criticisms of Christianity were not repeated in the case of Islam, Slisli goes on to argue that Fanon "makes constant references to Islam without acknowledgement" (103). He suggests that Fanon was not

so much anti-Islamic as naively unaware of the deep roots of Algerian culture in Islam. While Fanon respectfully acknowledges the fighting spirit of the Algerian masses, he mistakenly attributes this to some primitive, tribal stubbornness of peasant resistance. For Slisli, the Algerian resistance would not have been conceivable without taking into account, on one hand, existing traditions of *jihad* as resistance, and on the other, the radical efforts of social and doctrinal reform carried out by the Association of Islamic Scholars.

Resisting the temptation to follow in the footsteps of Fanon's theorisation of national liberation and violent decolonisation, Mosteghanemi's approach to Algeria's history of colonialism and violence is somewhat different. For Mosteghanemi, violence enacted in the name of any ideology cannot but be a form of colonialism; this form of violence always entails an attempt to control the functioning of the state apparatus, in an attempt to subjugate one section of the country's population to the will and directives of an elite minority. Calls for revolutionary violence are always bound to fail, since they are futile attempts to homogenise the essentially pluralistic character of the social. Often, calls for violent decolonisation ultimately reproduce the racial binaries of colonialism, by singling out the white occupier as the Other who must be ejected in order to create an independent nation-state composed of its *true people*. At the same time, Mosteghanemi appears to agree with Slisli in that she acknowledges the deep-rooted Islamic cultural influences that have come together to constitute the revolutionary zeal for independence. Mosteghanemi repeatedly makes reference to terms such as martyrdom and *mujahideen*, which have a rich history in Arab Muslim culture. However, she also distances herself from the more exclusionary aspects of the articulation of these terms adopted in the contemporary Islamist movement.

The narrative of national liberation is thus always precariously poised—on one hand, it inaugurates a struggle against colonial exploitation; while on the other, the narrative of national culture and unity is just as guilty as colonialist discourse of creating a strictly univocal representation of the present. As a consequence, questions of gender and the varied effects of traumatic experience remain unexpressed in public discourse. The urgent need is to offer a full account for the repressed, silenced and disavowed voices that constitute the true polyphony of the Algerian present. In doing this, Algerian society must come to terms with the wide-ranging and unresolved effects of the traumatic experience of the war—the dreams of the freedom fighters must also answer for the silent, everyday violence of postcolonial Algeria that have followed in their wake.

Postcolonial Reconstruction and the Role of Literature

Mosteghanemi's personal history is intertwined with the history of the Algerian war, because she lived through the initial war of liberation as the daughter of a militant political activist who was exiled during the conflict, returning to accept a government position in order to help oversee the transition ("Biography"). As such, she has important experience and insightful perspectives of the ongoing postcolonial situation in Algeria and is therefore uniquely qualified to write about it. *Memory in the Flesh* and *Chaos of the Senses* are part of a trilogy that offers representations of the wide-ranging social and cultural transformations that have shaped modern Algeria.

Memory in the Flesh tells the story of an encounter between its protagonist, Khaled, an injured veteran of the Algerian War of Independence, and Ahlam/Hayat, the daughter of Khaled's respected senior comrade-in-arms who was killed during that same war. It was first published in Arabic in 1985 and is set mainly in Paris in October 1988,

with some scenes in Constantine, Algeria. The story is told through the first-person narration of Khaled, who becomes an artist and is living in the French capital. He is reminded of his youth in the town of Constantine when he meets Ahlam, as she visits an exhibition of his paintings. He last saw her as an infant, during the War of Independence. By this time, however, Algeria has long been an independent country, and the two compatriots engage in a highly charged reunion, characterised by a mixture of unfulfilled love and various complex emotions arising from their past in war-torn Algeria. Khaled's memories of the war and his struggle to recover from physical and mental trauma play a prominent part in the novel, and it is clear as the story unfolds that the somewhat hopeless, thwarted love he feels for the much younger woman is closely bound up with his suppressed and conflicted love for Algeria. Khaled feels a sense of exile and loss even though he has made a conscious decision to build a new life for himself in the metropolitan centre of France, the land of his former enemy.

While *Memory in the Flesh* explores the contrast between the dreams and the reality of postcolonial Algeria, *Chaos of the Senses* examines the impact of the Algerian war in its immediate aftermath, whilst attempting to determine the implications of radical change. A female writer, with first-hand experience of the war that brought about a significant historical shift away from colonialism and towards independence, Mosteghanemi was certainly positioned to construct representations of Algerian history. Her novels are an attempt to come to terms with Algeria's traumatic past, and its wide-ranging effects on national life, with specific emphases on the ways in which this experience of national trauma—as well as the multifarious strategies of coping with it—shape, and are shaped by, the unequal differences of gender that form contemporary Algerian society. The novel is a literary and cultural narrative, in this particular context, of counterinsurgency in relation to war (Morton 151) and can provide a social,

emotional and political insight into war vis-à-vis its emphasis on the experience of tragedy via its position within the canon of communal literature (Cooke, *Women and the War Story*, 236). In this way, the two novels effectively present the struggle experienced by Algerians in the context of the war for liberation and its aftermath. Mosteghanemi returns to her thematic concerns in the third novel in the trilogy. Set in Paris, *The Dust of Promises* is narrated from the perspective of the journalist who had been Ahlam's lover in the second novel. This final work in the trilogy is also a return to the city in which the first novel was set. This return to Paris, however, is not merely an atmospheric device. It also stages a revisiting of the tangled web of circumstances that link three characters—Khaled, Ahlam and the journalist—in the form of palpable memories and unanswered questions. In doing so, Mosteghanemi also explores once again some of the key people, places and concerns that populated the first two novels—namely, the horrors of sectarian violence, and her sustained commentary on Algerian history, politics and culture. A kaleidoscopic reading of the author's choice to return to Paris and reconnect the lives of the three characters in the final novel would give us an opportunity to consider her key themes and historical event from another alternative perspective. However, as already noted, this was not possible because the English translation of *The Dust of Promises* was just published in 2016.

In these novels, Mosteghanemi inscribes the wartime violence and its effect on families explicitly, when Khaled recalls the visits of resistance fighters to their families, often entailing a dangerous crossing over the border to Tunisia where they were taking refuge from possible French retaliation. It was during such visits by the war hero Si Tahir that Khaled learnt about the dramatic battles for Algerian freedom, and at the same time made his acquaintance with Si Tahir's two children, Ahlam/Hayat and Nasser. Momentous historical events are mentioned obliquely, with a particular

emphasis on the meaning they have for individual characters. Independence Day, for example, might be imagined as a day of celebration for all the Algerians who fought for it, or those who suffered the loss of much-loved family members, and finally, those who cast their votes in a peaceful process. In *MIF*, however, Ahlam remembers how it brought only grief and pain to her grandmother, the mother of fallen hero Si Tahir. The old woman, Umm al-Zahra, can only weep, because she had hoped for so long that the announcement of independence would bring about the end of the war and return her son to her. She represents a picture of absolute and universal loss, as she stands “bareheaded, repeating in a primitive grief, “Oh sorrow! Oh blackness and pain! Oh my dear Tahir, why have you abandoned me?” (Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 68). The contrast between political joy and personal grief in this situation could hardly be greater. The weeping mother symbolises the double-edged nature of Algeria’s independence, built upon a bloody sacrifice and the shaky promise of a bleak future no one really knows how to cope with.

Through the character of Khaled, Mosteghanemi frames her response to the war in gendered terms. In *Memory in the Flesh*, Khaled is tormented by memories of the war in which he lost his arm, and from which he carries a lifelong commitment to remember and revere his fallen comrades. Khaled marks the passage of time with anniversaries of key events in the battle for freedom, such as the anniversary of the first bullet fired in the war, or of the fall of the last group of martyrs (12). His focus is retrospective, since the War of Independence is the period that gives meaning to his life, and that of his comrades, many of whom were killed for the sake of their homeland. He speaks often of “martyrs,” which is not just a religious term, signifying participation in the pan-Islamic jihad against the infidel oppressor, but also a nationalistic one, since these men in dying gave birth to the new independent state of Algeria. The death of resistance leader Si

Tahir is narrated in heroic terms, stressing his sacrifices for the good of his homeland, and the fact that he did not live to enjoy the fruits of victory, or even see his children growing up. Khaled's account idolises Si Tahir, fixing him in the past as a beacon of perfection, one who must be admired, and above all remembered by all those Algerians who were able to profit from his courage.

Ahlam/Hayat's response, in contrast, symbolizes both a generational and a gendered difference to Khaled's essentially pessimistic, defeatist perspective on both present and future. She sees the legacy of her father, Si Tahir, rather differently. A distinction is made between those who lose their fathers, like Ahlam, and those who lose their mothers, like Khaled. Khaled maintains that the latter situation is worse because it removes the source of love and affection associated with the mother figure. Khaled's relationship with his mother is inextricably bound up with his relationship to his country: "the revolution was entering its second year and I was in my third month as an orphan. I cannot remember now exactly when the country took over the character of motherhood and gave me an unexpected and strange affection and a compulsive sense of belonging" (*MIF*, 14).

For Ahlam, however, the loss of a loving father is an equally debilitating experience. She searches forever after for a father figure, one who is real flesh and blood, and not just a number along with the other martyrs, or a publicly recognised street name. Ahlam is the daughter of Si Tahir, and thus there is a kind of sublimated father/daughter dynamic between her and Khaled, because he was charged with registering her birth while her father was at the front fighting for Algeria's liberation. This reveals a generational difference between the two characters: Khaled is almost, but not quite, old enough to be her father; at the same time he sees her as a connection with his own childhood.

Ahlam lost her father, while Khaled lost his mother, and each of them carries a deep emotional scar because of their loss. In Khaled's jealous mind, however, there is a certain fusion of all the female objects of his love. Ahlam is for him "the heartless beloved, the homeland that turns its back on its devoted children" (Bamia 89). Conversely, Ahlam seeks a father figure's strength, since "Khaled represents the collective memory, the past that Ahlam was seeking in order to find her stability" (Bamia 89). This collective memory is, however, not always portrayed as a positive thing. Ahlam accuses Khaled of being fossilised in the past: "you know, you've never emerged from the revolutionary generation" (Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 70-71). This conversation underlines both the unbreakable bonds and the tremendous gulf that exist between Khaled and Ahlam. They represent respectively the pre- and post-independence spirit of Algeria. Both are crippled by emotional trauma: one is obsessed with looking back to the heroic past, while the other is impatient to move on and find a new and better future for Algeria.

Mosteghanemi's choice to write a story of an unfulfilled relationship thus takes on a poignant significance. The greatest symbol of Algerian history in the novel is the very real but deeply unsatisfying love that Khaled has for Ahlam and Ahlam has for Khaled. Each doubts the sincerity of the other, and they are drawn to each other, despite knowing that there is no possibility of comfortable fulfilment: "In its symbolic dimension, however, standing for the citizen-homeland relationship, the unrequited love is more representative of the Algerian realities" (Bamia 86). This sad and lonely attraction between incompatible generations epitomises one of the key issues that faced Algeria in the struggle to gain independence from France and which continues as the root of ongoing violent struggle. Beyond just a romantic metaphor, the failure of the relationship is as much a symbolic representation of the crossroads where contemporary

Algeria finds itself, between two opposing perspectives on the possibilities of the Algerian nation-state.

The lost ideals of the nation and its tragic state can be identified within both Ahlam's turbulent and highly self-conscious internal struggle and her dissident brother, Nasser. Ahlam is an example of the struggle for identity within a new and yet familiar world, and this is embedded within her musings on the state of Algeria and its national consciousness and memory, such as her reflection on a person being shot in the street as a consequence of armed individuals being able to walk around freely and shoot at will (Mosteghanemi, *COS*, 61). However, Nasser's fate runs parallel to that of the Algerian state. Named after a powerful leader Gamal Abd al-Nasser, and therefore imbued with nationalistic dreams and sentiment, he "shared everything with the nation, his orphanhood and his name that wasn't his any longer. Nasser Abd al-Mawla was the cherished son of the nation's memory, but not necessarily the cherished son of the nation" (72). It becomes evident from this particular linking of Nasser to Algeria that he provides a representation of the nation in its post-independence state. As an allegorical tool, Nasser is highly effective for this reason, although he also provides answers to Ahlam's rhetorical questions. For example, she asks why there is no place for love within the context of war: "Was it because wars, conflicts, and personal disputes cast their dark shadow everywhere?" (4). This suggests that the context of war is entirely pervasive and infringes on all elements of life, thus suggesting that the role of literature is to emphasise how civil war and the struggle it perpetuates may permeate from a public level of consciousness into a personal level that is far more pervasive.

Ahlam's marriage and the refusal of her brother Nasser to attend the wedding brings to the fore the generation that inherited Algerian independence, and that generation's struggle to come to terms with the transition from resistance to peaceful

normality. Instead of liberation from oppression and enjoyment of the lofty ideal of freedom, there was in Algeria an ongoing struggle on the part of ordinary people just to achieve the bare minimum income for the stability on which to build their family lives. The young generation exemplified by Ahlam and her husband are preoccupied with making a living, and this leaves little space for the ideals that people like Khaled had suffered so much for. Paradoxically, the suffering continues, and violence continues also, but in this case it is no longer possible to blame everything on the colonising power. Khaled secretly admires Nasser's obstinacy and sees in it a remnant of his father's stubborn refusal to accept the rule of the French. These shifts in personal relationships within the novel illustrate the bigger picture of society at large, in which the Algerian government assumes the role of oppressor of the people, complete with terror tactics and institutionalised torture as a way of keeping order.

As a female writer writing in Arabic, Mosteghanemi is one of the pioneers of modern, post-independence Algerian literature. Other well-known Algerian women writers use French, but Mosteghanemi identifies the use of Arabic as part of the birth right which modern Algerians have recaptured from the French as a result of the War of Independence. Her novels thus represent a break from Algeria's Francophone past and can be seen as a continuation of the struggle for independence in the domain of culture. In a sense, therefore, the War of Independence is still being waged in Algeria today, in the hearts and minds of its citizens, many of whom were educated in French ways and still do not have a comparable range of contemporary literary and artistic works in the medium of Arabic that demonstrate Algerian values and achievements. In an interview, Mosteghanemi makes poignant reference to the writer Malik Haddad as an inspiration for her choice to write in Arabic: "He felt the pain of this seriously; not like other writers in Algeria, who did not experience the 'Francophone' as a tragedy and for whom

the Arabic language never meant anything. Other writers were satisfied with the French language” (Baaqeel 148). Haddad, who was born and educated in Constantine under French rule and was barred from receiving an education in Arabic, decided to stop writing in the language of the oppressor when Algeria became independent (Holt 123). As Mosteghanemi states, “Haddad’s tragedy also represents my father’s tragedy; he was also not good in Arabic and for this reason directed me to study it on his behalf” (Baaqeel 148). Thus, for Mosteghanemi, writing her novels in Arabic is partly an attempt to fulfill the dreams of her father’s generation, for whom the end of foreign occupation meant not just political independence, but cultural decolonization.

According to Shaden Tageldin, Mosteghanemi “both joins and challenges the male dominated canon of modern Algerian Arabic literature... She reasserts Algerian identity by choosing to write in Arabic... She uses Arabic to rewrite women into the nation in realist rather than fantasist terms” (“The African Novel in Arabic,” 98). This draws attention to the role of literature within the post-independence context in two distinct modes. The first is Mosteghanemi’s use of Arabic over colonial French to reassert Algerian identity; the second is the fact that she has chosen to simultaneously and deliberately redefine the place of women within the nation. In terms of the latter, she contributes to the creation of the new emancipated woman, specifically “a woman subject whose subversive conduct has shattered archaic tradition” (Cheref 52). However, despite the fact that she lends her voice to creating and representing a new Algerian history, she is still chronically underrepresented and makes this quite clear in the narrative: “There are more than sixty political parties in this country whose job it is to represent the people and defend their freedom to choose. But there isn’t one to defend me” (Mosteghanemi, COS, 121). Although there is a lack of representation for women, Mosteghanemi demonstrates a resolve and a voice that emerged in spite of the civil war

and continual political and economic disenfranchisement. For Mosteghanemi, the role of literature is of vital importance in representing a more complete version of personal history associated with the civil war: “literature is born only from wounds” (*MIF*, 252).

History, Gender and Memory: Between the Personal and the Collective

Memory is a pervasive theme in Mosteghanemi’s work, with political memories often becoming directly and inextricably intertwined with personal memories (Kilpatrick 39). Indeed, collective memory facilitates examination of the interaction with history via the presentation of individual stories, and Ahlam’s narrative is certainly conducive to that. The continuing violence is the product of a decolonisation process that is intimately linked with the apparent necessity of acts of revolutionary terror. While Mosteghanemi’s perspective is consonant with the broader critique of revolutionary violence as an inverted reproduction of colonial violence, the use of personal memory emphasises the very real consequences of life in Algeria during the civil war period. By personalising memory, it is possible to record the full historical impact of the struggle for independence and power.

One conversation between Ahlam and Nasser in particular mediates personal experiences with personal thoughts and ideas. Nasser makes it quite clear that he does not feel part of the fabric of the nation in the post-independence context, recounting the death of his friend who put his hand in his pocket and was shot as a direct result of a policeman’s interpretation of this as suspicious behaviour: “Our lives depend on the place, the time or the way you happen to look at a particular moment. We have all become accused. It’s not enough that we match one of these coincidences or fulfill some terrorist profile” (Mosteghanemi, *COS*, 122). This echoes the actual events of the Algerian war, such as the 1955 massacre of *pieds-noir* civilians by the FLN at

Philippeville, mirroring the brutal suppression of opposition, which endured into the 1990s (Byrne 38). Ahlam responds with a contrasting perspective:

I don't think anyone likes to hurt another, or kill for the pleasure of killing. But everyone has started to think that if he doesn't kill, he'll be killed. It's a matter of trust. We've lost faith in each other. We're being swept toward evil, and we must not get carried away into riding that senseless train. Life is beautiful, Nasser, believe me. If only we put some love into it. (*COS*, 122)

This juxtaposes reality with hope for the future. In an almost philosophical way, it reflects upon paradigms of human behaviour in order to construct oppositional realities within the context of the same narrative. Ahlam clearly perceives the good in human nature, representing the violence within the post-independence context as a symptom of the revolutionary context. Nasser, however, positions violence as the instigating factor rather than the outcome. Both attitudes can be linked to Fanon's theoretical framework. Nasser's assertion taps into the violence of the struggle, challenging the transition from colonisation to independence, and therefore undermining any sense that the nation may move towards the fulfilment of his version of utopia. Ahlam, on the other hand, concurs with Fanon's perspective to an extent, accepting that the violence has emerged out of colonialism and the lack of faith in humankind as a direct result. Nasser's personal memory is connected to real events, whereas Ahlam provides a broader opinion that emerges out of the national picture during a specific historical context. She remains hopeful, whereas Nasser is entirely worn down by life in the corrupt and violent Algeria of the 1990s.

Algeria's experience of the War of Independence left behind it a deeply ingrained normative ideal of womanhood. Fanon writes, "For revolutionary war is not a war of men... The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured,

raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity” (*Dying Colonialism*, 66). Despite placing woman as central to his understanding of resistance, Fanon’s representation of the subjectivity of the colonised has also been subjected to feminist critique. Gwen Bergner argues that Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is inherently patriarchal in its construction of the subjectivity of the colonised, insofar as he posits the black man as the universal example of black subjectivity. In her discussion of two essays on interracial sexual relationships in the conditions of colonialism, Bergner argues that even as Fanon is perceptive in noticing the intersections of race and gender relations, he nonetheless works with the assumption that “women (both black and white) mediate between black men and white men, enabling the differentiation of masculine subject positions according to race” (80). Woman is thus constructed as mediating social and symbolic relationships between men, and the struggle of “black” against “white” is more about the ability of black and white men to control the exchange of “their” women (81). This new ideal of the nation—where men and women participate equally in the task of national liberation—is significant in that it nominally opens up the possibility of a degree of equity between the two genders. At the same time, women come to be “at the heart of combat,” precisely when the unity of the nation in its anti-colonial struggle needs to be reiterated. In this moment, the single-mindedness of national purpose—which claims to represent the aspirations of all members of the community—legitimizes only those ideas of womanhood and women’s “liberation” that are compatible with its ultimate aim. The nation thus falls short of becoming the site where a genuine multiplicity of perspectives that constitute a national community can be represented and allowed to enter into polyphonic dialogue with each other.

Of particular relevance to the present study is Fanon's realisation that the history of colonisation, both in terms of the initial conquering of Algerian territory by the French, and in terms of the later equally violent resistance of the Algerians to their oppressive rule, has a psychological dimension, and that this dimension is emphatically gendered. He maintains that colonisation has "an aura of rape" about it and that:

The history of the French conquest in Algeria, including the overrunning of villages by the troops, the confiscation of property and the raping of women, the pillaging of a country, has contributed to the birth and crystallization of the same dynamic image... Thus the rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil. We here witness a double deflowering. Likewise, the woman's conduct is never one of consent or acceptance, but of abject humility. (*A Dying Colonialism*, 45)

The parallels that are drawn here between colonial power and gender power are striking, and reflect a biased view of the world as seen from a masculine perspective. Similarly, we may also read Fanon's "stages" in the symbolism of the veil as an attempt by the predominantly male leadership of the liberation struggle to control the bodies of women, under the sign of the nation and the demands of revolution. In his essay "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon plots the trajectory of transformation of the veil as a form of cultural practice for Algerian women:

In the beginning, the veil was a mechanism of resistance, but its value for the social group remained very strong. The veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria. In a second phase, the mutation occurred in connection with the Revolution and under special circumstances. The veil was abandoned in

the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle. (63)

In its transformation as an element of a new national culture, the veil had been transformed into an element of camouflage, “stripped once and for all of its exclusively traditional dimension” (63). Woman here is the object of struggle between a “traditional” and a “modern, national” patriarchy.

Mosteghanemi invokes the metaphor of the veil in a gesture that instead resists the temptation to transform it into a symbol through which the anxieties of “becoming modern,” that trouble a typically postcolonial society such as Algeria, are mediated. Marnia Lazreg, who grew up in Algeria but moved away to work in other countries, observes that the veil was a potent symbol for Algerian women under colonialism, but that its role was never a constant one: “The veil rose and fell depending on local political circumstances” (*Questioning the Veil*, 98). Under colonialism, Algerian women were able to use the veil to signify their deliberate withdrawal from the gaze of the occupying force, and their cultural and religious distance from European norms. This symbol was quickly removed, however, during the war years, in which women fought alongside men, and at the time of independence. Lazreg argues that the veil was only ever a convenient symbol, taken up as mark of silent resistance or as a mark of religious piety, but that in the early days of independence it was regarded as having no major role to play in a modern, independent Algeria: “Accepted as a remnant of the past for the generation made redundant by history, the veil was looked down upon as an archaic custom, devoid of substantive meaning” (98).

Lazreg's analysis of the "rise and fall" of the veil in different historical moments allows a more nuanced approach to the cultural meanings of the veil in Algerian society. However, given the history of the violence of the secular nation-state, and the succeeding wave of Islamist populism in Algerian society, it is questionable whether the veil, after independence, did indeed come to be seen as an "archaic custom, devoid of substantive meaning" (98). I work with the broad assumption that such narratives of a radical break after the achievement of national independence are deeply problematic. In fact, the crises of contemporary Algeria may actually be understood as a result of the unacknowledged traumas of the War of Independence, and the inability of the modern Algerian nation-state to establish a genuinely inclusive, democratic society. From this perspective, the belief that aspects of Algerian culture (such as the veil) are mere archaic remnants is perhaps part of the problem itself. Such derision for popular cultural practices, I argue, is inseparable from their violent reprise in the form of Islamist politics and cultural attitude. These debates about the political and religious significance of cultural artefacts are an important aspect in Mosteghanemi's novels. Symbols contain multiple layers of meanings in her work, reaching back through many generations to the Garden of Eden, Berber traditions, Muslim practices and modern secular culture. This need to grapple with the layered significance of such embedded cultural artefacts and meanings is itself a gesture to the anachronism of traditions that seem to persist in the midst of the modern, "secular" society of postcolonial Algeria.

In *The Art of Forgetting*, a non-fiction book of quotations and reflections, Mosteghanemi muses on gender relations in modern Arab countries: "The Arab woman, like the Arab nations, has grown up with the notion of the father-leader. Her only recognised symbol of masculinity is the ruler who grows old in power" (71). *The Art of Forgetting* presents a number of male characters who do not measure up to this

impossible ideal. The heroes of Constantine in the War of Independence were either martyred like Si Tahir, or maimed and exiled like Khaled. The younger male characters in the novels are weak and oppressed by poverty and the hopelessness of making a living in an increasingly chaotic struggle for survival. Sporadic violence is shameful and destructive, rather than glorious and heroic. There are no more towering tribal leaders who can rule unchallenged. This has implications for the future of Algeria, and Mosteghanemi hints that it has major implications for gender relations as well.

The Art of Forgetting draws a parallel between Arab masculinity and domination over a divided and unruly people: “Just like every Arab ruler, the amorous Arab is paranoid. He expects only plots and treachery from those closest to him” (123). The divide and rule strategy that worked so well for the Ottomans and the French is one that is not so easily applied in post-independence Algeria. Despite the establishment of a modern nation-state, the notion of popular sovereignty remains precarious. Substantive power in present-day Algeria continues to be channelled through local tribal, religious or feudal elites, who are guided by their spontaneous loyalties. This situation makes the country difficult for the likes of Khaled, who cannot live up to this ideal of masculine strength, and for Ahlam, who sees no man she respects enough to love, and probably would not accept patriarchal domination even if she did. The aspirations of the main characters cannot be met in the messy and uneasy truce that modern Algeria represents.

This overlapping understanding of ancient gender and power relations explains the tortuous relationship which Khaled has with his home city, and with the young Ahlam, whom he often regards as a personification of that city, as well as Algeria as a whole. He likens losing her to the Arab ruler’s loss of the Spanish city of Granada: “Was I that king who did not know how to preserve his throne?” (*MIF* 143). Significantly, he blames himself for losing her, and immediately seeks a target for his

bitter revenge: “Did I fail to hold on to you in the way I should have done? ... Against whom should I be declaring war, when you are my city, my citadel?” (143).

However, for Mosteghanemi, memory has a double edge:

Memories do not live inside us, rather they envelop our lives. They are all the things around us that we surround ourselves with: what we touch, what we wear, what we keep, what has no use but we refuse to throw away. They are what ensnares us. (*Art of Forgetting*, 150)

Memory, for Mosteghanemi, holds some people in suspended animation, preventing them from getting on with the job of building new lives in a newly liberated country, such as the character of Khaled. Before being able to build new lives, the characters must learn how to reach out and connect with each other across divides of gender, politics, history and memory. For this reason, I next examine the metaphor of Constantine’s bridges, to show how the complex and even paradoxical image of the suspension bridge offers, in theory at least, a way to escape from one side of the abyss to the other, if only Khaled, Ahlam, and by extension Algeria, are willing to cross it.

The City of Constantine and Algeria’s Struggle for Independence

Due to its prime location in North Africa, with a long Mediterranean coastline that is dotted with cosmopolitan ports and a vast agricultural interior, the territory that is now called Algeria has a long history of both peaceful trade and violent conquest. Successive ancient civilisations left their mark on the landscape, from the ancient Phoenicians, to the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Greeks and Romans, until finally the indigenous Berber peoples of the inland regions converted to Islam in the eighth century and helped build a strong Maghreb identity based on Arabic language and Islamic culture. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the territory was divided into three

provinces: the cities of Algiers in the centre, Constantine in the east, and Oran in the west; each had a governor called a *dey* who collected taxes and reported to Ottoman headquarters in Istanbul (Silverstein 40). One feature of this system (which was to be highly significant in the later period of colonisation by the French) was the fact that each city had its own troops and took care of its own perimeter security, under the leadership of local shaykhs (Ruedy 63). This resulted in a patchwork of tribal loyalties, rather than a truly unified national identity.

Algiers soon gained prominence, focusing on trade with Europe. This left the second and third cities of Oran and Constantine to carry forward a more traditional Islamic way of life. When the French first arrived in 1830 they captured Algiers first, and then Oran in 1831. Constantine, which was a very attractive target due to its rich agricultural hinterland and strong trade links with the Sahara and with Tunisia to the east, did not fall to French rule until 1837 (Stora 244). The much larger but much less developed inland area, labelled the “Southern Territories,” was only gradually taken by the French and never fully accorded the same status as the three Ottoman provinces, each of which became French *departements*, reporting to the central government in Paris.

Constantine was, therefore, from the beginning of French rule in Algeria, associated with Islam and resistance to colonisation. It has always been known as a city of bridges because of its physical location. The river Rhumel flows through the city, cutting a long winding ravine over which the various ancient and modern bridges are built. This is a feature caused by its role as a hub for the exchange of agricultural goods, acting as a link between the inland areas and the coast (McDougall 33). The bridges¹ are

¹ See Appendix, fig.1.

what give the city its character; as Khaled reflects, “If it weren’t for the bridges, the city wouldn’t have existed” (*MIF*, 110).

The first attempt to conquer the city by Governor General Clauzel in November 1836 resulted in a “stunning defeat” (Ruedy 60), thanks to heroic resistance, led by Islamic scholars urging a *jihad* against the infidel French. Some 120 years later, in the late 1950s, it was natural and inevitable that the city of Constantine and the surrounding area should again take the lead in violent resistance to the colonising force. The riots in Sétif to the west of Constantine in 1945, and the battle of Philippeville (now renamed Skikda) to the north of the city in August 1955, were both instances of extreme brutality in which many hundreds of people lost their lives. The Sétif incident resulted in huge numbers of Algerian civilian casualties, but in the Philippeville massacre the Algerian FLN demonstrated its ability to turn French terror tactics upon urban *pieds noirs* in retaliation for the many thousands of military casualties that the French army was inflicting upon resistance fighters.

One of the most damaging effects of colonial rule was economic: local peasant crafts could not survive in competition with mass-produced goods imported from France, and large scale agricultural concerns were run by and for French immigrants. By the end of the 1950s there was little incentive for home-grown industrial development, and Constantine, once a centre of international trade and the cultural capital of eastern Algeria, had become a collecting point for displaced and unemployed peasants and a focus for seething resentment. This is perhaps the main reason why the name of the city was used by the French in their desperate “Constantine plan” of 1959-1960, “the aim of which was to industrialize the Algerian economy” (Stora 123). This plan was announced by de Gaulle in Constantine, and it even contained policies such as the promotion of

three women to senior positions and other measures designed to enlist female support for French colonial rule (Seferdjeli 19).

The French hopes that these political measures would stave off Algerian independence and encourage the citizens of the regions to show greater loyalty towards France were soon quashed, however. The Constantine plan failed dismally, and as soon as it became clear that independence was inevitable, French investment in infrastructure and maintenance of existing industrial plants ceased and French skilled workers fled back to Europe (Ruedy 200-215).

After independence, the situation worsened further. In 1963, Algeria had some 2,000,000 unemployed people, and poverty levels were extremely high and rising: “Various troubles born of poverty erupted: peasant revolts, and especially in Constantine there was the spread of violent crime; there were sporadic but persistent demonstrations by the unemployed in the cities” (Stora 136). Once again, Constantine played a key role in a period of transition, in which demonstrations and violence were used to express the frustrations, not only of the inhabitants of the city itself, but also of the outlying rural regions whose livelihood was under threat. The mountains around the city sheltered guerrilla resistance fighters and their role became one of a rallying point and spiritual centre for an Islamic *jihad* against the French (Stora 136-139). This resistance is mentioned by Mosteghanemi through Khaled’s description of the landscape, referring to the period before independence was won:

Constantine, covered with its old veil, crawls toward me with bushes and secret paths and slopes that I once knew, surrounding the city like a security cordon. The various paths lead you through its thickly wooded forests to the secret hideouts of the *mujahidin*, explaining to you, as it were, tree after tree, and cave after cave. (*MIF*, 13)

Mosteghanemi makes much of the physical contours of the city and of its famous reputation as a locus of resistance. She recalls the ancient battles of 1837 and of the War of Independence in oblique language, for example when Khaled looks around at the city after years of absence and muses “All the roads in this ancient Arab city lead to defiance. All the woods and the rocks here enlisted in the ranks of the revolution before you did” (13). It is not just one battle that Khaled singles out for special remembrance, but the Arab attitude of defiance which has characterised the place since ancient times. Constantine is for Khaled a city of heroes and martyrs, and that is why he finds it so hard to adjust to it in post-independence Algeria.

The city of Constantine provides an important anchor point in space for the whole of *Memory in the Flesh*. This is reflected in Mosteghanemi’s choice of an opening dedication to the Algerian francophone author, Malek Haddad, who was born and educated in Constantine under French Rule and decided to stop writing in the language of the oppressor when Algeria became independent (Holt 123). Khaled identifies with Constantine, and this is made clear in the opening scene, where he is described drinking sweet Arab coffee and hearing the sounds of the city around him, imagining himself like the bridge that he had painted so long ago. The song of an apple seller captures his imagination and forces him to come face-to-face with his homeland, making his long years in Paris seem “a fanciful dream” (*MIF*, 4). This is indeed a kind of homecoming for Khaled, but as the story is told, it becomes clear that his relationship with his mother country, just like his love for the unobtainable Ahlam, is fraught with difficulties and disappointments.

The town is described in the novel as being the location of one of the first of Algeria’s guerrilla cells, sending men like Si Tahir out into the surrounding hillsides to plot their acts of resistance, and imprisoning even the young Khaled for six months

when he became caught up in the resistance (*MIF*, 17). The city of Constantine is immortalised by Khaled in the form of art, and especially in Khaled's very first picture, which signified the first step in the journey of recovery from his war wound. The picture is significantly entitled "Nostalgia" and depicts a particular bridge in the city, but this image carries much more than just the symbolism of transition from one place to the next in the journey of life. At the beginning of the novel, Khaled muses upon the picture and thinks "Good morning, Constantine! How is my suspension bridge, my own sadness suspended for a quarter of a century?" (47). By returning to Constantine for Ahlam's marriage, Khaled faces up to his pain and loss, and finally comes face-to-face with the troubled reality of Algeria in the late 1980s.

Conclusion

Memories in the Flesh, as a fictional account, neatly avoids the considerable difficulties that present themselves for anyone attempting to write a detailed history of this war, since the available evidence is fragmented, and even official reports are polarised according to the perspective of the writer. Mosteghanemi chooses an extremely partisan narrator in the figure of Khaled, and shows that even he, with all his patriotic commitment to the struggle for freedom, is perplexed and depressed by Algeria's descent into violent disorder after independence. What remains clear, however, is that this was one of the most devastating of the wars of independence from colonialism, both brutal and necessary, and casting a very long shadow upon the emerging independent state of Algeria.

Algeria's long and violent history is fundamental to the narrative of *MIF*, though there is no attempt to recount the individual battles, or retell the country's long struggles in any chronological or otherwise coherent way. It seems that the country's destiny to be

in a state of perennial resistance is the main point that the author wants to make. In this respect the city of Constantine is representative of the whole of Algeria; Algiers cannot play this role because it is so contaminated by the influence of the French, but Constantine, ancient capital of Berber wealth and centre of Arab culture, has worn its resistance with a great deal more pride. Exploring Constantine's destiny is one way of trying to make sense of the long history of struggle that the country has endured. Mosteghanemi draws a very clear parallel between Constantine's early resistance to colonisation and its later battles to break free from French rule. The heroic figure of Si Tahir, for example, is likened to the resistance leader Amir 'Abd al-Qadir, and "those who could change history with a single speech" (18). Khaled's hero-worship of Si Tahir is an example of what is expected of the Arab male.

The social and political disarray that followed in the years after independence in Algeria were predicted and analysed by Fanon, who observed that underdeveloped countries emerging from colonialism suffer from two major weaknesses. One of these is the systematic exploitation of its resources and general "mutilation" by the oppressive foreign regime, but another, more insidious, weakness is of "the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, of its spiritual penury, and of the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in" ("National Culture," 121). The Algerian bourgeoisie was concentrated in the capital and was dependent upon French systems and processes for its survival. Education, jobs and intellectual pursuits were all heavily influenced by the French, leaving little understanding of or concern for the vast hinterlands of the country away from the prosperous capital and the coast. Mosteghanemi's novels successfully address, represent and mediate Algerian history in the post-independence era. She documents the struggle in numerous ways, drawing upon diverse perspectives to assess the nature of the violence and killing in the country, as well as the hope, or indeed lack

of it, for the future. The historical background of the struggle offers an explanation for violence in order to rid the nation of the last vestiges of colonisation, but the fact that Algeria is unable to shrug off the bonds of slavery without further violence suggests that the utopian vision of Algeria that Fanon presented is undermined by Mosteghanemi's gendered representations of the war and its postcolonial aftermath. In the chapter that follows, I take up these multifaceted, gendered representations of war, as I apply my kaleidoscopic methodology to Mosteghanemi's complex narrative intersections of trauma, gender, art and nation.

Chapter Three

The Kaleidoscope of Gender and Postcolonial Theory

“Critics would probably say that is compensation for other things, that it is not the full story. That is only the ravings of a madman who has no idea of literary form. I can assure them in advance of my own ignorance and of my scorn for their criteria. My only criterion is pain.” (Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 252)

Theoretical Framework

Mosteghanemi's novels must be understood as emerging out of an intellectual milieu in Algeria that was confronting new questions about the place of women in the new nation-states, both in their lived realities and socio-political imaginaries. In this chapter, I analyse the work of earlier theorists who inform my own kaleidoscopic methodology, for the purpose of arguing that, by utilizing the literary techniques of, first, polyphonic, dual narrations, and second, kaleidoscopic, or fragmented, multiple perspectives to represent the traumatic memories of war as expressed through gendered art, Mosteghanemi's novels critique relations of gender and power that constitute post-independence Algeria in ways that argue for a reimagining and reconfiguring of nation. In Mosteghanemi's post-war social order, men are just as much victims as women, perhaps even more so. Mosteghanemi's work sees through the smokescreen of heroism and martyrdom that Algerian men erect to feel better about their pain, and identifies instead with the underlying vulnerability and fear which still affects them. Her work, I argue, thus enables us to think through the political present in Algeria without having to begin with the unstated assumption that postcolonial trauma must necessarily produce an endless cycle of violent acts and the erection of increasingly oppressive structures.

In constructing my theoretical approach, there are necessarily overlaps between the theoretical lenses used, polyphony, mosaic, kaleidoscope, as well as the symbols of the veil and bridge, as one might expect in a framework which attempts to give structure

to the analysis of key ideas in two highly metaphorical and ambiguous texts. For the purposes of this section, however, I consider each theoretical lens separately. Many of the critical terms I discuss within these frameworks are contested, and may be defined in multiple ways, depending on the philosophical, political and cultural assumptions underlying their use by individual writers and scholars. In each case, I offer a rationale for preferring one concept or definition over another. The objective here is to find and define the most appropriate terminology for analysing two novels which defy easy categorization, according to traditional “isms,” such as feminism, nationalism and postcolonialism. No single “ism” provides an adequate framework for analysis of these two novels, and that is why such an extensive and interlocking overall theoretical framework of a kaleidoscopic theory is necessary.

Miriam Cooke argues that in the aftermath of the war in Algeria, there was a moment of immense potential, when the colonial masters had been overthrown and the new Algeria was on the brink of setting up its own social order. The courage of women fighting alongside the men in the War of Independence conjured up a dizzying vision of change in the age-old patriarchal hierarchies that had kept women hidden and domesticated. Algerian men feared such a renegotiation of the power relations that constituted the public sphere and, as Cooke argues,

since the Algerian women did not recognize the men’s trepidation and the impact of their new roles, they did not exploit their opportunity. When the war was over, the men imposed neo-traditional demands as part of national self-assertion. They encountered no resistance and quickly patched up their tattered egos. The moment was lost. (20)

For Cooke, and importantly for my argument as well, the emergence of the newly independent nation-state was a re-assertion of the masculine ego. Drawing attention to

this recurrent aspect in a number of postcolonial nation-states, Anne McClintock argues that Algerian men's "progressive" ideals were often articulated through a gendered imaginary:

women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism's progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity. (359)

The psychosexual connotations of traditional gender assignments here are obvious and are interrogated throughout my analyses in terms of not only how they continue to circulate, but also how in Mosteghanemi's narratives they ultimately implode.

One of my central areas of focus in this study, then, is the complexity of Mosteghanemi's representation and exploration of gender, as well as how her conceptions of gendered identity move away from the traditional polarized views of male vs female. For the purpose of defining "gendered" here, this work necessarily moves away from an understanding of gender as premised on a "natural" biological differentiation. The work of Judith Butler encourages us to understand the subject of gender as an effect of discourse. Emphasising the relationship between representation and materialisation, Butler also argues,

That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms... [but] it is the instabilities, the possibilities for re-materialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which... [we] call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law. (*Bodies That Matter*, 2)

For Butler, the possibility of power emerges in the constitutive tension between representation and its materialisation. This simultaneously makes possible the exercise of power, while also rendering it perpetually unstable in its effects. Butler's insight concerning this instability that occurs between representation and materialisation is particularly relevant in the context of Mosteghanemi's novels. As I argue in the following chapters, Mosteghanemi's writing inhabits this space of instability, wherein she explores the possibilities emerging in the constitutive gap between representation and materialisation, which is articulated through a kaleidoscopic overlap of her ideas about gender, memory and art, for the purpose of representing not only healing for the protagonists, but also for a reconfiguring and reimagining of a future Algerian state.

However, the question of gender must not be situated solely in the domain of the cultural, as against a supposedly natural domain of sex. Rather than make such a simplistic distinction between (natural, pre-discursive) "reality" and "discourse," Butler argues that gender must be understood as inhabiting the space *between* materialisation and representation. For my purposes, this theoretical distinction allows one to define gender more precisely in Mosteghanemi's writing as the unstable space between materialisation and representation, through which a reconfiguring of the Algerian future can be imagined in ways that create new gendered social relations. The fragmented, multifaceted relationship between power, colonisation, history, gendered discourse and collective ideas of nation, I argue, inherently informs Mosteghanemi's representations of gender identity.

The historical trajectory I have previously traced is an altogether familiar one for many in the postcolonial world—the emergence of liberation struggles against colonial oppression organised on a "nationally popular" basis; the achievement of political independence and establishment of a formally democratic state based on the principle of

popular sovereignty; and finally the usurpation of the state apparatus by entrenched elites, accompanied by the progressive weakening of their promises of political emancipation and social transformation. It is not surprising, then, that the dilemmas emerging out of this experience of the modern nation-state have been recognised as key concerns for the domain of postcolonial theory. Having set itself the twin tasks of, on one hand, a critique of colonialism, and on the other, a theorisation of the workings of the postcolonial state, it may be said that the key problems for postcolonial theory are the history of the nation-state as a Western form of political organisation and the legacy of anti-colonial struggles for national liberation. Such a project, according to McClintock, must begin with a reframing of the idea of nationhood itself. Nations, she suggests, “are systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community. As such, nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed” (353). This has been a key thrust in postcolonial theory’s understanding of nationalism, both in the form of anti-colonial nationalist struggles, as well as postcolonial nation-states, and is an insight that is useful for my argument here in that, in Mosteghanemi’s narratives, remaining ideas of traditional patriarchy become reified as phantasmal, veiled, yet an ultimately outmoded perspective on how a new Algeria should be configured.

This multifaceted relationship between power, colonisation and gendered discourse, as well as the gaps between, I argue, inherently informs Mosteghanemi’s representations of gender identity. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith’s “Feminism and Cultural Memory” provide a vital postcolonial feminist framing for postulating a theory that encompasses this multifaceted relationship between power, colonisation and gendered discourse. Said’s “contrapuntal reading” is

employed as a lens through which to engage with the complexity of Hirsch and Smith's work on gender and cultural memory, and therein provide a framework for articulating the relationship between what is remembered and how it gets configured to power. Said's original formulation of contrapuntal theory (79) reframed classical Victorian English literary depictions by canonical authors, such as Jane Austen and Rudyard Kipling, of plantation owners and the colonial ruling class, by highlighting the extent to which the worlds these authors depicted were underpinned by wealth generated from plantation slavery. A contrapuntal reading such as Said's thus illuminates and gives voice to the voiceless, who are most often perceived as the weaker side of such colonial equations. Both of these realities of colonizer and colonized co-existed, and both have been encoded in cultural memories with very different psychological legacies. A contrapuntal reading allows these opposing experiences and memories to stand alongside each other, each having its own validity and truth, their jarring juxtaposition defying any attempt to exclude one or another reading for particular purposes.

My kaleidoscopic reading, however, allows for a fracturing and re-patterning of both the binary of colonizer and colonized as well as traditional dichotomies of gender, ideas which can also align in obvious ways, such as how the character of Ahlam/Hayat reconfigures the traditional idea of gender by taking up the pen to write a newly configured history and future for Algeria. In my analyses of Mosteghanemi's narratives, my theoretical approach of kaleidoscopic narrative takes into consideration a blending of the fragments of discontinuous recall of collective memories and histories. Additionally, a kaleidoscopic theory also applies specifically to gendered memories, in that not only are these collective memories, histories and ideas of nation which are socially constructed from fragmented perspectives, they also encompass postmodern, socially-constructed ideas of gender. My approach is situated in contrast to Said's

because his traditional postcolonial approach is dichotomous, instead of a blended, palimpsestic, overwriting of fragmented memories of previous histories. Said's contrapuntal reading is only able to show the complicity and inter-connectedness of colonized and colonized, while my kaleidoscopic reading foregrounds the simultaneity of multiple axes of social power, and attempts a radical reconceptualisation of social realities. Against Said's tendency to accord primacy to the Orientalist biases of colonial knowledge formations, my kaleidoscopic theory reads together the questions of gender and colonialism in postcolonial nation-states. Moreover, in so far as a kaleidoscopic reading concerns itself most prominently with historical fragments and disjointed memories, it is sceptical of the ways in which the colonized can be "read into" the knowledge of the coloniser.

Memory is gendered here and refers to the different ways Algerian men and women remember Algerian history differently, as a way of defying social and cultural constructions in Algeria. Drawing on Butler's theories of gender as a social construct, "Gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (*Gender Trouble*, 10). Butler prefers "those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts" (9). Thus, in Mosteghanemi's novels, rather than being a static, traditional binary of male and female, gender should be seen instead as a fluid continuum of collective memories, histories and ideas of nation which are socially constructed from fragmented perspectives, a critical move which necessarily also changes and redefines ways of thinking about Algerian culture and history.

Mosteghanemi achieves the ambitious aim of encapsulating the counterpoint of traditional patriarchal views of masculine and feminine as well as the counterpoint of

colonialism and resistance, through her strategies for presenting a gendering of memory in her novels, in which the interweaving of these chains of gendered memory creates the dense, and at times necessarily confusing, emotional texture of the novels, by blurring the lines and reconfiguring previous patterns of belief about the history of Algeria. No single narrative perspective is held for any length of time, so that the reader is constantly encouraged to shift their gaze, in a kaleidoscopic fashion, to follow the author's lead. This approach allows the author to capture more wholly the detail and complexity of Algeria's recent history; this focus on minute details creates a kaleidoscopic confusion and/or overlap at times, but through this kaleidoscopic approach it is possible to discern fascinating patterns and important interlocking themes, all of which coalesce to a new configuration of the Algerian nation. It is through this kaleidoscopic theoretical approach that this work contends that Mosteghanemi's exploration of gender succeeds not only in representing the different roles men and women played during the Algerian war of independence, but also the ways in which their "recollection and transformation" and their "frame of interpretation and the acts of transfer" might also be gendered (Hirsch & Smith 22).

From the perspective of postcolonial theory, it is impossible to disentangle Mosteghanemi's works from the postcolonial discourse that has shaped our engagement with and understanding of the discourse of Algeria's War of Independence. Thus in an effort to amalgamate theories across history, memory studies, trauma theory, gender and feminist studies, postcolonial theory provides a scaffold for the necessary links between history and gender identity, by drawing upon the work of Fanon, Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha. My engagement with these critics provides a means of exploring ideas of gendered memory that expands the focus of their theories to reveal a new chapter in postcolonial, as well as Algerian, writing, that Mosteghanemi's works represent. As I

argued in the previous chapter, Fanon's analysis was particularly perceptive in articulating the violence of French colonialism in Algeria. Even as he drew attention to the brutal violence of the colonial regime, he emphasises the extensive psychological effects of violence on the colonised population of a country. The novelty and acuity of Fanon's understanding of colonialism and its effects on the formation of colonial subjectivity, as I also demonstrated, as well as his theorisation of violent decolonisation and use of rape as a metaphor of colonial violence, are problematic in their understanding of anti-colonial resistance and its residual patriarchal frameworks.

Said put forward a critique of Orientalism as the epistemological and moral basis of colonialism. While Said's theorisation of Orientalism was instrumental in opening up many new avenues of research, it was also subject to criticism. Robert Young has argued that Said's theorisation of Orientalism is problematic in that it constructs the coloniser and colonised as a binary category constituted out of antithetical elements. In doing this, postcolonial theory only tends to reproduce rather than dissolve the effect of the static, essentialist categories themselves. Even as Young is willing to accept that colonialism was to some extent historically and geographically homogenous, he nonetheless finds it problematic to use a broad term like Orientalism, as referring to a "totality of discourses of and about colonialism" (164). Young is extremely reluctant to efface the heterogeneity in the historical forms of colonial domination and their variegated effects. Young is opposed to positing a "general theoretical matrix that is able to provide an all-encompassing framework for the analysis of each singular colonial instance" (164).

In a feminist critique of Said's *Orientalism*, Yegenoglu has argued that "A more sexualized reading of Orientalism reveals that representations of sexual difference cannot be treated as its subdomain; it is of fundamental importance in the formation of a

colonial subject position” (2). In a psychoanalytic reading of Said’s categories of manifest and latent Orientalism, Yegenoglu argues that even as he differentiates between the stated and the unstated dimensions of Orientalist discourse, he is unable to show an “inextricable link between the process of understanding, of knowing the other cultures, and the unconscious and sexual dimensions involved in this process” (25). For Yegenoglu, the notions of manifest/latent Orientalism are significant in that they enable a conception of variegated levels of discourse, each related to the other in complex ways. But without a proper theorisation of the unconscious, she argues, Said’s analyses of the images of women and representations of sexuality remain on the level of manifest Orientalism, and make them a sub-domain of Orientalist discourse. She argues:

representations of the Orient are interwoven by sexual imageries, unconscious fantasies, desires, fears, and dreams. In other words, the question of sexuality cannot be treated as a regional one, it governs and structures the subject’s every relation with the other. (26)

Thus the question of gender and sexuality, for Yegenoglu, must be read through the “double articulation” of Orientalist discourse—it requires simultaneous attention to fantasy and the historical, to desire and power. This insight is particularly relevant to my study of Mosteghanemi’s novels because it is only through a study of the fantasy structures of her novels, alongside the historical dimension, that one can arrive at a representation of Algeria’s past and present that can account for the question of gender.

Notably, the relegation of the questions of gender and sexuality to secondary importance is also seen in other aspects of Said’s *Orientalism*. His readings concentrate, for the most part, on works by male authors. Moreover, by focusing only on the construction of the Orient in European discourse, and not the representation of Europe in the production of knowledge in non-European cultures, Said fails to explore the

Oriental side of the Orient-Occident binary. His work therefore unconsciously reproduces the Orientalist paradigm of the West as the agentive, masculine element, and the East as the passive, feminine aspect. Said may have been able to bring to light the hierarchies of the discursive production of the Orient, but also ended up reproducing those very categories elsewhere.

In the context of Orientalist discourse, Said's contrapuntal reading sets itself the task of taking into account both imperialism and resistance to it. In contrast to discourses that produce the Orient as a negative reflection of the West, a contrapuntal reading works "with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 51). It does this by including in the reading what was once "forcibly excluded" (67) from the text, emphasizing the disjunctions (146) rather than overlooking them. This approach is developed on the basic assumption that identity is relational and cannot exist without projecting others.

In contrast to Fanon's vision of violent decolonisation, Said offers a more integrative vision. A contrapuntal perspective looks at Western and non-Western experiences as belonging together through the historical experience of imperialism. For Said, "whereas the whole of a culture is a disjunct one, many important sectors of it can be apprehended as working *contrapuntally* together" (194). Moreover, the contrapuntal reading does not negate or replace the canonical reading. Rather it sets itself up as a counter-narrative running alongside the traditional reading. The concept of contrapuntal reading is based on Western musical theory, whereby one melody co-exists with another, and the two are intertwined, each pursuing its own direction but at the same time influencing and being influenced by the other. The relationship between the two narrative lines is at times complementary and at times contradictory—these tensions and

overlaps create a rich, polyphonic aesthetic experience as the mind follows one train of ideas, and now the other. In the process, this polyphony is able to generate a substantive and complex representation of both the effectivity and failures of colonial discourse.

The theorisation of a “multivocal” notion of history notwithstanding, Said’s notion of “contrapuntal reading” remains problematic in many respects. Even as Said calls for a new integrative approach to the study of colonialism, he does not make explicit the location from which he is able to authorise such a reading. This third place remains neutral, and the politics that defines this position, undefined. As L. H. M. Ling argues, “[Said] never theorised about the relations between these contrapuntal worlds, memories, states of being, and their legacies. He left them simply resonating, like Bach’s disjunctive chords, each equal to and confronting the other” (139). The *place* from where a contrapuntal reading may be made remains untheorised in terms of gender, and once again returns to the universal categories of the patriarchal, colonialist discourse of the universal. In the context of Mosteghanemi’s work, a contrapuntal reading provides a suitable structure for analysing the life and times of her two main characters, Khaled and Ahlam. At the same time, I argue, she also problematises the *place* of the contrapuntal representation through the author’s gender-shifting narrative voice, moving from a contrapuntal, or polyphonic, reading to a kaleidoscopic one.

The difficulties in theorising the relation between the cultures of the coloniser and the colonised are taken up also by Homi Bhabha in his discussion of the concept of cultural difference. Cultural difference, Bhabha argues, must be understood as “a form of social contradiction or antagonism that has to be negotiated rather than sublated” (*Location of Culture*, 162). Even though the approaches adopted by Fanon and Said seem divergent, they are both instances of an attempt to sublimate difference rather than negotiate it—Fanon’s “mutually exclusive sectors” (*Wretched*, 4-5) are sublated through

the revolutionary decolonisation, while Said attempts a more integrative approach that reads disjunctive groups contrapuntally, from a place that is somehow outside the antagonism itself. For Bhabha, postcolonial theory must not content itself with just making visible the rationale of political discrimination at work in orientalist discourse. Rather, it must be able to connect disjunctive sites through the notion of “articulation,” which does not claim to surmount the incommensurable meanings and judgements that are produced through the encounter of colonialism (*Nation and Narration*, 162).

Even as Mosteghanemi’s writing may be read through a contrapuntal method, she is reluctant to stabilise the authorial voice, and shifts between different gendered perspectives. Drawing on Bhabha’s notion of cultural difference, I argue that her novels may be understood as, first, contrapuntal, or polyphonic, articulations of postcolonial Algeria that, second, refuse to sublate their difference into a homogenised narrative of the national past, and are, instead, in effect, kaleidoscopic. Mosteghanemi’s work reveals the complexities that make up each of these disjunctive, gendered positions.

In the course of this review of postcolonial theory, I have thus far argued that the theoretical frameworks of both Fanon and Said have, for the most part, given the problematic of gender only secondary consideration. While feminists may have subjected postcolonial theory to rigorous criticism, the interaction between these two theoretical orientations has been mutually critical. Particularly, from the 1980s onwards, a number of feminists have drawn on postcolonial theory to show the deeply Eurocentric and Orientalist biases in the theoretical assumptions and research agendas, as well as styles of interpretation, that were prevalent in Western feminist activist and academic work. For instance, Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued that a latent ethnocentrism prevails in writing about women in the Third World. This is most acutely visible in the virtually normalised analysis of sexual difference in the form of a cross-

culturally monolithic notion of patriarchy that produces a reductive notion of “Third World Difference”:

that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. And it is in the production of this ‘Third World Difference’ that Western feminisms appropriate and ‘colonize’ the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries. (335)

Making a similar observation, Abu-Lughod notes that the contemporary feminist in the countries of the Middle East is caught between, on the one hand, being labelled as “Western” by Islamists and nationalists, while, on the other, a Euro-American context that takes her to be “not quite feminist” (*Remaking Women*, 22). In an attempt to dismantle both these positions, Abu-Lughod calls for a renewed attention to the specificities of women’s experience in societies in the Middle East, through an approach that does not reduce them to specific instances of an abstract notion of patriarchy. In a theoretical resolution that attempts to retain the specificities of various non-Western social formations, even as it engages with the forces of colonial modernity, Abu-Lughod argues that the forms of patriarchal domination and resistance must be understood as “rooted in sets of ideas about politics, law, rights, personhood, and community that are part of a modernity that are both related to Europe and developed in particular ways in the Middle East” (22). More recent feminist work explores the gendered exploitation of women within the system of global capitalism, which transcends national boundaries and has serious implications for traditional concepts of nationhood (Spivak, “Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace,” 342-343). New approaches such as “transnational feminism” (Tambe 1-5), which simultaneously critique and extend theories of gender, race and

nationhood, have attempted to find creative new ways to make visible the structural blind-spots that characterise each of these frameworks when taken in isolation.

Like many other postcolonial feminist theorists, Gayatri Spivak has tried to draw attention to the effect of the “epistemic violence” of colonialism. Writing against the grain of critics like Fanon, Said, and even Bhabha, Spivak argues that such has been the epistemic violence of colonialism that it becomes difficult to talk of de-colonisation, and even more so when one turns to the question of gender: “both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 287). To apply this understanding to Mosteghanemi’s novels, we must avoid the temptation to read back from the identity of the author to argue that her writing represents a minority (women’s) history. I argue instead that Mosteghanemi’s writing is not an attempt to “give voice” to the Algerian woman. Rather, she makes an exploration of the historical conditions that create the structural constraints through which the silence of subaltern women is ensured. Mosteghanemi’s writing tries to bring to light, on one hand, the history of repression, and on the other, the ideological dissimulation that produces the authorised histories of the Algerian national past. Often elements of this history slip below the surface, out of recollection, and out of the archive. It is the task of the historian/critic to read these absences in and through the manifest text of the present. This is exactly what Mosteghanemi does. Hers is a gendered kaleidoscopic reading that looks at a history of oppression that produces the silences of the present.

Thus far, we have firmly established women’s voices not as an individual or subjective representation, but as a moment of collective, historical, memory. A

preoccupation with a gendered vision of history or national values gives rise to questions about the transmission of memory across identities and generational boundaries. Novels and literary analyses of ideas of history, memory and their legacies offer a space in which the different transmission of gendered memories and identities can be represented. This argument is one of the foundations of the present study.

The feminist critique of nationalism and postcolonial theory must be extended in the case of Algeria through a rethinking of the status of the War of Independence. Mosteghanemi's novels attempt this by rendering the war as a traumatic moment in Algerian history. For her, the legacy of the war is far more complex than a nation winning back its freedom. It is an event that leaves festering wounds in the psyches of those who were touched by it, both directly and indirectly. The shadow of the war extends into the present. And it makes itself felt not just as the burden of the past, but as a deeply fissured present constituted of a multiplicity of narratives that intersect and overlap without resolving themselves into a grand narrative, a kaleidoscope of trauma, memory and culture.

The Kaleidoscope of Trauma, Memory and Culture

Suggesting an affinity between the domains of feminist theory and trauma studies, Hirsch and Smith state that "both presuppose that the present is defined by a past that is constructed and contested. Both fields assume that we do not study the past merely for its own sake; rather, we do so to meet the needs of the present" (226). Demonstrating parallels between feminist studies and memory studies and the ways in which they both draw simultaneously on the past and the present, they assert: "what we know about the past, and thus our understanding of the present, is shaped by the voices that speak to us out of history" (226). Connecting history with feminist theory and

trauma studies provides a better understanding of Mosteghanemi's novels as a representation of the aftermath of the Algerian war as a gendered, collective remembering of trauma.

Trauma studies emerged as a field of study in academia in the early 1990s, with the ground-breaking work of the likes of Judith Herman, Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth. Drawing on the critical-theoretical tools of psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, the work in this early moment in trauma studies took as its starting point the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) provided by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. Anne Whitehead suggests, "The formal recognition of PTSD was the result of sustained political campaigning by Vietnam veterans, who organised agitation groups against the continuation of the war" (*Trauma Fiction*, 4). A term initially applied only to those suffering from symptoms directly related to their experience of the horrors of war, it has since been broadened to include witnesses and secondary victims as well. As a consequence of sustained work by feminist and human rights activists, this notion of trauma has also become a frame through which to understand cases of domestic abuse, political persecution and torture.

However, over the years, the field of trauma studies has had to account theoretically for wide variations in the experiences that have come to be grouped under the name of trauma. Whitehead asserts in her theoretical work, *Trauma Fiction*, that

The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered. This raises, in turn, the related issues of politics, ethics and aesthetics. (3)

I argue that Mosteghanemi's novels problematize this binary of memory by drawing attention to the social dimension of forgetting. While Whitehead foregrounds

the ethical dimensions of the question, Mosteghanemi emphasizes its social aspects. In doing this, I argue, Mosteghanemi accomplishes a significant conceptual shift: while trauma theorists tend to frame the question of remembrance-forgetting as an ontological and ethical problem, Mosteghanemi instead sees it as a historical and political question.

Trauma studies today can be understood to have developed along two related but clearly distinct trajectories. While some theorists have focused on the clinical and therapeutic aspects of trauma, others have approached the question through literary theory and are concerned with the philosophical status of the notion of trauma. Judith Herman's work was instrumental in the attempt to expand the definition of trauma beyond PTSD, as she attempted to theorise forms of violence such as rape, domestic abuse, child abuse, and political violence and incarceration under the term "complex PTSD". Drawing on a wide range of sources—including survivors' testimonies, prison diaries, archival material, literary works—Herman attempts to situate individual experience within a social context, characterised by structural inequalities and forms of violence. Making a provocative argument, she draws parallels between combat and rape as the public and private social rites through which adolescents are initiated into "coercive violence at the foundation of adult society" (61). Psychological trauma is characterised by an experience of disempowerment and disconnection from others. Consequently, recovery means that "the victim must be helped to speak the horrifying truth of her past—to speak of the unspeakable" (179). Herman's work is particularly significant in that it not only draws attention to the everyday and subtle forms of violence experienced by those facing abuse, it also foregrounds the long-term implications of such trauma, rather than the drama of a singular event. This makes her insights into violence particularly pertinent to my analysis of Mosteghanemi's explorations of the breadth of the traumatic effects of the drawn-out Algerian war of

liberation. Similarly, Felman's work in trauma studies deals with the European experience of the Holocaust and gives centrality to questions of testimony, witnessing and recovery. In an important intervention, she argues for a new, constructive overlap between the domains of pedagogic practice and clinical research in trauma (13).

Elaine Scarry attempts to ground a theoretical framework through the concept of pain, which encompasses its philosophical, political, aesthetic and therapeutic aspects. According to Scarry "intense pain is world-destroying" (9), with the consequence that people, or indeed whole nations of people who undergo extreme suffering such as war and torture, are left with a significant handicap which influences their ability to understand the world and engage in meaningful social relationships. Concerned with the question of trauma and recovery, Scarry explores the relationship between torture and war, and art as a literary representation of pain. She recognises the relation between physical pain and imagining, observing that "the only state that is as anomalous as pain is the imagination" (162) and that "pain and imagining are the 'framing events' within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur; thus, between the two extremes can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche" (165).

The experience of pain is also central to Mosteghanemi's novels. Her novels use "framing events" to preserve memory and to reflect its effects. Pain and imagination as represented in art are both used by Mosteghanemi as tools to show the impact of memory on the individual imagination and to reflect the past in the present time. According to Scarry, all made objects (including creative writing and artistic paintings) are to be seen as both a site of projection and a site of reciprocation (281). It is as though the embodied pain and suffering in the human being must be exorcised by inventing another container and expending great physical and mental effort in order to transfer that pain into another specially created external object. Mosteghanemi's novels,

however, suggest a more complex, and less optimistic, understanding of the role of art in recovering from trauma. For while both her protagonists are artists (Khaled a painter and Ahlam a writer) attempting to recover through their art, they meet different outcomes. While Ahlam, as Scarry suggests, is able to mediate her traumatic experience through her writing, Khaled meets with no such success. He cannot but try repeatedly to return to the more perfect past through his paintings of the bridges of Constantine, but is condemned each time to fail. Khaled paints obsessively, trying to return to his traumatic break and represent it in his art. But it does not help him, as he is caught up in a symptomatic repetition that only stages the event in his mind again and again, without offering him a way through it. Mosteghanemi thus problematises Scarry's account of the relation between trauma and recovery by showing the process as haunted by the possibility of failure.

Despite Herman's critique of Freud's theory of hysteria and Oedipal trauma, Felman and Scarry have productively drawn upon Freudian concepts of repression and symptom. Other theorists of trauma, such as Cathy Caruth and Linda Belau, have also extended Freud's insights into the complex processes of subject formation in a slightly different direction. Caruth has combined aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis and poststructuralist literary theory to develop important insights into the relation of trauma to language and memory. Caruth makes the case for literature as a domain that can open up new theoretical insights for trauma studies: "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, (indeed) at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 3).

The Freudian concept of latency is central to Caruth's understanding of traumatic experience. She draws attention to Freud's description of a road accident, where a person escapes seemingly unhurt, only to experience the "return" of the traumatic memory at a later time. This "belatedness" of experience, according to Caruth, provides a description of the experience and memory of trauma. For her, trauma is something that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). This provides an understanding of the experience of many trauma survivors, where memory of a traumatic event is lost over time but returns in the form of symptoms in language. In so far as the traumatic experience is one that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, it "does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility" (6). This "returns" in the form of an uncanny repetition of the events for the survivor long after they have occurred. The traumatic experience thus suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct experience of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, and immediacy may take the form of belatedness (92).

This marks Caruth's most significant theoretical departure, as she produces a sustained critique of the notions of temporality and reference to reality in narratives of trauma. The experience of belatedness produces a peculiar temporal structure whereby trauma is accessible only through its later emergence as symptoms in repetitive narrative structures. What would seem in trauma narratives to be an obsessive preoccupation with returning to the fateful event must now be understood as the very practice through which the sufferer attempts to incorporate the incomprehensibility of the event into the symbolic network of language. Furthermore, in so far as the trauma narrative is a symptom, the repeated account of the event cannot be simplistically taken

as true testimony of the event itself. Rather, the referential ability of signifiers is tied up with trauma in complicated ways. They bear an “indirect relation” that does not deny or eliminate the possibility of reference but insists, precisely, on the inescapability of its belated impact (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7). Thus, on one hand, the signifier is not tied to the signified in the real world; on the other, its signification of meaning is always a retroactive process.

As in the work of Herman, the ethics of bearing witness is an important concern for Caruth, but with a different emphasis. While both have similar understandings of the analyst-analysand relation in psychoanalysis as well as other forms of psychological therapy, Caruth complicates Herman’s notion significantly. Where Herman argues about the therapist as one with whom the survivor can establish an open relationship, Caruth sees this as a complex two-way process, in which it is important to “read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another” (8). Here, the encounter is between two traumatised subjects, rather than between a subject of trauma and another who can presumably help them recover, just as Khaled revisits and attempts to rework his own trauma, when viewing Ahlam through the filter of his own traumatic experience of war.

Caruth’s reworked concepts of latency and repetition of traumatic experience are particularly useful in understanding Khaled. A painter, he attempts to recover from his traumatic experience as a rebel fighter in the Algerian war through his art. However, as Caruth has shown, forgetting is not so simple. As Mosteghanemi reveals, his very attempt to make a break from his traumatic experience is marked by the symptoms of latency and repetition. Transfixed by the site of his trauma, it is really through his explorations in art that the war comes to be articulated *as* a break as such. Khaled’s first

meeting with Ahlam in his Paris gallery offers a useful framework for reflecting on the role of Ahlam in *Memory in the Flesh*. Khaled sees Ahlam as a filter, which is strongly coloured by the revolutionary struggle of Algeria's recent history. When he meets Ahlam in Paris, he tries to connect her with another time and place and so reveals the inherent latency of his traumatic and historical experience. In this sense Mosteghanemi goes beyond the Freudian notion of latency and repetition that Caruth draws upon. For Caruth, traumatic repetition is associated with specific cues of time and place that seem to be set off by the subject's return to the traumatic experience, as if transfixed by it. In Mosteghanemi's account of Khaled's first encounter with Ahlam, however, it is specifically bodily features—the presence of the person of Si Taher in Ahlam—that sets off his mental associations with the liberation war. Thus, through Mosteghanemi, we may add the idea of “person” to Caruth's “place” and “time” as triggers of traumatic repetition. This distinctive example of traumatic repetition will reveal its full import when the question of trauma and collective memory are taken up further in the following chapters. For now, an important theoretical question emerges from this idea of a person as indelibly linked to another's traumatic repetition: if there is an inter-subjective dimension to an individual's latent repetition, is it possible to talk of a singular, undifferentiated notion of collective trauma? In Mosteghanemi's view, I argue, it is not.

Drawing again on Freud's discussion of the death drive, Caruth notes a “a deeply disturbing insight into the enigmatic relation between trauma and survival: the fact that, for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, can be a crisis” (*Unclaimed Experience*, 9). The connection between trauma and survival is depicted in *Memory in the Flesh* when Khaled describes his depression and feelings about his

mutilated arm: “I was not sufficiently recovered to start on a new life. I was living in Tunis as a son of that country and a foreigner at the same time. I was a man rejected both by life and by death” (35). Khaled’s survival itself can be seen as a crisis, as he originally joined the war of independence hoping to die and become a martyr but was refused this reality.

The question of memory that thus seems inseparable from that of trauma cannot be understood as a subjective experience of crisis and recovery. Maurice Halbwachs (69) points out that there is no such thing as a purely individual and personal memory, except perhaps in dreams. This is because people live together in groups, and the social nature of human experience necessarily defines peoples’ perception of the world. In fact, Halbwachs maintains that “when a member of the group perceives an object, he gives it a name and arranges it into a specific category. In other words, he conforms to the group’s conventions, which supply his thought as they supply the thought of others” (168).

Later studies on the social nature of memory and history have built upon the foundations forged by Halbwachs, bringing into the debate some useful methods and insights from sociology and anthropology (Halbwachs 3). Michael Rossington maintains that *collective memory* is something that is deliberately created and nurtured: “ways of remembering and giving significance to what is remembered are... fostered and shared by family, religion, class, the media and other sources of the creation of group identities, referred to by Pierre Bourdieu as ‘habitus’ or ‘systems of dispositions’” (134). Rossington’s reference to Bourdieu’s work on social distinctions and the defining of taste highlights how important cultural practices are not just for the retention of memories but as a locus for their creation and interpretation through the passage of time.

The question of trauma further complicates this understanding of collective memory. There are obvious implications for memory when a group is forcibly broken up or destroyed, since the disappearance of a social context, and of the people who shaped that context and all that was within it, removes not only the memories that exist in relation to that time and place, but also the conceptual terms for talking about it and understanding it. Moreover, as we have seen with Caruth, traumatic memories do not directly represent the historical event of such destruction, but rather come to be inscribed in complex ways that haunt its subjects, just as Khaled is haunted.

Reaching somewhat different conclusions from Halbwachs, Pierre Nora takes up the question of French national memory. According to Nora, there are “realms of memory” (*les lieux de mémoire*) where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” in small, isolated pockets rather than in an authentic social milieu. Nora laments the so-called acceleration of history and claims that modern film and media, and the printed works of academic historians, have separated people from their own authentic past, highlighting a “brutal realization of the difference between real memory—social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past” (8). This leads to the important conclusion that in modern times “memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition” (8).

The gap between history and memory—between universalist claims of history, and the memories of those who bear its burdens—has been a central concern for postcolonial theorists. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens argue that “trauma studies’ stated commitment to the promotion of cross-cultural ethical engagement is not borne out by the founding texts of the field (including Caruth’s own work), which are almost

exclusively concerned with traumatic experiences of white Westerners and solely employ critical methodologies emanating from a Euro-American context” (2). In doing so the field of trauma studies risks marginalising non-Western traumatic events, their narrative memories, as well as the theoretical frameworks that can make them visible.

They argue for the significance of postcolonial theory for trauma studies’ understanding of collective memory by asserting that “colonial trauma is a collective experience” (Craps & Buelens 4). Irene Visser further argues that the historical “centrality of PTSD in western trauma models is particularly problematic” (272). In much aid and activist literature, the theoretical paradigm of PTSD has come to be applied uncritically to conflicts all around the world, often with little regard for the various regional and ethnic dimensions that constitute these conflicts and the effects on all those involved in them.

Trauma theory’s theoretical preoccupation with Freudian psychoanalysis leads to an ahistorical, structural trauma and melancholia, as well as a Euro-centric insistence on formal criteria of narrative rupture and aporia (Visser 277). According to Visser, the abiding theoretical concern for repetition and retelling should be seen instead in the light of early dominance of the Holocaust as a subject of research for trauma studies. The question of “unsayability” that characterises the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist modes of interpretation sits “ill at ease” with postcolonial theory’s concern with historical, political and cultural factors (273).

While Caruth has been justifiably subjected to extensive critique by theorists of colonial trauma, her critique of traumatic speech, language and reference nevertheless remains significant. It even finds a distant echo in Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” For where Caruth draws attention to the belatedness of traumatic speech (and thus a problematic of memory and event), Spivak must contend with the fact that the speech of

the subaltern is always already silenced, repressed. This repressed subaltern speech can only be “recovered” as a theoretical figure that marks the historical impossibility of the subaltern being able to speak—the subaltern gestures towards that which cannot be said in a specific historical formation, and the structure of its impossibility, rather than arriving at what she presumably *really* wants to say. In this sense, it is the belatedness of traumatic speech that opens up the space where Spivak’s theorisation of subaltern historiography may come to operate.

Mosteghanemi’s novels, too, do not claim to give a voice to the authentic subaltern. Rather, they too attempt to “recover” the Algerian woman as a figure that marks the historical impossibility of the subaltern’s ability to speak. Rather than speak as an advocate of the “silenced” Algerian woman, Mosteghanemi tries to show the particular historical context within which it is impossible for this “Algerian woman” to “speak” in postcolonial Algeria. In other words, she offers a description of the pernicious effects of patriarchy in a specifically post-revolutionary, postcolonial context. Even as her novels present an evocative and troubling picture of the trauma of the Algerian freedom struggle, it would be an act of misrepresentation to read this as either her attempt to “bear witness” to the traumas of Algerian national memory, or to demand the same of the reader from the position of abject victim. Rather, I argue, Mosteghanemi’s work is acutely conscious of the residual Orientalism that characterises such narratives. The question of trauma, in her novels, cannot but be refracted through the experience of colonial trauma and postcolonial recovery. This entails a more complex understanding of the relationship between individual and collective trauma, and between survival and forgetting. In doing this, her work stands as an implicit critique of the universalist narrative of trauma and recovery, that attempts to obscure its foundations in the Western experiences of PTSD and the Holocaust that constitutively

shape its epistemological, political and ethical imperatives. Mosteghanemi's work thus extends the cultural repertoire of trauma studies through her treatment of the questions of trauma and memory. Her work draws on a non-Western milieu of cultural symbolism, literary technique and subjective experience in ways that challenge the established theoretical paradigms of memory and trauma studies. Her novels are imbued with the deep symbolisms of Algerian Arab Islamic culture—so much so her narrative style itself is influenced by Islamic mosaic art. Moreover, they take up the question of trauma at a collective level, and the differing strategies of coping with trauma (as depicted through Khaled and Ahlam) are not just personal but collective. The question of recovery from trauma is always a collective, national question that must come to terms with the irreducible differences of the multifarious effects of trauma on the nation..

Interweaving trauma and collective memory, I draw on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin to foreground Mosteghanemi's specific strategy of meta-narrative which I designate as a "polyphonic layering" that critiques the prevalent discourse in modern Algerian Arabophone literature, with its tendency to allegorise the nation in the figure of the woman. In terms of polyphonic layering, even as Mosteghanemi exposes patriarchal impulses behind the symbolisation of nation as woman, she does not altogether reject this allegorical representation, but rather explores its dynamics from the stance of a critical, yet engaged observer, for the purposes of forming an idea of the history of the nation as an act of "remaking" that is oriented towards thinking through the present, rather than a static, and nostalgic, notion of nation as "remembrance". While a critical move from a kaleidoscopic theory to one of polyphony may seem incongruous, this is in fact not the case because, similar to a kaleidoscope, polyphony

necessarily has many points of convergence that can be said to flow out of a kaleidoscopic configuration.

This polyphonic layering occurs in Mosteghanemi's novels through the dual narration of the protagonists Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat which converge at times as points of intersection, as well as more often dispersing into multiple layers of discourse. For instance, Mosteghanemi's critique of gendered social relations is overlaid with the utopian imagery of homeland and motherhood, while the gendered imagination of the nation is transformed through an access to the repressed domain of folk memories that subsists underneath the dominant narrative of national unity and progress. This contrast of remembrance and remaking is overlaid with a sustained engagement with the questions of nation, community, trauma, as well as the temporality of past, present and future in ways that speak to a collective memory that is composed of newer, multivalent views. Through an extended critique of the polyphonic discourse that forms this nationalist allegorising and gendering of woman as nation, I access Mosteghanemi's call for a remaking of the nation in the present, rather than a remembrance of an idealized past.

The 1980s and 1990s saw what Rossington and Whitehead have called a "memory boom" (6), which arose out of what they describe as "many and various" factors occurring in the mid- to late-twentieth century. A main motivator for this development was attempts to conceptualise the shocking events and aftermath of the Holocaust, which has notably produced literature that can be read as polyphony. Whitehead attempts to open up a new direction of research into culture that is sensitive to the critique of postcolonial theorists. In a move that particularises universalist claims of history and memory, she argues that the prevalent theoretical concerns of memory studies must be situated within the long history of the term "memory" in European

thought. By doing this, she argues that one may locate “the current memory boom as simply the latest of a series of preoccupations with memory which have punctuated Western culture” (*Memory*, 3). Whitehead raises the important issue of “mislaying a Western construct (trauma studies itself) onto the likely radically different experience of suffering and oppression known to African postcolonial subjects” (Craps & Buelens 5).

Mosteghanemi’s work, I argue, offers a way to go beyond the Eurocentric theoretical concerns and interpretative resources that are presently available in the study of trauma and memory. Mosteghanemi’s novels are a polyphonic and kaleidoscopic critique of not only the paradigm of reference, but also the trajectory of recovery and cure that Western trauma theory establishes for the relation between trauma and text. This is achieved through a complex rendering of traumatised subjects in her novels. As already noted, in many ways her characters seem to be the typical survivors of traumatic experience. They show the typical symptoms of latency and repetition, and seem to turn to art as a form of mourning and recovery. However, this citation of the Western discourse on trauma is done in a conscious, reflexive way. In what stands as her critique of Western trauma narratives, Mosteghanemi deftly plots the notions of latency, repetition and art as recovery on the character of Khaled. However, for Mosteghanemi, Khaled is a figure of the failed attempts to recover from trauma, trapped in repetition with no exit. On the contrary, Ahlam is able to find a way through her trauma. Only she is successful in achieving a critical distance by essentially making herself the subject of exploration in her writing, and therefore is able to use art productively to overcome the trauma of Algerian history.

This difference may be understood through Caruth’s insightful teasing out of the differences between traumatic and ordinary memory. Caruth states that “in contrast to narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable.

Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody... it is a solitary activity. In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function... as an appeal for help and reconnection” (“Introduction,” 163). While in the former, memory is a solitary reliving of the traumatic event, in the latter the subject acknowledges the fact of language as a social act, and attempts a recovery by trying to provide a representation of the trauma in the social resources of language, thus opening up to the possibility of being reintegrated into the social. While the former is fixated by the break instituted by the war in the experience of temporality, the latter is able to come to terms with the cut that traumatic past introduces in the present. In Mosteghanemi’s novels, I argue, Khaled and Ahlam represent these two, polyphonic trajectories of relating with the trauma of the freedom struggle.

Mosteghanemi’s characters thus provide a literary expression of Caruth’s theoretical insight into the different forms of memory. At the same time, she extends Caruth’s concept by producing a specifically gendered difference between the two modes of memory. In effect, Mosteghanemi argues that gender is a key factor in the shaping of memory. While Khaled presents art as a way to immortalise his beloved, Ahlam presents it as a means to get rid of those who burden her life. This is Mosteghanemi’s postcolonial gendered critique of the Algerian national memory of the liberation struggle as a “historical break” that separates the colonial from the postcolonial. The impossible resolution of the crises and tensions of the two characters is a metaphor of the Algerian political present, of the failed repetition of a decisive trauma of the Algerian war that splits time into a *before* and an *after*. Mosteghanemi’s novels, then, are a work of memory “not as the continuation of the past that has been, but as the past that makes sense for the present” (Cubitt 27).

Throughout this study, I take up three metaphors in Mosteghanemi's novels, the veil, kaleidoscope and bridge, that also function symbolically at times, arguing that these become particularly significant in reading her postcolonial feminist critique of trauma and national memory. Through these metaphors and symbols, I additionally treat the concern of the traumatized body. Developed at length through the course of the two novels, these metaphors and symbols problematise the idea of a singular national memory in various ways. In an early study on Berber, Bedouin and Islamic influences in Algerian cultural life, Bourdieu argues that Algerian society must be understood as structured like a "kaleidoscopic mechanism." A society that presents contradictory aspects of diversity and uniformity, of unity and multiplicity, it is so structured that each group draws from a common cultural heritage even as it gives itself a distinctive personality by stressing certain aspects of that heritage (Bourdieu 93-94). This understanding of Algerian society is also evident in the way the collective memory of the Algerian freedom struggle is constructed. Even as the traumatic experience of the war invariably marked everyone who came in contact with it, the effects were equally diverse; and the unity of Algerian collective memory is internally divided into a multiplicity of particular differences. Mosteghanemi, I argue, extends Bourdieu's notion of the "kaleidoscopic" mechanism by developing a kaleidoscopic narrative technique through which she represents Algeria's traumatic colonial and postcolonial history. Going beyond Said's contrapuntal mode of representation, Mosteghanemi's narrative technique follows Spivak in pointing out the silences that mark the place of repressed subaltern speech, thus providing a gendered perspective of postcoloniality. Her writing also gives central importance to the belated experience of trauma as well as the constitutive incommensurability of gendered differences within it. The kaleidoscope thus represents Mosteghanemi's deep scepticism of the masculinist project of

nationalism, which disavows the difference that lies at the heart of the project of an organic, homogenous national community.

Gesturing towards this deep schism in the construction of Algerian national identity, Mosteghanemi holds the narrative in a tension, where a conventional love relationship between Ahlam and Khaled is impossible, as is a cathartic fit of hate and permanent separation. This unequal pair are bound by ties of history, trauma, memory and identity. They embody the complexity and ongoing crisis of modern Algeria with all the pain and unresolved trauma that goes with it.

Khaled, having lost an arm in the Algerian war, lives in Paris as a painter. Caught up in the traumatic past, his repertoire consists of countless images of the bridges of his native Constantine. The metaphor of the bridge operates on two levels: first, as a mark of Khaled's traumatic repetition, and then as a metaphor of exile. The bridges of Constantine are doubly articulated, as structures of metonymy and metaphor. Khaled's obsession with painting the bridges, on one hand, happens almost in spite of himself. It depicts the subject of trauma as caught up in a practice of representation that is metonymic and repetitive in structure. Khaled, in his obsession, is subjected to the repetition of his trauma not because he "wants" it, but because he is not able to come to terms with its constitutive place in constructing his symbolic world. However, his trauma is also the figure that belies a complex metaphorical structure, condensing a whole mosaic of different fragments and snippets of memory garnered from various characters in the books, and from myths, history and literary works external to the story of Khaled and Ahlam's difficult encounter. The idea of exile may be understood through Edward Soja's notion of "thirdspace," which brings to light the effect of spatio-temporal dislocation that constitutes the "place" of the exile, and enables a "recombinatorial and radically open perspective" through a critical strategy of "thirthing-

as-Othering” (5). Ultimately, as I will show, Mosteghanemi’s narratives recommend this third space, represented through the metaphor of the bridge, as the place of healing, if not for Khaled, for Algeria itself.

Finally, the body is an important site on which various conceptions of nation and community have come to be inscribed. On one hand, Khaled’s body is the mutilated remainder of a nation built on the glory of struggle, sacrifice and national pride. On the other, the veil, as in the work of Lazreg, highlights the female body as the object of male desire, caught up in a play of covering and uncovering that drew the complicity of both colonialist and Islamic male dominance. The figure of the veil is in need of critique in contemporary cultural discourse, as a choice of object for projects of “modern secularism” as well as “authentic tradition.” So much so, the figure of the veil has even escaped the gaze of Fanon, the most revolutionary of postcolonial theorists. In Fanon’s comments, quoted earlier, about the “aura of rape” surrounding colonisation, Fanon presumably attempts to show the Orientalist fantasy that underpins the sexual violence of the European man on the colonised woman, but simultaneously invokes what Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias note as the widespread topos of a country’s geographical territory being equated with a woman’s body (Olaussen 108).

The major themes of the two novels—loss, love of the homeland, love between men and women—remain unresolved, as the characters make their uncomfortable compromises. Partners are chosen more out of convenience than out of love, and the two main characters move from Europe to Algeria and back, never sure where they really belong. The narrative line of each novel is elliptical and ambivalent, mixing dreams, memories, desires and art in a stream of consciousness that the reader recognises as being both flawed and biased. Neither of the narrators is reliable, and yet they bear the authentic scars of the past on their bodies and in their minds, finding

expression for their struggles mainly in cultural production, one in painting and the other in writing. The truth, Mosteghanemi seems to say, is complicated, and it is most clearly evident in the way that the characters themselves embody the past. Cultural production provides the only bridge out of a traumatic history, even though the individuals in the novels are destined to never quite understand the value and meaning in each other's work. This lack of understanding stems from the fact that these characters reflect two different gendered perspectives.

Mosteghanemi's work shows that it is only by taking hold of opposite perspectives simultaneously that the contradictory aspects of the past can be represented. Ahlam has sad and bitter memories in relation to her father, whom she experienced mostly as absent and as a heroic ideal, while Khaled experienced the man as a hero and a martyr. Both suffer from these memories of the past, but in different, gendered ways. In the contrapuntal interplay of male and female, art and literature, past and present, and many other binary pairings, a new, polyphonic, melody is constructed. From this postmodern collage of partially discordant and partially overlapping theories, a new, multivalent, kaleidoscopic Algerian collective identity is being formed.

My kaleidoscopic mode of reading is most useful in understanding how Mosteghanemi articulates her critique of Eurocentric notions of trauma and collective memory, specifically from a gendered perspective. Her deployment of Western theoretical frameworks and literary forms in a seemingly haphazard and piecemeal manner thus selectively accepts the localised value of various critical insights, but refuses the burdens of its Orientalist epistemological and ideological project. At the same time, Mosteghanemi's kaleidoscopic mode of narrative is also a critique of the underlying patriarchal attitudes that have informed earlier postcolonial theories.

As a woman writer in Arabic, Mosteghanemi provides a feminist critique of Algerian national memory. This poses new and difficult political, ethical and, most importantly, aesthetic questions, that have until now been more or less invisible in the canon of Algerian literature and criticism. It opens up new theoretical possibilities in the reading of postcolonial literature, which are not premised on reified categories of the “indigenous” that are, in the last instance, an empty reversal of the binaries that are paradigmatic of Eurocentric thought.

Similar to ancient forms of mosaic art, a kaleidoscope is also a work of art, one that creates changing patterns as the viewer adjusts their perspective, or gaze. While importantly tapping into an ancient Arab form of mosaic art, in constructing a kaleidoscopic narrative, mirrors, perspective, gaze and changing patterns also reveal both refraction and a splitting of views as well as an art of reconfiguring patterns, or, for our purposes, redefined ways of thinking about and defining Algerian culture and history.

Mosteghanemi’s work gives us a vision of an Algeria whose national identity is not held together by a dominant narrative that silences all voices of difference. She opens up the possibility of contemporary Algeria reckoning with its inherited past of revolutionary violence in a way that accepts the multiplicity of experiences and subject positions. This is possible only when the icons and imaginaries of collective national identity become genuinely multivalent in meaning, and are not built on a disavowal of the constitutive difference that marks the formation of any society. Her critique calls for a radical stock-taking of the present that is able to acknowledge its deep-seated patriarchal past and make space for hitherto silenced voices. I argue that the gendered memories of the protagonists, Khaled and Ahlam, in Mosteghanemi’s two novels

present a rich, new, kaleidoscopic narrative of both memory and history in late twentieth century Algeria that gestures towards a new, collective configuration of nation.

Chapter Four

The Kaleidoscope of Gendered Narrative as Healing National Trauma

"I always like to relate important events in my life that then stir another memory."

(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 12)

This chapter seeks to unveil how Mosteghanemi's novels deconstruct national narratives, in ways that a collective process of healing may be facilitated, as Algeria processes its traumatic colonial and revolutionary past. Central to this healing process is the reassessment of traditional gender roles and a rewriting of gender as a social, and historical, construct. Thus this chapter will show how Mosteghanemi rewrites and revises the multi-faceted, fragmented memories and history of Algeria, through gendered perspectives, as her novels' protagonists attempt to retrieve a sense of Algerian identity as a new, collective national memory. In *Memory in the Flesh* and *Chaos of the Senses*, Mosteghanemi is in effect arguing that the significance of these memories and gendered historical experiences are multiple and contested. I argue that the gendered memories of the novels' protagonists, Khaled and Ahlam, present a rich, kaleidoscopic narrative of both memory and history in late-twentieth-century Algeria that gestures towards a new, collective configuration of nation. This chapter focuses specifically on how memories of trauma can constitute both a sense of Algerian identity and nation itself. Mosteghanemi challenges traditional Algerian national narratives and collective memory, thereby actively participating in and, one can even assert, leading her country's healing process.

The two novels both illustrate and problematise gendered ways of dealing with memory. In developing her kaleidoscopic, as well as gendered, narratives, Mosteghanemi's approach towards the process of writing in the Arabic language differentiates her work from other Algerian writers in important ways, as a mechanism

of national healing that reconfigures gender identity within a perpetual state of becoming. For example, Khaled states that “nobody could ignore the power of Arabic language or the impact it had in the hearts and memories of the people” (*MIF*, 17). Against a tendency to turn language into a marker of national identity, Mosteghanemi conceptualises the Arabic language as the site where the nation can undergo a process of collective transformation. As Kaye and Zoubir argue, “languages encode national value” (22). Language is one of the most prominent sites on which the idea of modern nationhood may be built. It offers an open-ended space where multiple perspectives and alternate narratives can be constructed, and where new modes of reflecting the fragmented memories of the nation-in-making may be expressed. Tapping into the cultural resources of mosaic art in Arab culture, Mosteghanemi attempts a kaleidoscopic construction of narrative perspectives and thematic concerns. Every shift in narrative perspective effects a disjuncture that sets off a splitting of perspective with a re-formation of patterns, that enables the reader to view the multiplicity of Algerian society. Through her kaleidoscopic technique, Mosteghanemi interweaves her thematic concerns with trauma, memory, art and nation, in a way that disrupts reified patterns of thinking about these ideas. In an effort to trace the shifting gaze of Mosteghanemi’s kaleidoscopic method, I first take up each of these themes in isolation before synthesising them into a holistic perspective.

One necessarily begins with trauma as representing the fracturing of Algerian culture and history. Drawing on the insights of trauma theory, it is possible to think through the effects of violence on those who were directly involved in it, as well as those who were indirectly affected by it. In Mosteghanemi’s novels, the Algerian War of Independence affects not just those who fought in it, or lived through it—it also shapes the experiences of children and subsequent generations as well. Traumatic

experiences show up as symptoms that are similar to those demonstrated in cases of PTSD: nightmares, flashbacks, depression, an increased sensitivity to cynicism, depersonalization and distinct changes in spirituality or worldview (Visser 272). Consequently, the two novels contain a whole range of characters that have been touched by the war in different ways—as fighters, as families or as passive observers. Mosteghanemi prefers to explore the aspects of active conflict through male characters, while female characters embody other forms of connection with the war.

This gendered contrast can be seen both as another aspect of the kaleidoscopic narrative technique as well as being similar to the postcolonial contrapuntal “reading back” (Mortimer 55) from the point of view of the colonised, proposed as a fruitful and, arguably, less biased way of approaching postcolonial texts. The main feature of Said’s contrapuntal reading is that it captures at least two different perspectives at the same time, and this offers a way of viewing events that defies attempts by observers to reduce historical complexity to the simple formula of victory or defeat, for example, because the perspectives and patterns shift and change, depending on who is focusing the gaze. It is my assertion that the theory of contrapuntal reading can be extended into a theory of kaleidoscopic narrative, in which the positionality of gender is also factored in, a critical move that importantly reconfigures how we read and interpret postcolonial literature.

Critiquing the epistemology of Orientalist thought, Said’s contrapuntal reading gives voice to the voiceless, reinstating the voices of the colonised by exploring the political and ethical aspects of colonialism. As I have discussed in detail in Chapter Two, the contrapuntal reading looks to place the narratives of the coloniser and the colonised in stark juxtaposition, to construct a new understanding of the colonial encounter. I argue that, in contrast, a kaleidoscopic approach opens up a way of

representing discontinuous, fragmentary memories in a gendered paradigm. Unlike Said's binary approach, my kaleidoscopic method enables a creative overwriting of fragmented memories.

Following Butler's suggestion that gender can be understood as a "relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (*Gender Trouble*, 10), I view "gendered memory" as the different ways in which memory becomes a site where gender can be "performed," through a socially constructed differentiation of collective memories and histories. Mosteghanemi achieves the difficult task of simultaneously taking up the questions of gender and colonial violence, without turning the former into a metaphor or a subordinate relation of the latter. Through a constantly shifting kaleidoscopic perspective, she is able to capture the tumultuous complexity of post-independence Algerian society.

Thus Mosteghanemi emphatically rejects the unifying, but ultimately suffocating, constraints of one single postcolonial perspective. The characters instead all delve into the depths of the past, using the unique narrative perspective that variously treats each person's gender, age, geographical location, social position, personal attributes and general disposition. They display a range of evolving perspectives. Mosteghanemi is consistent in her rejection of a unified, singular notion of Algerian history, and prefers to think of the nation's past as several knotted and complicated strands that come together in the present. As the narrator exclaims in *Chaos of the Senses*, "there is never only one truth; it isn't a fixed point. It changes within us and with us" (170). For her, there are only fragmentary images, narratives and experiences through which the idea of Algerian national belonging must be thought through and constructed as a multiplicity of perspectives, none of which are reducible to the other. In a gesture towards the violence that accompanies the construction of national memory,

Khaled asserts at the end of *Memory in the Flesh* that “our own homeland made the events and wrote us up the way it wanted. Were we not after all merely the ink used for writing?” (262). Through these strands of Algerian history, Mosteghanemi foregrounds the conflicts and complicities that frame the articulation of the deepest unresolved questions of Algeria’s collective existence as a nation—namely, the troubled political legacies of the traumatic liberation struggle, and the entrenched inequalities of age, class and gender.

As the stories unfold, there emerges another pattern in the kaleidoscopic narrative in the counterpoint of gendered personal and cultural memories, in which the male and female perspectives pursue different gazes and ways of patterning memory; together with the reader’s input these begin to form a new kind of pattern. This pattern is not something that is experienced by the characters in the novels themselves, at least not for more than a few brief moments of heightened awareness; rather it is something that emerges out of the reading of the novels, as the reader puts together the different fragments of memory and history that are portrayed in the novels. This strategy is further made evident through the author’s rewriting and revising the fragmented memory and history of Algeria, as the characters attempt to retrieve a sense of Algerian identity as a collective national memory. This is in fact one of the cleverest aspects of the two novels, as it reveals how the author engages with the reader from a perspective of postmodern narrative, requiring each reader to bring his or her own experiences, interpretations and personal preferences into play. Just as different individuals can react to the same piece of music in fundamentally different ways—some with great enthusiasm, and others with heartfelt loathing, and many with feelings somewhere along the spectrum between these two extremes—in the case of Mosteghanemi’s novels, interpretations are likely to vary considerably. Indeed, the fact that the novels have

sparked such plentiful and diverse reactions from critics underlines the inherent ambiguities and tensions that are built into the narratives. When Khaled describes his experience of looking into Ahlam's eyes, he says:

I took a last look at you as you shook my hand before leaving. In your eyes there was an invitation to something... There was some *mysterious promise*... In them, there was some kind of exquisite drowning, and perhaps a look of advance apology for all *the traumas* that were going to afflict me later on. (*MIF*, 41)

Mosteghanemi's kaleidoscopic narrative technique here, complete with ellipses and the overlaying of later knowledge onto the simple account of this meeting, causes the reader to see the events described through the biased lens of Khaled's mind. The picture that the readers are given is fragmented, contradictory, and full of overlapping fragments that do not make logical sense. The logical continuities of space and time are broken up—the present seems already to contain within it echoes of the past and premonitions of the future. Moreover, the subject's response to this is highly ambiguous. Be it the phrase “exquisite drowning” or the idea that one is already apologetic for the traumas one will knowingly/unknowingly inflict, the relationship between the two characters is not at any point stable, unequivocal and direct. Rather, they seem to be caught up in an agonistic tension. This is intentional, and this condition is best expressed precisely through a one-sided articulation that is deeply impassioned in its utterances, but also, ultimately, highly unreliable.

The counterpoint of gendered male and female reminiscences is what makes Mosteghanemi's novels such interesting and subtle constructions, going far beyond the adversarial contrasts of traditional male and female perspectives that on occasion have arisen out of the reductionist trap of earlier postcolonial theory, or even the complex and kaleidoscopic collage of postmodern writing. All of these aspects are present within the

novels, but it is their fusing into a multi-level narrative of gendered memory that makes them unique. It is the reader who is left with the demanding task of conducting the dissonant fragments of memory into a sense of coherence, congruent with making meaning that speaks to a desire for a sense of collective Algerian memory of their history in the wake of the fractured sense of Algerian nationalism and identity. Different readers will construct the complicated romantic relationship between Khaled and Ahlam in different ways; for example, some will see it as a richly deserved thwarting of patriarchal ambition, while others will see a poignant failure of two damaged characters to find their way to a traditional happy ending. Still others might focus on the generational gap and read the relationship as an allegory of Algeria's generational divide. The point for Mosteghanemi is to lay out all these different possibilities, and many more, insisting that the past contains the potential for all of these narratives, if only the reader resists the temptation to over-simplify things into the mirror of just one human mind. Thus the narrative perspective in the novels is deliberately elusive. The reader has to work tirelessly to keep up with the shift from one character's thoughts to another and from one interpretation to another. As Khaled expresses about her writing,

I could have written anything, because in the end, novels are just the letters and greeting cards we write for no special purpose; where we reveal the climate of our souls for others who care to take any interest in us. The most beautiful novel is the one that starts with a sentence wholly unexpected by the reader who has lived through our storms and norms, and who might once have been the cause of our changing moods. (*MIF*, 3)

For the most part, these sentences seem like the narrator's musings on the work of writing, and the play of language through which the writer offers to the world his deepest emotions and most profound ideas in the form of a literary work. The second

sentence, however, renders the first sentence unstable in its import for the reader, as it transforms the idea of revealing “the climate of one’s soul” into a consideration of achieving a desired effect on the prospective reader. Simultaneously, it renders the address to the reader ambiguous—for the last line refers equally to a possible reader as well as one *specific* reader, namely, Ahlam.

Khaled remembers and describes his first meeting with Ahlam, saying,

My only pleasure at that time was to place in your hands the key to my memory and to open up to you the yellowing notebooks of the past, reading them in your presence, page by page, as if I was discovering them with you by listening to my own voice... we were silently discovering that we complemented each other in an alarming way. I was the past that you did not know, and you were the present that has no memory... I was trying to unload the baggage that had weighed on my shoulders. You were as empty as a sponge and I was as deep and heavy as an ocean... by then, we had already been carrying a shared memory, shared roads and alleys, shared joys and griefs too. Both of us were victims of the war. Destiny has placed us in its pitiless quern, and we emerged, each carrying a different wound. My wound was obvious and yours was hidden deep. They amputated my arm, and they amputated your childhood. They ripped off a limb of my body and snatched a father from your arms. We were remnants of a war: two broken statues under elegant clothes. (*MIF*, 64-65)

These lines represent a dense overlaying of the many dimensions of Mosteghanemi’s novels. It foregrounds the complex ways in which Khaled and Ahlam are caught up as “remnants” of the utopian dreams of Algeria’s war of liberation—while Khaled has lost his arm and suffers from a deepening sense of disillusionment, Ahlam must come to terms with the legacy of her father, and the demands of the contemporary political

climate in Algeria. Here, Mosteghanemi shows how, even as the lives of the two characters follow completely different trajectories, placing them in very different circumstances, they are nonetheless bound together by a shared history and a common predicament that characterises their present. Mosteghanemi invokes poignant fragments from the two characters' pasts to depict relations of difference and similitude, in an attempt to lay out a shared, collective sense of the past, present and future that has until now remained as the *unsaid* in contemporary public discourse in Algeria.

It is of course technically difficult to present all of this perspectival complexity in such a way that the reader is able to follow the text and indeed is willing to continue making the effort that it takes to put together the fractured pieces of information into some kind of coherence. The technique that Mosteghanemi uses is in some ways a variation on the classic flashback mechanism. Characters engage in a stream of consciousness mode of reflection, which deliberately plays with present and past in the same way that traumatic memory itself defies the space-time continuum: "The traumatic event may intrude repetitively on everyday activities and sleep, but there may also be a total absence of recall. Symptoms may appear chronically or intermittently; immediately or many years after the event" (Visser 272). This is suggested by Khaled's self-questioning: "how would we be able to leave a place that had become part of our memory? How could we do that somewhere that placed us for a few days beyond the boundaries of time and place?" (*COS* 84). Here, Khaled simultaneously expresses the deep inscription within the psyche of traumatic memory as well as a desire to escape its repetitive structure by constructing a fantasy of "another place" beyond the logics of space and time. On one hand, he recognises the indelible mark left upon his psyche by the traumatic experiences of war. On the other, his desire to reach a place a "few days beyond" the boundaries of time and place is a manifestation of an attempt to overcome

his traumatic blockage, albeit through fantasy idealisation. Time here is understood not so much through notions of past and present—rather, it is refigured into metaphors of inevitability and hope.

The most explicit representation of this dilemma of having to remember the same painful memories again and again, and to face troublesome flashbacks and dreams, is found in the stream of consciousness presented in the first novel, *Memory in the Flesh*. The fractured state of Khaled's memory is, as the title suggests, forever stamped upon his physical body in the form of a visible amputation. In the opening pages of *Memory in the Flesh*, Khaled identifies his own existence as a symptom of his historical memories, observing: "There you are, chasing after your memory to catch up with a past that in reality you have never really left, in pursuit of an idea that has become physically part of you. Your mutilated body" (15). Mosteghanemi appears to imply here that Khaled's narrative journey is essentially a realisation of trauma memory, wherein he is only able to understand his own existence through his past that has become him. Caruth's work underscores this idea in that "the traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (*Trauma*, 5). Thus, the relationship between Khaled's memory and body reveals the possession that history holds over memory. As Caruth's trauma theory asserts, Khaled's physical injuries themselves become part of history, just as his memory of that history becomes confined to the parameters of his gendered body, always looking back towards the past of his own trauma's creation.

Moreover, in an example of what Caruth has characterised as the "latency" of traumatic experience, these words signify the disruptive effects of traumatic experience, which are symptomatically manifested in traumatic repetition. Such is the effect of the

traumatic experience that has deep-seated effects on subjective dispositions—long after the traumatic disruption, the subject must try to come to terms with it by giving it meaning. What Khaled calls “chasing one’s memory” is an expression of his attempt to recover a sense of social, symbolic meaning, after the rupture brought about by the traumatic experience of war in the “past.” Moreover, the idea of the past as “physically” part of oneself—as an unhealed wound—expresses the deeply visceral manifestations of the latency of traumatic experience. The mutilated body is the symptom of a subject who is inscribed—“scarred”—by trauma. Such is the violence of that moment of trauma that it cannot be overcome simply by “thinking through it”—the psychological effects of trauma are as “real” as a physical wound.

For Khaled there is a vein of suffering which permeates even his most loving and positive memories of his youth in Algeria, and he manages to keep this under control by simply leaving his native country behind. Physical separation eases the pain of constant reminders that the city of Constantine brings to him. This reliance upon distance as a resolution to unbearably painful memory is a feature that Khaled shares with his childhood friend, Roger Naccache. Roger had fled Constantine before adulthood; he assisted Khaled in the first days of his new life in Paris. He thus offers a potential connection between the present and the past that is unfortunately unsustainable for both men. Khaled recalls a conversation in which Roger explains his longing to return just once to Constantine, a city which he evidently reveres and longs for just as much as Khaled, despite his Jewish heritage. However, his longing is fixed in the history of his remembrance: “His secret dream was to return there, if only once, or to have someone bring him just one fig from the fig tree that used to reach up to his window, a tree that had been in his garden for generations” (*MIF*, 87). Roger wants to go back to Constantine, but only under the condition that nothing has changed: “What

I'm afraid of is not people not knowing me, but of me not knowing that city, the alleys and the house that is no longer mine after so many years" (87). This insistence that the place should remain known to him, and his inability to face up to the house that he once owned, are clear expressions of the masculine instinct to know, to possess, and in effect to dominate the physical spaces of the past. This translates in psychological terms into a need to control the memories that he has, which in turn implies ruthlessly rejecting the passage of time and the events which have eroded that patriarchal power since last contact with the beloved place:

‘Let me live the illusion,’ he [Roger] went on, ‘that the tree is still there, producing figs every year, and that the window still looks over people I love, and that narrow alley still leads to places I used to know. The most difficult thing, you know, is to confront memory with incompatible reality.’ (87)

In both novels, a reality incompatible with present experience in relation to a remembered past, or a kind of cognitive dissonance, sums up the kind of disconnect that male characters so painfully experience. They have an extremely conflicted love-hate relationship with people and places because of the power shift that has occurred in the intervening period between youth and middle age. If they cannot resume their privileged relationship with the past, able to enjoy all the fruits of family inheritance and personal status, then they are not willing to go back to the places they most love in the world. They are caught in an illusion of supremacy. For male characters, the postcolonial reality of Algeria is incompatible with their own self-image as proud, and above all powerful, entities.

In contrast, Mosteghanemi makes it very clear that time is experienced and valued very differently by female characters. Typically, this insight is conveyed through

the somewhat jaded filter of Khaled's mind when he receives a telephone call from Ahlam after many months of non-communication:

Your voice came on Monday. There were no preliminaries. There was no hint of joy or sadness, not the slightest embarrassment. You started talking to me as if you were carrying on a conversation we had begun the day before. You did not sound like one who had not spoken to me on that telephone line for six months. How strange is the connection between you and time! And how odd is your memory! (*MIF*, 180)

Ahlam is apparently unaware of the effect that her long-awaited call must have on Khaled, and she chatters happily about her forthcoming wedding. She does, however, share with Khaled some discomfort over the disjunction between her past and present experience. She confesses the reason for her marriage as follows: "I'm only running away to him, from memories that have become uninhabitable. I have fed on impossible dreams and repeated disappointments" (181). This shows that both characters are in agreement about the intolerable gulf that exists between their memories and their present reality. There is a fundamental difference, however, in how the male and female characters react to this situation. Khaled remains trapped in his dreams and illusions, while Ahlam wants to move on. Khaled tries to foist a level of national significance on Ahlam's choice: "You are not just a woman, you are the nation. Aren't you concerned about what history will one day write?" (181). This manipulative question reveals Khaled's patriarchal drive to control Ahlam, and to define who she is and what her actions mean. Conceding that he has lost the battle to dominate her in a personal sense, he raises the spectre of the all-knowing voice of history, which will one day condemn Ahlam's choice as unworthy. Ahlam's response is a bleak and definitive rejection of the power of the written word both to label and judge the actions of people: "'You're the

only person,' you [Ahlam] said bitterly for the first time, 'who thinks history sits like some recording angel registering our little victories, our books, our defeats. History doesn't write anymore, my friend. It erases'" (181). This illustrates the gap that many theorists have identified between memory and history. Ahlam argues for the importance of living by personal memories, rather than basing actions upon the crushing power of public histories which are written by the powerful to force people into courses of action which benefit those same powerful people. Ahlam thus draws a veil over the past, ignoring pressure from Khaled to believe the stories in the history books. For Ahlam, power lies in being able to forget the harms of the past and to move on to a different future. This example illuminates Mosteghanemi's postcolonial gendered critique of the Algerian national memory of the liberation struggles as a "historical break" separating the colonial from the postcolonial.

Just as time becomes elliptical or warped in the memory of the traumatised subject, so place takes on new and unstable meanings, as the subtle effects and "causes" of critical moments of traumatic dislocation—physical, emotional and psychological—cut across both novels, such that no question is restricted to one novel alone. Khaled's physical dislocation from Algeria is portrayed as a kind of psychological splitting, whereby he adopts a new persona, splitting being characteristic of kaleidoscopic narrative. At the same time, he is constantly drawn to recall the geographical features of Constantine. The memory of Constantine's various bridges intrudes upon his perception of the differing bridges of Paris, showing that his battle to suppress the pain of his past is not complete. Every time he looks at a bridge in Paris, his memory of the war in Algeria is sparked into life:

My eyes were focused on the Mirabeau Bridge and the Seine, but my hand was painting another bridge and another valley in another city. When I was through I

had simply painted *The Arches of Sidi Rashid* and *The Canyon of Sand*. Only then did I realize that in the end we don't paint what we live in, but what lives in us. (*MIF*, 106)

Khaled's disjointed memories of the past offer clues to the way that he has processed painful events, but they do not provide the reader with a full or reliable account of historical events. In fact one of the main points of the novels is to show that the recollections and individual histories that people construct do not singly or collectively match the kind of narratives that exist in history books. This reconstructing of history speaks to the narrative's force of re-patterning history in ways that attempt to reconcile earlier narratives in new ways. There are some anchor points, such as particular characters, events or specific buildings, geographical features and other places which feature in the historical record, and these are what the author uses to fix her novels in the real world, by effectively paralleling the real world with worlds she has created in her novels in the allegorical mode. For example, Khaled mentions places in and around Constantine where significant life experiences took place, such as his school, the brothel where his father went, and the prison where martyrs were held. These locations are anchored in history through Khaled's personal connection with them, but he realises that, without his presence, the significance of historic places will be diminished. At the end of *Memory in the Flesh*, he expresses this realisation with the following rhetorical question about history and meaning in general:

Nobody understands my madness or the secret of my link with a city from which everybody dreams of escaping. Do I find fault with them? Do the citizens of Giza in their misery and wretchedness feel that they live on the slopes of miracles and that the pharaohs are still with them, ruling Egypt with their stones and tombs? (237)

The implication is that places do retain a historical significance, even though the people who live there do not appreciate it or draw any comfort from it. In fact it is only outsiders who have the ability to discern the significance of particular holy or powerful locations. The irony of Khaled's position is that he is only able to appreciate the historical significance of Constantine if he remains aloof, observing it from a distance rather than experiencing it directly. His wider knowledge of the world helps him to make sense of the places he returns to, and he marks the significance of this or that place with a nod of recognition, before moving on to his lonely exile.

Beyond these anchor points, however, there is a further world of human experience that must be carefully decoded and apprehended on an emotional rather than rational level. The context is real, and there is a basis of historical fact underlying the stories that are narrated, but the memories draw attention to rather different semi-biographical meanings that the reader is encouraged to attach to this context. These memories are gendered, and many of them are hidden behind a shroud of symbolism which protects the characters, and readers, from having to confront some of the very difficult political, social and emotional dilemmas that Algeria's people have struggled with in the past and continue to struggle with in this period of post-independence. This is Mosteghanemi's main purpose in representing the painful histories of Algeria in such an elusive, and at times fractured, way through her male and female characters, by only revealing, or uncovering, the veil of time and its suppression of the violence experienced incrementally, in ways similar to how a veil can be made to both reveal and conceal. In doing this she also presents the first premise of a much larger argument about the difficulty of accessing any one definitive history of Algeria's struggle for independence, and hence the starting point for one definitive blueprint for post-independence stability. As long as the people are struggling with the need to find a

personal accommodation with the places, people and memories of the past, there can be no move to a new stability in the future. This desire for stability speaks to the kaleidoscopic narrative's attempt to reconfigure the fractured past into a reconciled vision of the future.

Criticism of postcolonial novels such as Mosteghanemi's has begun to theorise the best way to approach literary works which use innovative techniques to address the problem of a chaotic and unresolved past history, both at the level of the individual and society:

By bringing the insights of deconstructive and psychoanalytic scholarship to the analysis of cultural artefacts that bear witness to traumatic histories critics can gain access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation. (Craps & Buelens 1)

Deconstructive and psychoanalytic critical approaches as applied to Mosteghanemi's novels allow the critic to consider the relevance of how cultural artefacts, such as Khaled's paintings and Ahlam's writings, reveal their deeper concerns with Algeria's traumatic history in ways that cannot be spoken directly.

The corresponding plot device, used to bring the psychological dimension of gendered memory into focus in *Memory in the Flesh*, is the bringing of Khaled back to Constantine, to the locations which prompt his memory to bring forth all the pain that he has suppressed for years. A key scene towards the end of the novel recounts Khaled's encounter with a brothel: "That was where my father spent his fortune and his manhood" (204). This location encapsulates a series of starkly gendered reminiscences about the lives of Khaled's parents and the way in which Khaled himself negotiated puberty under the shadow of this particular building in Constantine. At first the narrator records the standard male chauvinist view of the women who worked in this building:

“It was behind these walls that presentable but wretched women disappeared, only to reemerge old and ugly, spending their money on orphans and the poor in a final bout of repentance” (204). This characterisation, filtered through Khaled’s memory, is full of moral repugnance, and it reflects the patriarchal objectification of women as being only valuable if they are young, beautiful and respectable. This view arises out of the way Khaled conflates the female with his Algeria, making real women the symbol of his native country, and making his native country a symbol of womanhood. No matter where Khaled goes, visiting Granada or Constantine for example, he sees Ahlam as the embodiment of the Arab features of the city: “I felt you were a part of that city [Granada] as well. Were you all Arab cities and was every Arab memory you” (*MIF*, 143).

It is clear that Khaled is using the figure of Ahlam as a receptacle for storing his most precious memories. This perspective does not allow him to see Algeria, or Constantine, or any other Arab city, or women as they really are, but instead it traps him into schematic impressions framed by patriarchal Islamic values. He objectifies women and experiences a desire to exercise control in a patriarchal assertion of the rights of the all-powerful male. The more elusive and charming the land or the woman is, the more the man desires it or her. Paradoxically, however, once the male has taken control, the attraction fades—this is a tragedy of traditional ideas of masculinity, both for men and women because it leads to a weakened sense of Khaled’s positioning as the traditionally strong male in relation to a submissive female, further leading to an ambivalent relationship to the feminine. Khaled clearly shares these traditional and patriarchal views, as we see when he reflects on female sexuality as if it were in some way a threat to men: “For centuries, women have been accustomed to carrying their desire buried in their subconscious like time bombs” (*MIF*, 205). Male desire is portrayed as something

that is to be expected, perhaps excessive, but it is still part of the “rational” order of things, where the powerful have the right to take what they desire. Women, however, must operate in far more restrictive conditions. Khaled does not think further about the reasons why women might have found themselves in such a place, or the unjust social conditions that promote a double standard whereby men are allowed to enjoy such illicit pleasures without any effect on their social standing, while women are utterly condemned for their role in such acts. This failure to identify with the female victims of patriarchal structures in society is Khaled’s major blind spot. It explains why he cannot find common ground upon which to build a romantic relationship with the proto-feminist, Ahlam. Thus the narrative perspective here exposes not only the patriarchal failures of the past, but the ramifications for the individual character when this misgiving is allowed to pass unnoticed. This kaleidoscopic narrative represents Mosteghanemi’s deep scepticism of the masculinist project of nationalism, which disavows the differences that lie at the heart of the project of an organic, homogenous national community.

There is one dimension of the past which Khaled does begin to understand from the perspective of a woman, however, and that is achieved through memories of witnessing the pain and trauma that were experienced by his mother: “I tried not to look at a place that was for years the reason for my mother’s private pain and anguish: probably one of the sorrows that killed her” (*MIF*, 204). This comment reveals that Khaled can, at least in this one case of his mother, make a connection between male behaviour and female suffering, as he acknowledges his subconscious acceptance of his father’s morality:

It also represented a secret ecstasy, repressed dreams I used to dream as a young man but lacked the courage to carry out. Perhaps it was because I did not want to

find my father there, or because I was satisfied with the flirtations I managed to have on the roof or in unused attics. (204)

Freudian parallels are unmistakable here, as the son struggles to compete with his father in demonstrating his manhood through sexual exploits. If Khaled had not been symbolically castrated by his father's dominating presence, he would no doubt have followed his father's footsteps into the brothel to pursue the same destructive and selfish masculine lifestyle. As it stands, Khaled's memory of this place conjures up only resentment towards his father and bitterness regarding his own failure to successfully negotiate the minefield of traditional Algerian sexual politics. The possibility of this moment of self-criticism is opened up through Mosteghanemi's kaleidoscopic style. Going beyond the Freudian allusions, Mosteghanemi here renders the same fragment through different perspectives. On one hand, she takes up the anxieties experienced by the male subject, while, on the other, she shows through his eyes the suffering of his mother. Thus the author is able to show the incongruity of the two perspectives, as well as the deep anxiety that an awareness of the same creates for the masculine subject.

In the passage that follows, Mosteghanemi's kaleidoscopic narrative makes an explicit connection between the narrator's personal and painful memories, and the public history that remains long after his father has died: "My father was no longer there to inhibit me from entering. He was gone, but he had left an excellent history behind those walls, like any other respected prosperous Constantine man of his times" (*MIF*, 204). There is much bitterness in this account, since the reader knows by this stage in the novel that Khaled has himself not laid down any such excellent history in his native country. This is clear in the way that Khaled describes the way his father hung up two of Khaled's primary school certificates on the wall, as if to show the intellectual promise in his son, and then "A few years later, he hung another one, but after that nothing" (188),

signifying the great disappointment that Khaled turned out to be for his father. He has not married, nor produced a child, and his artistic work is unknown in his home city. Khaled recognises the duplicitousness of the city, with its juxtaposing mixture of mosques and brothels, and puts it down to the “age old heritage of hypocrisy” (205), situating him as the rational male observer and the city as the immoral female object. His father’s public record remains upright and respectable, but behind closed doors there is a private history that speaks a very different message. Here, Mosteghanemi’s kaleidoscopic narrative technique displays its deft critique of Algerian society and its traditional patriarchal views.

If the narrative were to end there, then the reader would be left with an unreconstructed and bitter male chauvinist view of history. The text does not end there, however, and another memory brings Khaled the words of his grandmother. Through this message from a female character, Khaled is able to catch a glimpse of the feminine counterpoint to this masculine narrative: “Didn’t my grandmother say, counselling patience to help Mother put up with his infidelities, ‘What men do embroiders their shoulders.’ Father embroidered his adventures with scars and bruises on Mother’s body” (204). Here, just for a moment, Khaled glimpses the abusive nature of the relationship between his parents, but he does not pursue this thought any further. By juxtaposing his own memories with snippets that he has observed in the lives of his older female relatives, Khaled gains a brief moment of understanding, since he accesses pieces of their experience and this modifies his masculine perception. This also indicates Mosteghanemi’s suggestion that memories can become the site for reconsideration—that is, they are frequently revisited to generate new interpretations. There is at least a suggestion that memories are not static but are instead constantly being revised and rewritten each time they are recalled. Mosteghanemi even makes a clear statement to

this effect: “We are never completely cut off from our memory. Recollection provides the inspiration for writing, the stimulus for drawing, and for some, the motivation even for death” (*MIF*, 1). Recollection is always active—it impels action and demands an unceasing labour of interpretation and re-interpretation.

Memory in the Flesh draws attention to the close relationship between language, recollection and interpretation. At one point, Khaled states that “Sentences crowd up in my head, perhaps you would never expect. Suddenly the memories pour back” (3). Language here brings memory to life—it is in language that memories must be elaborated, and it is through the resources of language that memories may become subject to reinterpretation. Language also becomes a trigger for recollection of memories. On seeing Ahlam for the first time, Khaled says, “Memory almost burst into tears. Are you the crawling baby I once knew? My one arm trembles, resisting a great desire to hold you tight and to ask you how you were in that old Constantine accent that I was missing” (39). Here, it is not so much the content of what Ahlam says that sets off a train of recollection in Khaled. Rather, it is the pleasure of a shared language that makes possible a return to the past. It is in the togetherness of a few sentences in a shared dialect that Khaled and Ahlam can meet in the present as individuals, renegotiating their relationship. The reference to Ahlam as a crawling baby is able to simultaneously make clear the distance between the past and the present, as well as a minimal common ground upon which this difference may be renegotiated.

Moreover, the physical sensations that Khaled reports are a manifestation of the dichotomy between his authentic, original Algerian self and this new persona that he has so carefully constructed in the land of the former coloniser. The body remembers the old associations which have been imprinted in youth even as the adult mind adapts to the new social reality. Khaled’s close identification of his “one arm” and these old

memories can be understood by means of theories of how the human body remembers, and how the mind is also embodied. Jeff Friedman, for example, explains that “bodily movement is an important component of oral history since it has an important role in both the production and storage of memory. Subjective experience can be stimulated by referencing an indexical gesture that represents a larger and more complex movement sequence” (160). A small look, a touch, a certain movement of one’s own or another person’s body, can trigger whole packets of memories and of course they bring to the fore strong emotions such as pain, loss, pleasure and love without the person necessarily knowing exactly where these deep internal feelings are coming from. When the novel is read with this realisation in mind, it exudes a whole range of hidden histories, since even the tiniest physical gestures can carry huge significance. The reader is given enough hints by the narrator to begin to decode these “memories in the flesh”; however, there are considerable ambiguities and contradictions which make this a challenging task. In another use of memory, Khaled uses his “home” as a site of recollection, when he visits it after several years in exile, and he considers this a reason for his sleeplessness that night. Khaled states:

But it may also have been the shock of this latest emotional homecoming to the house of my birth and childhood. On the wall, stairs, and windows, in the rooms and corridors, *memories* were piled up inside me. They overwhelmed me and suddenly they wiped all else away. Here I was, *living in my memories in the house*. How could anyone else sleep amid these pillows of memories? (*MIF*, 188, my emphasis)

Here, Mosteghanemi encourages the reader to acknowledge the sense of anxiety that also accompanies any attempt to reinterpret one’s most intimate memories. Drawing on images that invoke the domestic space of childhood, Khaled’s sleeplessness dramatizes

a deep tension in Khaled's return to his ancestral home. On one hand, he cannot bring himself to acknowledge the past-ness of his happy childhood—and thus the need to attain a sense of distance from his nostalgic attachments. On the other, he is very much aware of the irrevocable past-ness of his memories—that he inhabits a house of *memories* is itself a reluctant acknowledgement that his childhood is actually gone, separated by all that has transpired in the years since.

The insight is short-lived, however, since Khaled ends this period of reminiscence with a florid account of female breasts and hips, recounting the tendency of women to take part in fevered erotic dances at celebratory occasions such as weddings. In his mind, female love is linked with pain and torture:

It was the same as in rituals of pleasure and of torture. Everybody knew that the beat of the drum should not prevent the rhythm from building up, until some of the women had reached a climax and fell to the floor in a swoon... That was how women made love in Constantine... an illusion. (206)

From the traditional male perspective, women in Algeria are a source of madness and excess, bringing moral degradation to the country. Khaled seems to reject heterosexual love on the grounds that it is a trick or an illusion, designed by women to distract men, and to offer them a temporary relief but no ultimate fulfilment. He retreats, in effect, into the false, contrived and ultra-conservative patterns that are lodged in his memory, deriving his gender frameworks from a previous age, and refusing to engage with women in the modern world. It seems he is not ready to let go the last vestiges of male privilege that he has as a Constantine male.

In contrast to this negative view of feminine love, Khaled maintains more positive memories which he links with a particular historical moment, namely, a major

anti-colonial protest held in Constantine on May 8 1945, and its violent aftermath. Khaled narrates his version of this historic revolt, stating:

Al-Kudya prison was part of my first memories that time cannot delete. It was a memory that made me stop suddenly in front of those prison walls. I entered them again as I had one day in 1945 with fifty thousand other prisoners who were arrested after the demonstration of the Eighth of May: it is with sadness that I remember. (208)

This passage reflects one of the most important historical events in Algerian history under colonisation. Khaled recalls this event when he passes by the prison's building, and remembers how he and his friends were arrested and captured because they joined the demonstration. The kaleidoscopic connection between memory and a particular historical event shows how certain places invoke sadness. This suggests that memories are not fixed but are instead constantly being revised and rewritten each time they are recalled.

Khaled recalls what appears to be the most positive memory in his life, namely a sense of belonging, due to a politicised and very male group identity which he experienced during his spell in prison:

In the prison cells, we were all united by singing the same anthem. It came from one cell, then was taken up and repeated in other cells by other prisoners who were not there for political offences. The words had a great power to bring us together. By chance we discovered we had one voice. We shook the walls of the prison and our tortured bodies at the same time. (208)

The prison represents the monolithic power of colonialism, which in turn produces a heroic counter-image of Algeria (Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, 15). This

was the place where resistance fighters were incarcerated and tortured by the French colonial rulers during the War of Independence. Khaled's memories focus on the heady joy of resistance here, while also marking the tragic sacrifice of his colleagues. This section of the novel contains some of the most harrowing recollections of torture and suicide which Khaled heard about in connection with Al-Kudya prison. Tales from the 1940s and 1950s echo in the walls as he walks past them. As long as the building stands in the middle of Constantine, he will be reminded of the traumatic past that he lived through. Even if the prison walls fell, the memory would still be embedded in *him*. The dance of the men which he conjures up here is very different from the irrational and immoral dance that he attributes to Constantine's women when they celebrate weddings or wail at funerals. The martyrs engage in a horrible but heroic dance of death, and this is the tortured masculine ideal that Khaled envisages.

Mosteghanemi's strategy of depicting the intertwining strands of memory and history through the separate lenses of male and female perception allows the reader to understand the way that both collective memory and social history are also made of gendered perspectives. Love and war are dominant themes, and they are given both individual and collective dimensions through the imagery that is used to convey the characters' struggles with them. One can see this in the conversation between Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat about her dual name. Khaled insists on calling her Hayat, which "means life," instead of Ahlam, which means dreams. She states: "you've never emerged from that revolutionary generation. That's why you have this urge to give me a name that goes back to the time of struggle, to a time before you loved me, as if you are enrolling me as an undercover agent. I wonder what mission you have in mind for me." Khaled laughs and says, "Listen, you apprentice revolutionary. You have got to learn that there must be more than one test before you're sent on a suicide mission. I'll have

to start by examining your special abilities so I can find out how prepared you are” (*MIF*, 70-71). This passage shows the fragments of gendered individual and collective dimensions of the theme of love and war in the novel. It reflects two gendered perspectives towards life through their argument about the dual name Ahlam/Hayat. Khaled’s attitude is shaped by his previous experience as soldier during the War of Independence, which constructs his relation with everything around him, even with his lover and the way he sees her and the language he speaks with. Khaled’s description of Ahlam as an “apprentice revolutionary” emphasizes his superior, masculine role with regards to her. She, however, is not satisfied with the way Khaled associates his past with the present, and she is more aware that Khaled’s political and historical experiences affect him and his relationship with her.

The argument about the name has significant implication for an understanding of gendered vision as a social and cultural formation for both of them. The oppositional meanings for both names prove that Mosteghanemi’s characters inhabit a new and troubling world where Algerians no longer have the luxury of a secure, and above all, shared construction of the past to help them build collective or social memories. Khaled’s previous political experience and Ahlam’s cultural distancing from the Algerian struggle for independence prevent them from forming a shared construction of the past that makes sense to them. The novel, however, with its complex male and female narrative voices, does just that, inviting the reader to participate in a mission to build memories of Algeria that are true to the past and also relevant to the present. What is interesting here is that through the gendered formation of memory, history rewrites itself within a collective memory that is differentiable. While the reader is invited to engage with a collective memory of Algerian experience, they are encouraged to identify the contrasts of such experiences based upon gender boundaries. Thus the

reader is privy to both the connections of the collective experience and the nuances of the individual gendered perspective in the same instance.

In their exchange, the difference in perspective between the two is inflected not only with gendered connotations, but also a reference to the overlaps and conflicts between individual and collective memories. Ahlam/Hayat is uncomfortable about being ascribed with a new name that seems too deeply implicated in Khaled's memories of the revolution. The tension between the two is an agonistic relationship between the "active" men who carry onward the revolution, and the "passive" women who must be the surfaces on which the ideal image of the nation may be inscribed. At the same time, it is a struggle between Khaled, who sees Ahlam as a symbol of collective Algerian identity, and Ahlam herself, who is struggling to develop an individuated sense of identity. The overlap of the themes of love and war is particularly provocative in that it shows the ways in which one may easily transform into the other, merely by shifting perspective from the individual to the collective, or vice versa. Drawing on Bhabha's notion of cultural difference (see Chapter Two), this passage supports my argument that Mosteghanemi's novels can be understood as a contrapuntal articulation of postcolonial Algeria, one that refuses to sublimate their difference into a homogenised narrative of the national past, and are instead, in effect, kaleidoscopic. Mosteghanemi brings to light the complexities that make up each of these disjunctive, gendered positions.

The symbolism used for these themes is likewise tinged with conflict; *Chaos of the Senses*, however, uses kaleidoscopic narrative differently to frame that conflict much more explicitly, as one that occurs between these two genders. Conversation between the fictional male and female lovers is portrayed as a stylised kind of conflict which is similar to the moves in a chess game: "The square table separating them soon became a chess table constructed of landmines of silence, where each player chose his color and

position, placing before him his army, knights, and rooks to prepare for battle” (*COS*, 9). Although the game of chess is the epitome of rational thought, and therefore traditionally a masculine symbol, it is portrayed here in a way which draws on the social setting and the psychology that lies behind the moves on the board. Moreover, the metaphor of the chess game is here merged with the reality of modern warfare, since Mosteghanemi uses the surprising phrase “landmines of silence” to add layers of gendered meaning beyond the primary depiction of the way in which a man and a woman relate to each other when their relationship shifts from one of passionate love to one of conflict. This modern reference shifts attention to the context of physical warfare, bringing in connotations of death and destruction, which forces the reader to make parallels between the fictional love story and real human suffering. Historical reference is made also to the Russian chess player Kasparov, a world-renowned figure in the 1980s, whom the female narrator quotes: “As she watched him, she remembered what Kasparov had once said: ‘The moves we make in our minds during the game, and then reconsider, are as much a part of the game as those moves we actually make on the board’” (9). This profound observation forces the reader to question every word of the narrative that is presented here, and to consider the existence of a considerable burden of meaning which is harboured by the characters in the novels but not fully expressed in words. Each word, correlating personal memory and representation of the present, is shadowed by the ghostly imprint of other words, memories and representations from the past, not unlike the shifting mirrors and colours of a kaleidoscopic lens. This quotation can also be read as an explanation of the deliberately ambiguous structure of the novel, in which narratives and meta-narratives overlap. Whether the events in the story really happened or not, they might have happened, and this infinite potentiality is the domain of human memory, which captures people’s reactions, hopes, fears and plans, as well as

aspects of actual experience. Khaled lives out a romantic relationship with Ahlam, for example, largely inside his own head, since she does not give in to his attempts to seduce her. It hardly matters whether the relationship is real or not, since for him the experience of knowing her is no different in its effects than the experience of actually being with her. He lives just as well in the illusion, and therefore it can be regarded as just as valid, or even true, as the reality. Mosteghanemi is in effect arguing that the significance and import of these experiences are multiple and contested.

The opening of the novel, which is billed as a sequel to *Memory in the Flesh*, seems to start off in the familiar stream of consciousness of the earlier novel, only this time framed in the feminine third-person perspective which presents the point of view of Ahlam, the writer, rather than Khaled, the painter. A sudden hiatus occurs, however, when a new section of the text begins with the phrase “I loved this story, without realizing exactly what I had written” (*COS*, 10). The author has tricked the reader into taking the short story as the main plot, only later realising that it is a story within a much bigger narrative. Later, the narrator starts to have a relationship with a character in her own story, and the reader will realise that there is something very strange about the shifting narrative perspectives in this novel. These structural devices bring to life the coquettishness and artificiality which Khaled interprets as feminine hypocrisy and shows them in a different, and much more positive, creative light. This feminine voice relishes the ambiguity and plays with the reader’s expectations in order to explore the gaps between the real and imagined past. This makes explicit the dance between reality and fiction that was hinted at in the first novel. The difference is that there are now fewer clues for the reader to follow, and the tension between fact and fiction comes to the forefront of the narrative. Ahlam says, “Nevertheless, I would go not realizing that writing, as my refuge from real life, was drawing me in a roundabout way toward it,

throwing me into a drama that would become, page after page, my own story” (20). It is no longer simply a question of negotiating the unstable gap between artistic representation and reality. Rather, it becomes an existential question that links the author, the narrator and the character in an unstable, ambiguous relationship, such that each plays on the tension between fiction and reality. While, in the quote above, Ahlam ponders the ways in which her fictional writing forces her to again confront her conflicted reality, in the following example the same question is taken up, only this time through the position of the narrator: “life comes disguised in the simplicity of a book, and any day, in front of any text, one of us might discover that a page of our writing has fallen captive to life, becoming our own life” (192). Even as both passages deal with the relationship between fiction and real life, they nonetheless approach the question somewhat differently. In the former, Ahlam finds that every attempt to escape reality through writing paradoxically becomes an inscription of that same reality, while in the latter the narrator offers an “external” perspective on the same experience. While the former conveys the intensity of the encounter, the latter expresses the contingent character of the same.

The existence of a huge burden of hidden, but highly relevant meaning is also constantly referred to in both novels through intertextual devices such as quotations, literary references and anecdotes. The following example shows how the female narrator in *Chaos of the Senses* frames such an anecdote with a link to the history of Algeria, and then a reflection on the meaning that is to be understood both on a personal and collective level. The historical introduction to the anecdote situates it as part of a commemoration ritual: “I remembered the incident a journalist friend once related to me. It happened in the 1970s, during a visit on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Algerian revolution” (37). The anecdote is therefore a retelling of a memory of a

conversation, which recalls a previous event experienced by a second person, which in turn occurred during a commemoration of the revolution that was experienced by a whole nation, therefore demonstrating the way kaleidoscopic narrative coalesces into a larger pattern, a coalescence that imitates the way differing views converge and merge to form a new view of history and nation that represents a blend of collective memory versus the more dichotomous contrapuntal view of Said's more traditional postcolonial perspective.

The narrator applies the lesson learned from her journalist friend to her own experience in Algeria, regarding the precarious social status of a lone woman in a café. These multiple layers of time serve to indicate the cyclical and interpersonal nature of human memory, as items are passed down through different kinds of formal and informal retelling. Some aspects of the story will change, including the person telling it and the context surrounding it, yet the core human experience of uncertainty and apprehension that a woman feels in public in an Arab society remains. A little later, the narrator's mysterious companion makes another apparently trivial analogy, this time drawing upon a classic European fairy tale to comment upon the black dress that the narrator is wearing: "Just like that story in which the prince, who has only Cinderella's shoe, must figure out who she is by the shoe size. I expect if I saw a woman wearing a dress of black muslin, I'd follow her, certain that it was you" (46). These personal, and yet, arguably, universal anecdotes hold a truth much deeper than their superficial contours might first suggest. Through this apparently trivial remark, Mosteghanemi brings to light the ways in which even mundane aspects of language in Algerian society reproduce deeply patriarchal assumptions. By making reference to fairy tales, the author gestures towards the chivalric frame of male imagination. The analogy of the woman herself with the dress she is wearing is problematic in that it dissolves her identity into

the dress as an object of fetish. Moreover, it instantaneously brings to light the silence of the women within this male-centered fantasy—be it the narrator herself, or all the “subsequent” women in black dresses whom he would presumably see.

A little later the narrator reflects upon another anecdote with a link to the history of Algeria, this time drawing upon a real female Algerian activist and national hero who resisted and fought French colonial rule, to comment upon the narrator’s actions:

I crossed in front of the Milk Bar café in panic, and I suddenly remembered Jamila Bu Hrayd, who had come here one day during the revolution, disguised in European fashion, ordered a drink and left her bag under the table filled with explosives. That bag had jolted the heart of France. The same country that had been demanding the removal of the veil for Algerian women discovered that even this weapon could be used against it—even a woman dressed in modern clothing could hide a freedom fighter. There I was, forty years later, the legitimate heir of Jamilah Bu Hrayd, passing by that same café, disguised in garments of piety. Once more, women have discovered that pious garments might conceal a passionate woman within, hiding under abaya [black traditional clothes for Muslim women which covers all the body] a body booby-trapped with desire. I walked down the street with the same fear she had felt, and with the same defiance; true love had now become the greatest suicide operation that an Algerian woman could carry out. (100)

Here, a fragmentary recollection is set off by a simple everyday event, such as walking past a particular landmark in the city. But even something as mundane as the street-side café catalyses a moment of recollection that draws parallels between Jamilah’s predicament and her own. The freedom fighter, driven by the ideal of liberation, had momentarily mimicked the norms imposed by the colonial oppressor in order to literally

explode the coloniser's illusion from within—she had turned the enforced norms of colonial culture into her disguise in order to wage the struggle to which she was passionately attached. Similarly, the narrator feels that beneath the drapes of her veil she is a passionate woman, showing the same defiance as Jamilah so many decades ago. The only difference being that where Jamilah died for love of her country, the narrator is struggling against a society that refuses women the right to be equal partners in love. At the same time, they were similar, in that they both struggled against a totalising cultural norm—the coloniser's civilising mission in the first instance, and the “piety” of Islamist conservatism in the latter. Mosteghanemi is able to produce a kaleidoscopic perspective, linking together fragmentary narratives as a form of collective memory of women's struggles in Algerian society. Her kaleidoscopic narrative firmly establishes the women's voices not as individual or subjective representations, but as moments of collective historical memory.

Returning to the experience that the narrator recounts, as she explores the female journalist's experience of having to wait for more than half an hour for a waiter to even take her order, it is clear here that women have strategies at their disposal to deal with the patriarchal imbalance in Arab societies. The narrator recalls how the journalist friend had used an attention-seeking device to make her point:

She was staying in a luxurious hotel in the capital with a delegation of foreign journalists. She called the waiter after waiting so long that she despaired of ever getting her order, and spoke to him in that eastern style. ‘We’ve been waiting for half an hour. You should give us special attention—we’re guests of the president.’ (37)

The mention of “that eastern style” refers to the constellation of gender and power that situates women in an inferior position in Arabic-speaking societies and forces them to

use language as a kind of reproach, scolding men for their lack of attention. As it happens, the journalist turns out to be Syrian and is therefore quite familiar with the unequal status of women in the East. The mention of the president draws in the momentousness of the commemorative occasion, and the watching gaze of foreign journalists who will be quick to judge the social mores of modern Algeria. The waiter's retort resonates as representative of the whole nation: "He answered in the way in which only Algerians excel. As long as you're a guest of the president, go to Ben Jedid and let him serve you" (37). This quick retort is significant in more ways than one. At the outset, the waiter's insolence does little to conceal his contempt for the new professional women who were breaking the established gender norms of Algerian society—that she is a customer at the restaurant notwithstanding. Moreover, the exchange, which occurs in the presence of a number of eminent foreign journalists, seems to show complete disregard for the example of "eastern hospitality" that he was setting before them. Most importantly, the reference to the president represents the broader political perspective of those in favour of maintaining traditional gender norms against the newly independent state's attempts to enact legislation in favour of gender equality. It is for this reason that the waiter asks her to call on the services of the president, who is there to "serve" self-reliant women such as the journalist. In this sense, the waiter's retort also plays on the modern democratic ethos of elected representatives as "servants of the people". It is vicious for what it leaves unsaid—"why don't you ask your president to serve you, why ask me?"

With this statement the waiter reasserts his male dominance, and at the same time shows contempt for the female customer, disregard for the reputation of Algeria amongst foreign observers and ambivalence about the new political order in Algeria as an independent state with its own president. By relating this anecdote, like an ever-

widening pattern in a kaleidoscopic vision, the narrator allows ripples of female memory to reach out and down through the past, beyond the single person, to enclose the experience of other women and depict the commemoration of momentous events from a critical perspective. This shows how Mosteghanemi explains the historical conditions that create the structural constraints through which the silence of subaltern women is ensured.

This anecdote shows in sharp relief that even the new political order and the trappings of status and power, in the form of staying at a luxury hotel, do not change the fundamentally hierarchical nature of gendered relations in Algeria. The anecdote reminds the reader that women's appreciation of momentous historical events is always clouded by the fundamental oppression that they experience in daily life on account of their gender. The memory that is retained of this commemorative day, and the dominant meaning that is passed on through such anecdotes, has been the ongoing fate of women throughout all of Algeria's history, rather than their also fully realizing the kinds of political gains that were made through national independence. This gendered, kaleidoscopic reading reveals a history of oppression that produces the silence of the present. Through the depiction of this incident, Mosteghanemi argues that even in eminently "national" spaces—such as a journalists' reception by the president—women remain vulnerable to patriarchal violence, which appears in the most inconspicuous ways. This seemingly personalised narration of the event must thus be read as a layered narrative of gendered social relations in contemporary Algeria. The individual and the social, the present and the past, are condensed together in this fragment of memory, which Mosteghanemi fits into a shifting mosaic of cultural memory and national reconstruction.

The experience that the writer, Ahlam, has in walking through Constantine, while similar to Khaled's insofar as the buildings and street furniture all serve as markers of events that have occurred in the past, reveals the ongoing gender oppression of Algerian women. These anchor points signify danger for her because of the illicit nature of her relationship with a man who was not her husband:

Here were streets where we feared the eyes of passersby, restaurants we dared not visit, houses we would not enter together. Here was a city that did not admit the presence of love, except in the songs of the Farqani. It didn't leave the house except to go to the mosque or to the café. It didn't open a window except to look out on a minaret. (196)

Ahlam recognises the memories contained in the building, but unlike Khaled, she succeeds in suppressing them simply by turning a blind eye. In another example, the female narrator remarks upon the way memories are inevitably associated with particular locations: "I was amazed by the coincidence of always being in places surrounded by history that pulled out their memories in your face at every turn" (82). In this case the location in question has multiple layers of significance. With each passing phase of history, the memories change. The first memory is linked to 5 July—the date of the arrival of the French colonial fleet: "Sidi Faraj wasn't just the name of a saint to whose tomb people still came seeking blessings, but also the name through which France entered Algeria" (82). The tomb of the saint is thus transformed into a site of multi-layered memory—it holds significance in the present as a place of religious faith for the people, while at the same time it stands as a symbol of the arrival of the French in Algeria and the history of colonialism that followed. This first reference links the place to the more distant past, with the mention of a famous Muslim saint, as well as to the start of colonial occupation of Algeria. Thereafter the place is linked to the end of

the War of Independence: “Fate, or rather the Algerian negotiators, wanted France to leave Algeria on the same date, one hundred and thirty years later, making July 5 the date of our independence as well” (82). The ironic substitution of the grand narrative of national destiny, with the negotiators’ whimsical sense of national predestination, suggests that the narrator is mocking monolithic historical narratives, which make tiny details such as dates and places bear extraordinary significance. This ambivalence about the historical record is continued in the description of the same location in the context of independent Algeria:

Directly after the independence, probably as a wink at history, Algerians redesigned the port in a more creative way. They made a modern fort of Sidi Faraj and built its tower and lighthouse so high that it seemed as if someone was still expecting an enemy to come by sea. But since then, the enemy hasn’t come from the sea, and not necessarily from overseas. (82)

This reflection shows that the female character can see beyond the memories that are fixed in physical spaces, in a way that Khaled patently cannot, and she gently mocks the mentality that stays locked into recalling past victories and past defeats, ever re-living their pain and fearing their return. Her ongoing relationship with independent Algeria teaches her that the battles of the past, and in particular the struggle with colonial domination, are no indication of the battles that will have to be faced in the future. The dangers that face modern Algeria come from within, and may be cultural and ideological rather than military battles with external powers bent on colonial suppression of the people. Thus, the feminist critique of nationalism and postcolonial theory must be extended in the case of Algeria by rethinking the status of the War of Independence through which the nation fought for and won its freedom. Mosteghanemi’s kaleidoscopic narrative attempts this by rendering the Algerian war as

a traumatic moment in Algerian history. As the above passage shows, for Mosteghanemi, the legacy of the war is far more complex than the nation winning back its freedom. It is an event that leaves festering wounds in the psyches and ideology of those who were touched by the war, both directly and indirectly. The shadow of the war extends into the present, and is felt not just as the burden of the past, but as a deeply fissured present of a multiplicity of narratives which intersect and overlap, without resolving themselves into a grand narrative.

One particular historical moment is recounted in the novel. Mohamed Boudiaf, who spent 27 years in exile, was invited by the military in February 1992 to become the new Algerian president. After spending only 166 days as president, he was assassinated while giving a public speech on live television. The speech is watched in the interior of a relative's house, a place Ahlam confesses she would normally avoid, since "I had never mastered the art of wasting time and sitting with other women. I was the mistress of gloom, while they were the handmaids of joy" (198). Rejecting the traditional role reserved for Algerian women, the narrator asserts her preference for the company of men and a right to be involved in the intellectual debates and political struggles of her country. This may be her desire, but it is a desire that is not fulfilled. Her viewing of the speech, on the margins of a meeting with other women, takes place without the benefit of sound, symbolising the exclusion that Algerian society imposes upon women that prevents them from fully participating in the country's history. Nevertheless, Ahlam records a different kind of emotional understanding based on the man's bearing: "Even with no sound, Boudiaf pierced you with his sad eyes that possessed a vague sort of grief compelling you to believe whatever he said. His eyes knew how the country had been trained in deceit since time immemorial" (199). The novel records the precise date and time of the assassination and thus situates the scene in history: "It was the 29th of

June, and the clock showed 11:27 a.m. Algeria watched its dreams being assassinated on live television” (199). Some rather trivial and domestic symbolism is chosen which also reflects the life experiences of women, in the phrase “Suddenly fate had brought him to a halt, just like the wheels of a car getting stuck in the mud while on the way to a picnic” (200). The gendered nature of memory is reflected in such language, since experiences have to be narrated in the language that the female writer has grown up with. There is no masculine talk of martyrs and heroic battles here, but rather the events are described from the margins, in the everyday words of women’s lives. The wheels of a car are mundane, trivial details that illustrate the pointlessness of many occurrences in human experience. The narrator makes reference to the classical myth of Ali Baba when she notes that “the forty thieves were secretly pleased standing in front of his corpse, rubbing their hands tightly as they happily thought of the booty that awaited them. They were free to continue plundering the country” (200). Thus it is no coincidence that the language here recalls the actions of the colonial oppressors. From the perspective of women and children who have no power in Algeria, the outcome is the same: the picnic is ruined and the legendary thieves plunder the country. These metaphors sum up the fate of modern Algeria, which is driven by internal power struggles and motivated by greedy Algerian men. The author’s interweaving of metaphors from story-telling traditions alongside everyday stories commingles myth and reality for the effect of underscoring the relations of history, nation and collective memory as a blending of fantasy and real-life events.

This narrator experiences the trauma of post-independence Algeria second-hand, even though, unlike Khaled, she lives right at the centre of post-independence historical events. She describes her situation in terms of her relationships with men:

At any moment and for any reason, my destiny could take another direction. I was a woman living between three men whose lives hung on the tip of a bullet... How could I live outside the ring of terror between my brother the Islamist who was chased by the authorities; my husband the soldier, who was monitored by the Islamists; and that journalist I loved in danger of being killed from both sides as they tried to settle accounts. (201)

This feminine understanding encapsulates Algeria's fate, illustrating in personal terms what the nation's history has been through the ages, namely a shifting destiny dependent upon the outcome of male violence. Mosteghanemi's kaleidoscopic narratives allow for a rewriting, or a palimpsestic overwriting, of the violence, and a redirecting of Algeria's future narratives towards peaceful progression based on a balancing of gendered perspectives. Gesturing towards this schism in the construction of Algerian society, Mosteghanemi holds the narrative in the tension in which Algerian women are struggling to find a peace after independence. Her narrative embodies the complexity and ongoing crises of modern Algeria, with all the pain, unresolved hate, and fear that goes with this role.

The parallel between the woman and the country is implicit here, illustrating the gender divide that Khaled had observed, only this time from the female rather than the male perspective. The trauma and loss experienced by women comes from inactivity in the presence of grave threats, but it is nonetheless damaging for that. The surface of the narrative speaks of love between a woman and a man, but underneath this narrative there is a historical subtext that speaks of the age-old realities of Algeria's violent past. This use of the allegorical mode allows the author to seduce the reader into an abstentious romantic tale, while also educating the reader about political concerns. It has already been shown that Mosteghanemi's work succeeds in "forcing Algerians to

confront themselves, in an effort to assess their failures, their mistakes, and their egotistical pursuit of individual aggrandizement and material comfort” (Bamia 87). My analysis explains further how Mosteghanemi unravels age-old myths and historical narratives, acknowledging their enduring resonance in particular places around Algeria, but at the same time laying down new meanings, through new analogies with Algeria’s no less difficult and traumatic present and future struggles, and through a kaleidoscopic narrative technique.

The ending of the book emphasises the ever-repeating cycle of life and death as the narrator retraces her steps down the same street that she had visited a year before, only this time after the death of her lover. The start of the new school year and the sight of some brand new notebooks are enough to reawaken the possibility of writing again, but in a way that is typical of Mosteghanemi, the ending is left open. “I was on the point of requesting some envelops and stamps, when...” (*COS*, 224). The last sentence of the book is incomplete, and the reader is left wondering what will happen now, imagining a new short story starting, and a new episode in the life of the narrator commencing, with some new twist that links the two in surprising ways. This is fiction within fiction but set within a real and precise historical time and place, a move that reveals how narratives of history and nation, like gender, are constructed and thus can be changed in ways that serve the better interests and future of the nation. The memories of the woman, Ahlam, are qualitatively different from those of Khaled, and the narratorial devices that are used to portray them are correspondingly more sophisticated. The locations that hold only dread and fear for the generation of martyrs who lost their friends and family in violent struggle are now redrawn with more complex meanings for the post-independence generation. Ambiguity and marginality are the only constants, and these contrast sharply with Khaled’s overblown certainties. In this chapter I have

argued that, taken together, the gendered memories of Khaled and Ahlam present a rich, new kaleidoscopic narrative of collective memory and history in late twentieth-century Algeria as a way of healing national trauma, a trauma that, as the following chapter will show, finds its problematic representation through gendered art.

Chapter Five

Gendered Memory and Art

“Art is everything that touches us, and not necessarily just everything we understand.”
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 30)

This chapter considers the way that Mosteghanemi makes use of gendered memory in relation to art in her two novels. The two protagonists, Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, each have ways of remembering trauma that are markedly different. Since gendered memory can be defined as the “differences between the ways in which men and women remember” (Leydesdorff, et al., 1), the protagonists’ gendered ways of remembering are crucial to understanding Mosteghanemi’s views of Algerian history. The ways in which they remember trauma, through their different gender perspectives and experiences, necessarily help to shape their understandings of the present as well as the future for Algeria. An argument that was begun in the previous chapter is thus extended in this chapter to demonstrate how Mosteghanemi is able to deploy a unique kaleidoscopic mode of narrative construction that allows her to explore questions of the gendered character of traumatic memory, more specifically in its problematic representation in art. This chapter demonstrates how art, and acts of creating art, can also be gendered, according to subjective experience and memory. I show Mosteghanemi’s method of deploying gender to explore the intersections between history, trauma and art, to provide a substantive understanding of her work, which demands recognition as arguing for an autonomous agenda for women writers in contemporary Algeria.

For the purpose of defining “gendered” here, this work necessarily moves away from an understanding of gender as premised on a “natural” biological differentiation. Butler encourages us to understand the subject of gender as an effect of discourse. At the same time, Butler is often critical of the basic premises of social constructionist

feminist theorists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who have argued for a dichotomized distinction between the natural/biological concept of sex and the culturally constructed notion of gender. Even as Butler agrees with constructionists' ideas of gender as a social-cultural construct, she offers instead a provocative historicization of the idea of nature itself, arguing that "the very concept of nature has a history, and the figuring of nature as a blank page... is decidedly modern, linked perhaps to the emergence of technological means of domination" (*Bodies that Matter*, 4).

Constructionist theory, according to Butler, is problematic in that it accepts the existence of a "natural body" that is outside of, and precedes, the effects of discourse. Thus Butler proposes the idea of "citational performativity," which establishes a dynamic relationship between gender and sex. For Butler, this entails a revision of the very concept of materiality as a static concept outside of time, into one of materialisation which is always and already a process. The idea of a construction, therefore, cannot be seen as one in which an independent agent (culture) acts upon gender unilaterally and from *outside* time, as an act "that happens once and its effects are fixed" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 9). At the level of the subject, Butler's idea of "performativity" enables us to understand how discourses "produce the effect they name" through "reiterative and citational practices" (2). Furthermore, Butler argues that "there is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability" (9).

For Butler, the possibility of power emerges in the constitutive tension between representation and its materialisation. This simultaneously makes possible the exercise of power, while also rendering it perpetually unstable in its effects. I argue that Mosteghanemi's writing inhabits this space of instability, wherein she explores the possibilities emerging in the constitutive gap between representation and

materialisation, which is articulated through an overlap of her ideas about art, memory and gender, for the purpose of representing not only healing for the protagonists, but also a reconfiguring and reimagining of a future Algerian state. The deployment of a kaleidoscopic perspective is Mosteghanemi's way of "inhabiting" the space of instability theorised by Butler. This, in fact, is what lends Mosteghanemi's writing its narrative force.

Thus, the question of gender must not be situated solely in the domain of the cultural, as against a supposedly natural domain of sex. Rather than make such a simplistic distinction between natural, pre-discursive "reality," and "discourse," Butler argues that gender must be understood as inhabiting the space between materialisation and representation. This critical theoretical distinction allows one to more precisely define gender in Mosteghanemi's writing as this unstable space between, through which a reconfiguring of the Algerian future can be imagined in ways that create new gendered social relations. Algerian women are represented as being caught between a normative patriarchy that seeks to turn women into symbols of the unbroken continuity and unity of "Algerian culture", and an ongoing struggle to transform traditional gender relations. Mosteghanemi attempts to explore this complex terrain of Algerian women's experience through a narrative textured by fragments of memories. Against the homogenising narrative of national culture, which seeks to subsume all differences in cultural memory under the dominant figure of national unity, Mosteghanemi's novels implicitly urge us to imagine a collective future where the national imaginary can be accommodating to the differently situated experiences and strategies of survival of Algerian men and women of different generations

In this argument, I demonstrate how Khaled and Ahlam present their memories about the Algerian past differently, and their gendered differences in remembering

provide an important frame for my analysis, for several reasons. First, these differences shape not only gendered memory in the novels, but also art as a way to express trauma. Second, the specific gender differences represent the history of the Algerian War of Independence as well as the struggle after independence. Third, the impact of this history and the trauma of the Algerian past inform the reactions to trauma that represent antithetical arguments in the novels about both Algeria's past and future. These gendered reactions to trauma play out in several ways in the novels; most interestingly in terms of the forms of art the protagonists create and what each art form represents. The protagonists both record and explore their individual memories of trauma through their art, and show markedly divergent approaches to the "often sharp differences in the overall characteristics of men's and women's memories of difficult or traumatic experiences" (Leydesdorff, et al., 165). This chapter demonstrates how art, and acts of creating art, can also be gendered, according to subjective experience and memory.

In terms of memory, an application of the critical approaches of Derridean deconstruction and Freudian psychoanalysis allows the critic to consider the relevance of how cultural artefacts, such as Khaled's paintings and Ahlam/Hayat's writings, reveal their deeper concerns with Algeria's traumatic history in ways that cannot be spoken directly. Freud's theorisation of the structural "belatedness" of traumatic experience is particularly useful in complicating our understanding of the relationship between trauma, subjective experience, and its conscious symbolisation in linguistic and artistic representation. Derrida's notion of *differance* emphasises flux of meaning and the work of re-reading that is involved in every attempt to create meaning. This allows one to theorise the ways in which the belatedness of traumatic experience shapes conscious articulation. The notion of difference foregrounds the temporal dimension of meaning formation. Seen from this perspective, Khaled's compulsive return to the bridges of

Constantine in his painting is an attempt to cope with his traumatic experience of the freedom struggle (the loss of his arm) through an act of painting that helps him to continuously defer the meaning of this traumatic experience. The bridges, for Khaled, are a trace that sustains the sense of a meaning-full present. As Derrida notes, “the (pure) trace is difference. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such plenitude” (63). The sensuous vibrancy of Khaled’s art is, paradoxically, made possible by his experience of trauma. Ahlam, on the other hand, adopts a practice of “citationality,” which places the apparent unity of the national past within quotation marks, and places the normative authority of the narrative under erasure.

My definition of “gendered art” here is also an expression of imagination and creativity in the choices of artistic expression on the part of each protagonist, such as forms of painting for Khaled and writing for Ahlam/Hayat. These forms are based on their individual understandings of having lived through a historical traumatic experience that was further experienced through the particular constraints and freedoms that constituted the traditional performance of gender in a patriarchal Algerian society of a strict masculine/feminine dichotomy. Understanding Mosteghanemi’s purpose in deploying gender as a way of exploring history, trauma and art ultimately leads the reader to the author’s vision for a configuration of a new Algeria.

The main feature of gendered art, as represented in Mosteghanemi’s texts, is her exploration of the deployment of the multiple healing and constructive functions of memory, art and imagination, by and through subjects who are themselves the effects of these modes of performing traditional binaries of gender. Khaled and Ahlam each deploy different modes of art from differently gendered perspectives and for different purposes. Their ways of creating art align with how critics such as Leydesdorff, Luisa

Passerini, and Paul Thompson have understood the production of art, and that by “addressing such issues can help us to understand how the memories of women and men have been reframed and reshaped, as well as the meanings assigned to masculinity and femininity” (Leydesdorff, et al., 8). Mosteghanemi’s assignment of sharply gendered meanings to Khaled and Ahlam’s experiences of trauma, as well as to their choice of particular art forms, reveals not only the purpose behind their choices, but also how the multiple functions of art are importantly differentiated along an axis of gender construction.

Thus gendered memory is linked to the ways in which the protagonists in the novels approach their chosen art forms, each from a different gendered perspective, in ways that align with traditional patriarchal binaries of masculinity and femininity. At the same time, Mosteghanemi also disrupts traditional gender binaries in critical ways. For this purpose, the use of trauma theory, as applied to postcolonial literature, provides a useful lens through which to analyse the main protagonists and their approach to memory and art. For my larger analysis, I construct a theoretical framework for linking gender and art in fiction through memories of trauma. The designation of particularized art forms to each protagonist represents a creative attempt to displace the traditional representation of gender roles. Mosteghanemi’s depiction of a woman who writes is deeply significant in the context of a modern Arabic literary tradition in Algeria that has historically been dominated by men, while women’s writing has been ignored and/or suppressed. I argue that Mosteghanemi’s novels explore not only the ways in which memory is *refracted* through gender positions, but that the subject’s strategies of recovery are gendered as well. Mosteghanemi is calling for a feminist perspective on the relation between art and trauma—only art that can take into account the social effects of patriarchal views of gender can enable a process of recovery. One of the distinctive

aspects of the strategies of recovery from trauma adopted by the two protagonists is that while Ahlam is able to articulate in her expression of trauma the structural effects of patriarchy, Khaled is unable to do so and remains trapped within the temptations and frustrations of his fantasies of masculine power and possession, thereby impeding his process of healing.

Mosteghanemi's novels are therefore to be understood as a literary attempt to come to terms with the traumatic past of men and women living in contemporary Algeria. This trauma, as Mosteghanemi shows, has various dimensions—the personal, psychological, bodily and the collective/national. The complex intersections of history, politics and identity are deeply inscribed within the architecture of Mosteghanemi's novels, such that the relationship between art and trauma seems to be a central theme. Out of all the trauma, pain and confusion, both novels point to creative cultural artefacts as a special place where individuals and nations can begin to flourish, free from the crippling legacies of the past. For both Khaled and Ahlam, art as cultural production provides a bridge leading back to memory. However, it is only in the case of Ahlam that this bridge also becomes a path to recovery, and in a profound sense, a way into the future—not just for the traumatised individual characters, but Algeria as a whole.

Theoretical Background

The complex set of questions about memory, art and gender that Mosteghanemi explores in her work expands the conceptual scope of “trauma.” Trauma studies offers an important point of departure for an analysis of Mosteghanemi's novels. Traumatic events have usually been understood as radical cuts in subjective experience that have profound effects on subjective states long after the event itself. For the protagonists in Mosteghanemi's novels, the violent years of the Algerian War of Independence become

the traumatic episodes that profoundly shape their subsequent lives. While Khaled is haunted by the violence and the promise of a struggle for liberation, Ahlam must confront the aftermath of the war in post-independence Algeria.

The development of trauma studies in the Anglo-American academy over the last three decades has offered insights into the process of verbalising trauma, as well as the relationship between language, representation and traumatic experience in general. For most theorists of trauma, the question of recovery is closely linked to the ability of the subject to draw on the resources of language to both communicate their experience and come to terms with it. Visser notes two dominant perspectives on the question of trauma and symbolic representation: the “aporetic” and the “therapeutic” approaches (274). While the therapeutic approach grew out of the experiences of psychologists, war veterans, social workers, lawyers, etc., and their efforts to develop a new vocabulary to publicly engage with trauma, the aporetic approach developed out of the more philosophical dispositions of French post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. For my present purpose, I take up the work of Herman and Caruth as representative of these two intellectual strains in trauma studies.

A product of over two decades of engagement with trauma survivors, Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* was amongst the early books to establish a theoretical framework for the emergent field. Her work is geared towards expanding the notion of trauma prevalent in clinical practice as well as public discourse. According to Herman “there is a spectrum of traumatic disorders, ranging from the effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse” (3). On one hand, she tries to go beyond the biological definitions of trauma in PTSD discourse: researchers in the field must “rediscover the essential interconnection of biological, psychological, social, and political dimensions of trauma” (240). On the other, she

discusses cases of long-term sexual abuse, with the intention of challenging prevalent notions about its psychological effects. She argues: “established diagnostic concepts, especially the severe personality disorders commonly diagnosed in women, have generally failed to recognize the impact of victimization” (3). Herman’s work is particularly significant in that it not only draws attention to the everyday and subtle forms of violence experienced by those facing abuse, but also foregrounds the long-term implications of such trauma rather than the drama of a singular event. This makes her insights into violence particularly pertinent to my own analysis of the traumatic effects of the drawn-out conflict of the Algerian war of liberation. While my work does not take up specifically the question of sexual abuse, it does deal with some of the other forms of trauma described by Herman. Her work allows me to think about the everyday forms of trauma and violence that are inflicted on subjects in such conflicts, and their long-term implications.

One of the most abiding effects of a traumatic experience, according to Herman, is “dissociation.” The experience of psychological trauma is characterised by a sense of disempowerment and disconnection from the social world. Recovery requires empowerment of the traumatised subject, and a re-establishment of social relationships of trust, autonomy, initiative and intimacy (133). Any such process of recovery must take place within a context of human relationships, rather than isolation. The fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community (3). The therapeutic approach of early theorists, such as Herman, places great emphasis on using narrative as an empowering tool that enables the integration of traumatic experience as memory. While there are necessarily difficulties in this process of integrating traumatic

experience into language, nevertheless, “the victim must be helped to speak the horrifying truth of her past—to speak of the unspeakable” (179).

Scarry makes a distinction between pain and/or bodily trauma and psychological trauma. Like Herman, Scarry argues for a complex understanding of physical pain as being simultaneously an individual as well as social experience. For the person suffering from trauma, pain and illness effectively inhibit the body’s social extension, which implicates the formation of human subjectivity in different ways (Neal 86). The person in pain loses the ability to articulate her experiences of embodiment, and, exhibiting symptoms of dissociation, the subject withdraws within the boundaries of the body. According to Scarry, “her world, effectively, becomes coterminous with the physical boundaries of her body” (34).

Physical pain is a universal experience, as Scarry notes, and one that is impossible to put in words. In this sense, pain marks a limit of language, its breakdown. At the same time, working within a therapeutic perspective, Scarry argues that recovery is only possible when the subject begins to put his or her pain in words. This helps the subject to move from a state of chaos, to one where they begin to gain control and make sense of pain (172). Thus, even as bodily trauma is marked as qualitatively different from psychological trauma, the access to the traumatic event, in both cases, can only be made possible through the resources of language. Only verbalising trauma makes recovery of selfhood and social identity possible.

In contrast to Herman and Scarry, the aporetic approach foregrounds the internal, abstract and “unsayable” causation of trauma, rather than a historically concrete, knowable, external causation (Visser 273). For theorists like Caruth, the therapeutic approach offers too simplistic an approach to the question of recovery. For her, narrativisation of traumatic memory constitutes an “impossible saying” (Caruth,

Trauma 9). Caruth returns to and builds on the Freudian notion of “latency,” which is central to Caruth’s understanding of trauma, art and recovery. According to Caruth, Freud,² in describing the psychological effects of an accident on survivors, argues that even in situations where a person escapes seemingly unhurt, they seem to experience a “return” of the traumatic memory at a later time, in the form of flashbacks, recall, and physical symptoms such as palpitation and sweating (84). Trauma, in this understanding, is something that “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4).

The belatedness of traumatic experience, for Caruth, renders problematic the notions of authentic testimony and progressive recovery through verbalisation of experience. Caruth asserts that this phenomenon of belatedness is constitutive of many dimensions of trauma narratives. It allows a theorisation of a range of experiences—from instances where memory of a traumatic event is lost over time but returns as symptomatic eruptions in language, to others where the survivor seems to return obsessively to the event through narrative. The repetitive “return” to the site of trauma, according to Caruth, emerges out of the constitutive opacity of traumatic experience. This experience of a radical “cut” in a subject’s symbolic reality cannot be fully integrated, and remains incomprehensible to victim, therapist and theoretician alike. According to Visser (273), traumatic experience is “literal yet latent” and is therefore governed by a very different kind of temporality than other kinds of experience. To

² Freud initially mentioned the theory of trauma in terms of WWI soldiers who had repetitive nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime trauma. The traumatic event and its aftermath developed as an essential aspect of psychoanalysis. The theory of trauma also receives historical elaboration through cultures. Important for my purposes is Freud’s explanation of the theory of “latency,” or the concept of how traumatic events and their memory are lost through the time and return again as symptomatic once initiated by some related event (*Studies in Hysteria*).

engage with the trauma of a subject, then, is to be aware of the peculiar temporal and referential structure of traumatic experience, which can be reached only through its later emergence as repetitive elements in narrative linguistic structures.

At the same time, this fundamental opacity of traumatic experience has a deeply social dimension as well. We must “read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another; the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 8). According to Caruth, engagement with the trauma of others through its literary/artistic representation is not about trying to reach an unadulterated “truth”. Rather, working through art is an opportunity which “permit[s] history to arise where immediate understanding may not” (11).

In so far as Mosteghanemi’s novels are literary-philosophical engagements with the question of trauma, she acknowledges at the outset the broad spectrum of subjective experience that constitutes the idea of trauma: “Both of us were victims of the war. They ripped off a limb of my body and snatched a father from your arms” (*MIF*, 65). While Khaled’s subjective dispositions, as a veteran soldier of the Algerian liberation struggle, are to a great degree framed through the bodily trauma of having lost his arm in the war, in contrast, Ahlam must contend with questions of disillusionment, loneliness and her familial legacy in postcolonial Algeria.

Khaled and Ahlam seem to represent, respectively, the aporetic and therapeutic approaches to trauma. Khaled relives his trauma every day—it prevents him from finding any peace with himself and his past. His approach is therefore an “aporetic” one, because he cannot find any solution or promising avenue through which he can reach an

accommodation with the painful past. Khaled sees the past in every aspect of modern Constantine and fails to identify in any way with the postcolonial Algeria that it represents.

Khaled's Painting: Gendered Memory and Art

The loss of Khaled's arm obviously symbolises the physical trauma he experienced: "I am the handicapped one, who lost his arm in forgotten battle and his heart in closed cities" (*MIF*, 62). Following the war, Khaled's exile to Paris further exacerbates the traumatic impact of war on the *damaged* body, as he flees from home to avoid the further psychological trauma of later governmental corruption as the "new" Algeria emerges. Khaled's trauma is also intrinsically linked to the act of art and his self-identification as artist. He says, "Here I am, an artistic phenomenon, and how could that not be when the fate of a handicapped man is to be a phenomenon, mighty even in his art" (38). Khaled becomes a famous painter, yet he restricts his art to images of bridges, specifically the bridges of Constantine³, thereby placing his trauma-stricken body in a state of diasporic flux, too traumatised to cross the bridge to return, and too attached to leave the city that he now calls home. I argue that Mosteghanemi uses this bridge of cultural production to explore the relationship between trauma, gender and art which, ultimately, for Khaled, fail. Khaled's obsession with the bridges of Constantine initially reflects his idealistic desire for a comfortable, happy space in which he can relive his childhood and his past engagement with the revolution, and art is at first therapy for him, although it does not appear to bring him relief.

An important aspect of trauma theory that is relevant to Mosteghanemi's work is the connection between the creative arts and recovery. According to Scarry, all made

³ See Appendix, figs 1, 2, 3, 4.

objects (including creative writing and artistic paintings) are to be seen as both a site of projection and a site of reciprocation (28). It is as though the embodied pain and suffering in the human being must be exorcised by inventing another container and expending great physical and mental effort in order to transfer that pain into another specially created external object. This connection explains why Khaled's paintings and Ahlam's writings are so personal to them and so critical to their survival. They serve a psychological purpose as receptacle for difficult memories in the first place, and then a locus for ongoing reflection, discussion and projection of negative experiences. As Khaled's doctor advises him when he amputates his arm, "You have to build a new bridge with the world through either painting or writing" (*MIF*, 35). There is a real sense in which the creators have a relationship with their works of art. This can be seen in the way that Khaled holds a conversation with his painting:

'Good morning, Constantine! How is my suspension bridge, my own sadness suspended for a quarter of a century?' I asked. The painting answered me with its usual silence, but with a little wink this time. I smiled conspiratorially. The painting and I understand each other. As the Arab proverb has it, 'People who are close understand each other with a wink.' It was a homemade painting full of pride like its owner, noble like him, and capable of understanding even from half a wink! (*MIF*, 47)

For Khaled, his painting is a way for him to maintain a connection with his past—the memory of his native Constantine helps him to survive the daily humiliations of an Algerian immigrant in Paris, even as it comes to bear in his mind a utopian significance. In the above passage, Khaled is talking to his painting in Paris and tries to personalise it as if he is talking to one of his close friends, who has similar principles and morals. To Khaled, both can understand each other from a wink. This passage

reveals that Khaled is unable to create real social relations with other people in Paris; instead he is talking to his painting. This dialogue reflects his trauma and may offer a “site of reciprocation,” but because he cannot transfer his pain to his painting, it does not help him. The bridges he paints express his suspended feeling, his dislocation and his loneliness. He admits: “As I painted those bridges, I thought I was painting you. But in fact, I was only painting myself. The bridge was simply an expression of my situation that is forever in suspense. I was unconsciously reflecting onto it my worries, my fears, my turmoil” (*MIF*, 137). The purpose of his painting is to be a reflection that shapes his thoughts, fear and anxiety. But there is no therapeutic relief through his painting.

Moreover, for Khaled, his crippled arm is a gaping wound that marks the bodily trauma he has suffered. When Khaled feels the critical gaze of the people in Paris on his body, he suffers a kind of emasculation as he finds himself reduced to an object: “one is ashamed of the empty sleeve hidden timidly in the pocket of a jacket, as though trying to conceal a private memory and apologize for the past to those who have no past. The missing hand disturbs them and takes away their appetite” (*MIF*, 43). The physicality of the reaction that Khaled anticipates is doubly suggestive—even as it arcs an almost physical transfer of pain from Khaled to those who see his crippled arm, it also attests to the sense of discomfort that this creates in those who are confronted by his traumatic loss.

There is no way for Khaled to build a new identity which measures up to his youthful self because he lives in a time and place that is unsympathetic to his suffering. In Paris, there are places reserved for war heroes in the Paris Metro, but Khaled reflects that “These places are reserved for other combatants. Their war was not your war, and their wounds may well have been inflicted by you. As for your injuries, they are not recognized here... You are the broken memory and this broken body is nothing but a

display” (*MIF*, 44). This passage is significant in that it not only marks the status of the crippled arm as a traumatic wound, it also shows the way in which the “return” from that original site of trauma takes place through a dislocation from the present. Khaled’s amputated arm is not so much a referential mark of the war in which Khaled participated. It signifies the impossibility of forgetting.

Remembering, here, is not so much a therapeutic integration into the symbolic order as it is a psychological mechanism that simultaneously compensates and intensifies his sense of subjective disconnection with his social environment. Moreover, this dislocation is not limited to the streets of Paris. At the end of the novel, he observes the yawning void between veterans of the freedom struggle—such as himself—and the post-independence generation: “An ill-tempered customs official, as old as independence, stood at his desk. He was unmoved either by my missing arm or by my grief... We stood close to each other, but he could not read me. It happens that nations become illiterate” (262). The apathy of the Parisians and the ill-tempered official towards Khaled’s trauma is symptomatic of a blocked process of recovery which ignores that he is condemned to failure without the presence of a witness who can recognise and affirm the traumatic experience that he has gone through. Moreover, the apathy of those like the customs official—who seems to be only one generation after Khaled—is all the more painful. A patriot like Khaled had come to assume that the deeper bond of national belonging was what connected Algerians of all generations. However, as Mosteghanemi appears to argue, for a country like Algeria, with its historical experience of colonial trauma and violent liberation, such a sense of a shared national culture and language (“nations become illiterate”) is hardly possible—those who came after independence had not themselves lived through the trauma of the war, while those who had valiantly struggled were blind to the deep scars the war had left

behind, despite the “victory” against the colonial oppressor. The “illiteracy” that Mosteghanemi refers to above is the fundamental lack of a shared cultural vocabulary through which the different generations in contemporary Algerian society could transmit experience and knowledge.

The only way out of this dilemma for Khaled is to retreat backwards, in other words to seek through his paintings to reproduce the time and the place in which he was a whole man, a time when his injuries would be interpreted as marks of heroism. Constantine, as the place of deep chasms and somewhat scary bridges, stands for Algeria, a country hit with division and strife, struggling to find ways of holding different political, cultural and religious factions together. The bridges in Constantine hold much more symbolism for Khaled than simply a connection with a physical place; they also connect him with his former self:

The colours suddenly started to take on the colour of my memory and became a gaping wound very difficult to stop... As soon as I had finished one neighborhood another would be aroused. As soon as I had finished one bridge, another would spring to mind. (*MIF*, 125)

By equating the colours of his memory with a gaping wound, Khaled reveals that he still sees the past in terms of trauma. Latent suffering rises to the surface again and again, as Visser (274) explains, thus forcing Khaled to re-experience the pain of previous trauma without any prospect of peace from the past.

The opening page of *Memory in the Flesh* demonstrates very clearly how Khaled imagines the relationship between his art and his traumatic past:

Before, I thought we could write about life only when we had recovered from our wounds; when we were able to touch old sores with a pen and not revive the

pain; when we could look back free from nostalgia, madness, and a sense of grievance! (1)

However, immediately after considering this idea about using a pen to revisit the past without pain, Khaled questions the viability of this way of dealing with memory through the arts of writing or drawing: “But is this really possible? We are never completely cut off from our memory. Recollection provides the inspiration for writing, the stimulus for drawing, and for some, the motivation even for death” (1). Khaled associates memory with pain and death, but also with acts of creativity.

In this sense, Khaled is depicted as attempting an aporetic engagement with his traumatic past. He dwells on its being “unsayable” and seems condemned to traumatic repetition. Even as he draws his artistic inspiration from the Constantine of his recollections, this engagement with art does not help him symbolise his trauma and transcend it in any way. Rather, his recollections can only circle around their traumatic object, without revealing the structure of this perpetual return that frames Khaled’s present. Rather than facing up to the discordant elements of the present that he confronts upon his brief return to Constantine, Khaled prefers to dwell in the past. He can imagine a therapeutic approach to memory, but he dismisses it as impossible, since for him the only release from painful memories is to be cut off from them, or in other words, to forget them. Thus the temporality of Khaled’s experiences appears disjointed, since his life is divided into two parts: life in Constantine during the War of Independence, and life in Paris as an exiled Algerian patriot.

In contrast, Ahlam/Hayat does not have this chasm in her life, and so the latent meanings in people, places and objects can be continually overlaid with new meanings, as she encounters them repeatedly throughout her life. Ahlam uses her writing to work through her painful past, while still suffering the hurt of parental neglect and the trauma

of growing up in a damaged home environment. Her military husband neglects her just as her father did in the past; however, in spite of her negative experience of patriarchy she still very much wants to be a part of the new Algeria. Ahlam declares, “in fact every successful novel is a kind of crime *we* commit *against* some memory and maybe against someone, we carry out a completely silent murder in full view of everyone” (*MIF*, 8). Ahlam’s choice of writing represents a more pragmatic and therapeutic attitude to painful memories than Khaled’s tortured self-absorption and longing for past loves, whether they be places, people or diffuse notions of an Algerian pre-colonial golden age.

In a half-serious description of her motivation in writing fiction, Ahlam exclaims: “We only write novels to kill those who have become a burden to us. We write to finish them off!” (*MIF*, 80). Whereas Khaled uses his painting as a fetishistic meditation on death, Ahlam has been able come to terms with the traumas of her past and present. In doing so her writing represents, like Khaled’s painting, an attempt to recreate the idealised past that is necessarily bound to fail. While Khaled sees his painting as a means to revisit and relive his traumatic past, Ahlam looks to sublimate her experience in her writing. She is not defeated by bitter memories, but rather they encourage her to action in the present difficult times in Algeria. Her reaction to trauma and loss is thus ambivalent yet affirmative: “If all joy holds within it a certain amount of sadness, it is no wonder that sadness, too, carries with it some joy. We are ashamed to call it such, but artists know it well” (*COS*, 222).

The differences in the way the two characters approach artistic creation is foregrounded by Mosteghanemi through the difference in the art forms they take up. Khaled’s aporetic approach, premised on a repetition of that originary moment of traumatic experience, means he is drawn to a non-figurative art form such as painting.

The almost tactile quality of Khaled's attachment to his painting marks a relationship with artistic expression that must be able to sustain the affective dimension of his aporetic, repetitive return to the Algeria of his utopian fantasies. Even when he discusses the purpose of writing a novel with Ahlam, he has the same aporetic approach: "I used to think a novel was the way writers lived a love story *a second time*. Their way of giving *immortality* to those whom they loved" (*MIF*, 9). Ahlam, however, adopts a therapeutic approach towards her experiences of trauma. Unlike Khaled, who tries to access through his painting the affective and emotional dimensions that sustain his trauma, Ahlam turns to her writing as a path towards coming to terms with her trauma. In so far as she is trying to achieve a degree of distance from her own experiences through the work of artistic representation, her choice of writing is particularly appropriate. Later, Khaled realizes the difference between his painting and her writing, saying,

I was conscious of your dialectic attitude towards art and literature. You rid yourself of things every time you wrote about them, as if you killed problems with words. And I became filled with them every time I painted, as if I was bringing to life their forgotten details, and I was finding myself increasingly attached to them as I hung them on the wall of memory. (*MIF*, 120)

As this passage reveals, for Ahlam, writing becomes a medium through which she arrives at a representation of her own situation—of how she has *come to be*. As a particularly self-reflexive medium of expression, writing allows her to work patiently through her traumatic attachments, rather than affectively identify with them. Thus, the act of writing critically supports Ahlam's attempt to reconcile with her traumatic past and engage in a process of recovery.

Contrastingly, for Khaled, the work of artistic creation itself is but an extension of his trauma and his masculine ego, his will to control. Khaled uses his art in much the same way as he uses women. His use of the language of sex and conquest in relation to painting reveals this as his unconscious positioning. A sense of his frustrated ability for masculine conquest can be seen in his description of a moment when the artist contemplates what he might paint: “But then I might not paint anything, and might die as I was standing, impotent before a virgin canvas” (*MIF*, 220). The empty canvas confronts him with his failure to resolve his traumatic past. This anxiety can be overcome only by displacing it onto a sexualised metaphor. Even as he stands before the canvas, his painting is transformed into a confirmation of his abilities of masculine conquest of the feminine form.

Khaled’s nostalgia for the city of Constantine is framed in similar language: of the artist who, through his genius, gives the lifeless city a fullness of being. Every painting represents for him a kind of conquest, and the memories that flood into his mind are all gendered, in so far as he casts himself in the role of the male artist/lover exercising power over the body of a female: “I wanted to give satisfaction to Constantine, stone by stone, bridge by bridge, and neighbourhood by neighbourhood, like a love who gives satisfaction to the body of a woman who is no longer his” (*MIF*, 125). The canvas is an object to Khaled, and he attempts to retrieve his former masculine power by using nostalgic memories to charge his paintings with sexual meaning: “I was going back and forth with my brush as if with my lips. I was kissing its soil, its stones, its trees, its valleys. Distributing my passion over the space with colored kisses, nostalgia, madness, and a sweating love” (126). This love is, of course, not reciprocated. It is solitary and imaginary, rather than a real experience with a real woman. Even Khaled’s love for Ahlam/Hayat is lived out mainly in his imagination. He

does not possess the masculine power that he thinks he ought to have, since he has lost an important power dimension of self through the trauma of the war. For Khaled the important power dimension of self was to join the front with Si Tahir and to be a martyr. As he describes, “I went on putting all the efforts I could into proving my heroism to him as if I wanted him to *witness* my *manliness* or my *death*, to witness that I belonged to nobody else save this country... but every time, I came back and others fell. It was as if death had decided to reject me” (19). Khaled wants to prove his “manliness,” but in effect his masculine sexual identity has been displaced by the trauma, and he has not yet found any way of overcoming this disability in his personal life. In this manner, the figure of the emasculated male becomes a signifier for the condition of the postcolonial male subject who cannot recover his lost powers.

Khaled further sees Ahlam/Hayat as a kind of filter, which is strongly coloured by the revolutionary struggle of Algeria’s recent history. Ahlam/Hayat is made, through Khaled’s eye, to embody his martyred hero, his perfect past, his mother, and his ideal homeland: “I look at you and recall Si Taher’s features in your smile and the colour of your eyes. How beautiful it is for martyrs to return that way in your looks” (Mosteghanemi 40). Here, one can see how Khaled remains fixated on his past life, and his past relationships, investing all his attention and hope in reestablishing what he has lost. When he meets Ahlam/Hayat in Paris, he tries to connect her with another time and place, and in doing so thus reveals the inherent latency of his traumatic and historical experience. As aforementioned, in *Memory in the Flesh* Khaled remains fixated on his past life, and his past relationships, investing all his attention and hope in re-establishing what he has lost.

Thus Khaled’s masculine approach to his trauma is definitively aporetic, and there is no therapeutic value in this imagined activity of sex and love; however, Khaled

expressly states that his loss and grief will continue after the painting is finished: “I was happy that Constantine would be the painting my body would weep over” (*MIF*, 126). He weeps because his love for Algeria and his loss in terms of masculine identity cause him anguish, even many years after he has left the country behind. This separation of body and mind is yet another symptom of trauma that shapes his art, since Khaled cannot feel that the damaged body he inhabits is his true image.

Through her deep exploration of the characters of Khaled and Ahlam, Mosteghanemi seems to present, on one hand, an aporetic mode of engaging with trauma that collapses into a strategy of avoidance and traumatic repetition. On the other, Mosteghanemi plots a trajectory of a therapeutic way of confronting traumatic memories, one which is able to come to terms with their latent effects in a subjective disposition and which looks to writing as a way to sublimate the traumatic rupture into language and narrative representation.

Trauma, it is argued, affects women differently from men. Because women and men start from different positions, they deal with the aftermath of violence and trauma in different, gendered, ways (Lazreg, “Feminism and Difference,” 81-83). Men are most often implicated in violence as both perpetrator and victim, while women are most often cast in the role of victim, whether or not they choose this role (McLarney 22-44; Valassopoulos 114). Moreover, research into narrative accounts of memory in general has noted that “men and women exhibit qualitative and quantitative differences in their reported autobiographical memories” (Reese, et al., 28). Joyce Mushaben discusses the “refractive impact of gender on both historical experience and recall” in the context of East and West German women who lived through the aftermath of the Second World War, the division of Germany and its reunification. She argues that women experience events differently from men due to their different roles in society, and that this means

that they also recall these events differently, giving divergent meanings which reflect their gender, social class and location, whether in, for the women of Germany, capitalist or communist parts of the country (8).

Thus this dyad of trauma experienced by Khaled-Ahlam represents the divergence of the aporetic and therapeutic approaches. Mosteghanemi explores the peculiarly deferred temporal structure of traumatic experience, and its integration into the symbolic order of language. Additionally, I argue that this dyad of trauma allows for a further analysis of gendered memory. Mosteghanemi's novels explore not only the ways in which memory is "refracted" through gender positions, but that the subjects' strategies of recovery are gendered as well. Mosteghanemi appears to call for a feminist perspective on the relation between art and trauma—only it is an art that can take into account the corrosive social effects of patriarchal views of gender and can therefore enable a process of recovery.

In this sense, Mosteghanemi's novels articulate a feminist critique of prevalent theories of trauma and recovery. Her work implicitly argues that trauma theory reduces the particularity of subjective experience and enunciation of trauma through its abstract construction of the traumatised subject. In doing this, trauma theory reads both the experience of trauma and its subsequent externalisation through the lens of an individualised subject. The significance of gender as a structural question is here reduced to one of many variables that seem to externally influence the subjects' dispositions. The ways in which Khaled and Ahlam turn to different art forms as a means of coming to terms with their trauma is not simply a question of individual "choice"; this difference is coded in a specifically gendered framework. Khaled uses painting as a means of reliving his trauma through his nostalgic memories of his native Constantine. However, he is condemned to an aporetic mode of repetition that offers no

scope of recovery. This is primarily because he continues to think of the relation between art and artist as one of a masculine painter who brings to life his feminized art. Contrastingly, Ahlam uses her writing as a way of engaging with and critiquing the strictures of patriarchal norms in traditional Algerian society. Her mode of engagement with her writing is ultimately therapeutic and enables her to work her way through the deep psychological structure of traumatic repetition that has characterised patriarchal Algerian society in the aftermath of the war.

Mosteghanemi's descriptions of Khaled as a painter place great emphasis on his disposition to practice art. Khaled's experience as an exile in Paris is bound to his earlier life in Algeria through two traces: his nostalgic memories and his missing arm. In a gendered reading of Khaled's character, his amputated arm now becomes more than just a mark of bodily trauma; he describes his amputated arm as "my personal documentation, my identification" (*MIF*, 30). It is a disguise that conceals his deeper anxieties—it is a sign of his emasculation. His inability to appear in society as a "complete" man is transformed in his painting into a highly eroticised fantasy of his own relation to his work. Mosteghanemi, however, does not cast this relation in a psychoanalytical framework. Khaled recalls his past when Si Taher promoted him to the rank of officer to make military decisions: "Only then did the revolution turn me into a *man*, as if the rank I was carrying had given me *an authority* that would *liberate* me from my memory" (19). The "incompleteness" that Khaled experiences, and his troubled sense of masculine authority, are not coded in specifically psychosexual terms. Even as he has difficulties in his relationships with women, his sense of insecurity has as much to do with his existence in Paris as an exile. The question here is more specifically one of a social experience of dislocation rather than of psychic repression.

In the aftermath of wars and violence, this necessarily sets up a gendered dynamic between the antagonistic approaches to art that are adopted by the two protagonists. The novels demonstrate that memory is gendered, and illustrate how processing memories of trauma through art can either help or hinder a person in dealing with a traumatic past, as when Khaled asks, “Had I become unable to walk straight without looking *backward* onto the landscape of my memories?” (*MIF*, 201). He suffers disempowerment on many levels, through his physical injury, his exile, and his unsatisfactory relationships with women, including his failed ambitions to pursue a love affair with Ahlam. In contrast, with her flourishing career, Ahlam, the writer, exclaims that “A woman who writes is a woman beyond *suspicious* because she is transparent in her nature” (218). She demonstrates her journey along a path from patriarchal oppression towards a feminist conception of equality and freedom. While memories of trauma hinder Khaled, they decidedly help Ahlam, demonstrating a taut link between memory, gender and art.

Ahlam/Hayat: Writing the Self as Healing

Ahlam believes that “intimate thoughts were written, not said, and writing is a silent confession” (*COS*, 130). As observed by Suzanne Henke, women are far more likely to turn to writing as a way of working through traumatic memories, and indeed the term “scriptotherapy” is coined by Henke to describe this process in the context of women’s autobiographical writings, following traumatic experiences (xxi). This applies to Ahlam’s choice of writing as a medium for expressing her own gendered memories. There is an added complication in making such assumptions, however, because so much of *Memory in the Flesh* is presented through the somewhat distorting perspective of the narrator Khaled. Even as he claims to offer an authentic narrative of his encounters with

Ahlam, it is hard to tell to what extent his words are tinged by his deep-seated jealousy. However, the second novel is narrated by Ahlam, making her choice of writing as a medium for expressing her own gendered memories better than Khaled's choice of painting. The difference is not so much in the artistic forms. Rather, it has to do with the particular ways in which the two protagonists deploy the expressive possibilities of their respective art forms to engage with their experiences of trauma. Khaled's paintings function as a nostalgic supplement that sustain his sense of self, even as he is unable to come to terms with the loss of his arm. In contrast, Ahlam is able to use her writing as a strategy to live with her trauma, coming to understand its conscious and unconscious effects on her life. In *Memory in the Flesh* Ahlam's choice of writing becomes a way of expressing her own gendered memories. In a telling passage, she says:

‘I might owe my culture and education to Algeria,’ you replied with some irony, ‘but becoming a writer is another issue. It’s not a gift from anybody. We write to recover what we’ve already lost or was filched from us. I’d have preferred an ordinary childhood and an ordinary life and to have had a father and a family like anybody else, instead of a group of books here and a bundle of notepads there. But Father became the property of the whole of Algeria. Only writing became my property, and nobody’s going to take that away from me!’ (67)

Ahlam perceives her previous experience as the deliberate act of an unjust, patriarchal state, as can be seen by her use of negatively-charged words such as “filched”. The focus on property also highlights the unfairness of a society that allows men to control property, seeing women as dependents rather than equals.

Islamic feminists have argued that despite provision for female inheritance in all schools of Islamic law, it was common for women not to inherit, especially land (Keddie 88). Legal and customary fictions such as inalienable family-owned “*wakf*”

properties and customs of endogamy were found to keep women from inheriting. Jurists also made provisions that took away a woman's right to inheritance in exchange for, for instance, a guarantee of sustenance by her natal family in case of divorce or widowhood. However, as Ketu Katrak points out, women in colonised societies in Africa and further afield had a well-developed range of strategies for resistance to oppression long before Western feminists came along to take ownership of this concept (56). Ahlam's choice of writing as a means "to recover what we've already lost or was filched from us" combines a therapeutic motive with more than a hint of resistance and rebellion in ways that confirm Katrak's argument. This passage has especial resonance in Muslim culture because of the "wrong" restrictions which are placed upon women in many Muslim societies in relation to ownership.

The question here is not simply about material property—at stake is the ownership of ideas themselves. As Ahlam says, her father was an icon of the nation, and it was only in the world of writing—of ideas and representation—that she could fight to create an autonomous locus of enunciation for herself. Having experienced psychological trauma because of the loss of her father at a young age, Ahlam turns to writing as something that is her own property, unlike her father, who was "filched" from her by the people and made into the property of the nation. Indicating the depth of her emotional trauma, Ahlam speaks about her yearning for an ordinary childhood, with a family and a father. In many ways, the intensity of emotional pain suffered by Ahlam is similar to Khaled's physical trauma (in the form of his lost arm). As Scarry notes, "Emotional pain can sometimes be so severe that it approaches the kinds of features that come about in physical pain" (225).

Where Khaled is content to relive his bygone Constantine in his paintings, Ahlam sees writing as a way to claim what was taken from her. Unlike Khaled's deeply

private, individualist and self-absorbed mode of engagement with his art, for Ahlam writing is a deeply political act. For her, art is not only about healing one's trauma at an individual, psychological level. Rather, it is an act that seeks to break the barriers that obstruct her access to the world of ideas, the domain of signs and representation. In a far-reaching critique of the rituals of remembrance that constitute the ideological construction of the nation, Mosteghanemi seems to argue implicitly that the act of "reliving" the past is itself a privilege secured through the normative patriarchy that allows subjects to represent the nation. For Mosteghanemi, the privilege of reliving the past has been constitutively denied to women subjects, and this order can be transformed only through a combative act of reclaiming. The use of a word like "filched" is significant in that it constitutively marks the work of remembering for Ahlam as a struggle against a foundational moment of expropriation. The idea of remembering, for Mosteghanemi, is simultaneously a question of what is being remembered and by whom. And most importantly, the act of reclaiming must return to that which has been foundationally excluded from the dominant narrative of the traumatic past.

For Ahlam, trauma is not a singular, contingent moment. Rather it is a structure of oppression and silence. Therefore, where Khaled's amputated arm symbolises an icon of the nation's experience of trauma, it is possible to imagine the same as a clearly defined "event", namely the war of liberation; Ahlam's writing, however, is an attempt to provide a description of both the social underpinnings of her trauma, as well as the resources to overcome it. To this extent, Ahlam's writing is an attempt to "reclaim" the past rather than relive it.

The gendered antagonism between the two characters reveals that the art forms of painting and writing come to be identified with a patriarchal and feminist

perspectives, respectively. Khaled writes: “Let me admit to you that at this moment I hate you and that I have had to write this book to kill you. Let me borrow *your* weapons” (*MIF*, 28). In support of feminist views, Ahlam is representative of not just an individual, but an “us.” It is significant that Ahlam uses the plural pronoun “us,” rather than the singular and egotistical pronoun “I” which Khaled uses, because this represents the solidarity that she feels with other women writers. It invokes a community of “we,” in her understanding of memory and inter-generational transmission.

As a source of inter-generational memory and transmission, Ahlam makes repeated references to storytelling and her grandmother: “She was the only person who would find time to tell me about everything. She would return automatically to the past as if she refused to leave it” (*MIF*, 67). The passing down of history from grandmother to granddaughter is the example which Ahlam follows in her own search for an expression of the sad memories she has about a childhood without a father. Speaking of the way her grandmother used to talk about her father, Ahlam says “It was as if she was bringing him back to us with words” (68). For Ahlam, listening to stories about her father from her grandmother is doubly significant. On one hand, it allows her to fill in the absence of her father with stories about him, while on the other it establishes a close feminine bond between her and her grandmother. This relationship with her grandmother is as much an inter-generational relationship as it is a clearly gendered practice of transmitting memory. This is an important moment in the novel as it opens up an understanding of how inter-personal bonds between women are established, nurtured and transmitted. Not only are the grandmother and granddaughter able to together overcome the void left by the absence of Ahlam’s father, they do so through a mode of narrative that is able to transmit and reproduce itself across time, providing a fragment of memory that has been constructed primarily from the women’s perspective.

It is through fragments such as these that Mosteghanemi seems to suggest we are intimated by the multiplicity of perspectives through which our collective sense of history is constructed, and the voices that remain subjugated within it.

Khaled, however, has no children to which he can pass on his stories. His narrative takes the form of thoughts that are unspoken and snippets of letters to a lost love. He constantly drafts and revises his reflections, but they do not lead to any positive resolution. Lila Abu-Lughod's account of her father's move back to his native Palestine after many years of exile shows that a return to the former homeland was the start of a process of bringing memories into the present into very changed locations, which then made possible "a different knowledge and identification for his children as well" ("Return to Half-Ruins," 79). The means by which this knowledge was passed on is described as "storied memories," in which older adults look back on their youth, seeing themselves as "guardians of an increasingly vivid past" (79-82). The themes of revolution, exile and homecoming in Abu-Lughod's statements in the context of Palestine find resonance in the case of Algeria as well. The long and bloody struggle for independence in Algeria and Palestine—concluded in the case of the former but ongoing in the latter—has brought in its wake similar experiences of violence, displacement and exile. For those who have remained in the wake of these revolutionary upheavals, a successful return to the homeland is as much a work of constructing anew. Mosteghanemi suggests a similar layering of stories in Ahlam's attempts to reclaim her past. Khaled is not able to make the adjustments that would be necessary for a permanent return to his homeland. Following Abu-Lughod's observations in the context of Palestine, it may be argued that in our analysis, we are extending Abu-Lughod's ideas to Khaled who represents another figure who "still longs to return to a home that is no more" (Abu-Lughod, "Return to Half-Ruins," 103).

The ability to turn these memories into a narrative, and to pass them on to the next generation in stories, while at the same time interacting with the changed environment of the present, is an essential part of a therapeutic approach to memory. Such a therapeutic experience, however, is impossible for Khaled. Khaled has no one to whom he can pass on his stories and memories. Caught between the objective fact of his exile, and his subjective inability to come to terms with his trauma, Khaled remains trapped in an existential loneliness, where his narrative only takes the form of thoughts that are unspoken and snippets of letters to a lost love. He constantly drafts and revises his reflections, but they do not lead to any positive resolution. His art is an intensely private way of returning to the site of his trauma, rather than an attempt at reintegration into the social existence of language.

The reason for the gender differences in the way memory is reported may also be related to the way in which parents talk to their children when they are young, since “parents are on the whole more elaborative with daughters than with sons” (Reese, et al., 31-32). Mosteghanemi, however, looks to emphasise the cultural dimensions of the utopian “we” that Ahlam represents in her writing: “We write to turn our dreams into monuments” (*MIF*, 82). For her this community emerges out of gendered spaces that allow women to share experience, knowledge and advice in a mode of socialisation that is discouraged by traditional patriarchy.

For Mosteghanemi, the contrast between Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat in their approach to art is not just a question of prescribing an aporetic or therapeutic resolution to traumatic experience. The question of trauma cannot be fully articulated without its gendered dimensions, and any process of recovery necessarily entails an acknowledgement of this from the subject. While Ahlam is able to do this successfully, and works through her experiences through her writing, for Khaled painting is a way to

restore stability to the supportive patriarchal social imaginary that had been rent apart by the trauma of war. While Khaled uses his art to reconstruct his sense of messianic male authority, Ahlam/Hayat uses her writing to explore the possibilities of a community free of the oppressions of patriarchy.

In this manner, Mosteghanemi's writing explores the question of gendered art. On one hand, her two protagonists deal with their traumatic experiences in different ways, the perspective of each defined by their own place in the world as gendered subjects. On the other hand, the reconstruction and verbalisation of traumatic experience in art can only be therapeutic if it opens up spaces in which the question of gendered oppression and sexual violence can be raised.

Despite the affective intensity of Khaled's recollections of Constantine, he is unable to integrate them into a therapeutic representation primarily because for him his art is itself an extension of his repressed and wounded sense of male authority. Khaled represents a patriarchal understanding of the relation between the artist and his subject. Art, for him, is a means for him to reconfirm his chauvinistic sense of superiority, as the implicitly masculine form of genius/creation, in whom the world—its objects and its people—sublimate themselves into a fullness of meaning.

Contrastingly, Ahlam represents an artist who uses her writing as a means of simultaneously critiquing the oppressions of patriarchal society as well as claiming a legitimate voice through which women may speak in public. Her writing is a way to bring to light the silences and repressions through which patriarchal power is constituted and reproduced. It is also a means through which she can explore the possibility of a new egalitarian community free of subordination and violence. The task of remembering the past through stories is not just about preserving a true account of what happened—the act of narrating itself establishes new communitarian bonds between the

narrator and her listeners. This work of narrating establishes an affective commonality that may then become the moral basis for a new society that abolishes patriarchy along with other forms of social inequality, disadvantage and misrecognition.

Ahlam represents an artist who uses her writing as a means of a simultaneous critique and a form of newfound freedom. Ahlam says: “This city might forgive you everything, anything except being different: *Is not freedom, in the end, the right to be different?*” (COS, 64). For Ahlam, the written word opens up a world of new different possibilities such as the truth, reality, creativity and imagination, rather than a nostalgic refuge. Ahlam stresses, “I am here because, *as a writer*, I need to look for the *truth*... I have only used my capacities as a writer to imagine” (158). However, for Khaled, a yearning for the past is really a desire for a return to a patriarchal order that sustained him and gave him a place of social status and respectability. In so far as such a position of respectability does not exist for a woman, a return to the same is similarly impossible. For Ahlam, neither is it desired.

Writing as a Space of Possibilities

One of the most salient features of the novels is the reflexive approach Mosteghanemi takes towards the process of writing itself, and writing in the Arabic language in particular. Mosteghanemi explores the cathartic function of writing and presents writing as a space of possibilities, particularly through the character of Ahlam, who often explicitly reflects upon her own desire to write, and the therapeutic way that it expresses and heals her own interior trauma. For Ahlam, and to a certain extent, for Khaled, writing creates a site in which individual, unspoken trauma may be articulated through the medium of fiction although their approaches are different.

Ahlam is expressing her own trauma *and* creating a cathartic experience for herself and her society. Thus, writing, for Ahlam, has a cathartic function. Ahlam frequently reflects upon the process of writing itself. One of the most prominent themes which emerge from Mosteghanemi's treatment of writing is the elision between fiction and reality, referred to explicitly by Ahlam at several points in *Chaos of the Senses*:

I also read that writing changes our relationship with things, making us fall into sin without feeling any sense of guilt because the mingling of life and literature causes us to imagine at times that we are living out a text we have written in a book. The desire to write seduces you into living things, not because you enjoy doing so, but because you enjoy writing about them.”

(180)

In this passage, Ahlam likens the drive to write as her primary motivator for living and experiencing life. However, a closer reading of the text indicates that it also expresses Mosteghanemi's approach to fiction: to invest the written word with the lived experiences of the writer. This has a principal purpose at the individual level, as it provides a coping mechanism for the writer to process trauma and express grief through a therapeutic approach, and in doing so she pours out her internal trauma and agony. There is thus a merging of the fictive and material worlds: for Ahlam, her fiction is an active expression of reality, and yet it is simultaneously a force that shapes her life and reality. Moreover, she reflects upon the purpose of writing as a way to confront deeply held fears or to express the inexpressible: “Writing always draws fear because it appoints us with all those things we are afraid to face otherwise” (66). In the following passage, Ahlam is berated for her compulsion to write by her brother:

I don't understand how you're able to keep writing as if nothing has happened! Neither this earth moving under your feet, nor the destruction awaiting an entire nation can keep you from writing. Stop and look at the ruins around you. What you're writing makes no difference. (53)

She remembers her husband and recalls his perspective on her writing: "He could never admit that what annoyed him was the act of writing itself, as an act of confrontation, a silent ruse whose legitimacy he could never debunk" (53). As these two passages show, writing forms a part of Ahlam's identity: her natural reaction to trauma and chaos is to write, to express her grief and to process her emotions. Writing, for Ahlam, has a cathartic function, and as such is inherently born out of her own experiences: it is not escapist, but rather confronts her interior grief. She is also acutely self-aware and reflexive about her own process of writing, which leads to her therapeutic approach. Ahlam acknowledges the subtle elision between her fictive and material worlds, and says about the written word, "Is it desire, or the need to write, or fate that makes every individual story progress in tandem with a public story, so that we can't tell which is writing the other?" (144). The very act of writing and publishing a novel may therefore be understood as a performative act: scriptotherapy extends to the wider population with whom the novel resonates, either at a national or international level. Henke points out that "Through the artistic replication of a coherent subject-position, the life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency" (xvi). By extending Henke's view to incorporate the idea of the novel as performance, one can observe the way in which the novel participates in a form of collective catharsis and healing.

Ahlam reflects on writing in Arabic when Khaled asks her why she writes in Arabic while she is speaking French. She states: "The language in which we talk to

ourselves is all that matters and not the one we use to talk to others” (*COS*, 57). Writing fiction in Arabic, for Ahlam, reflects her own identity, which is tied up with the myth of “common identity between language and nation” (Kaye & Zoubir 22). Ahlam is only able to write in Arabic as a therapeutic practice that expresses and heals her internal trauma because it is the language that belongs to her.

Henke’s work on writing as an expression of trauma is particularly useful. She examines the lives of six female writers in an effort to understand the way in which themes and conflicts that emerge from their writing are evidence for childhood psychological traumas. Like Mosteghanemi, Henke views writing as a form of catharsis, and charts the various literary methods that her subjects take to deal with their respective individual traumas (xxi). However, Mosteghanemi’s use of “we” indicates collective responsibilities. Thus, her works are dynamic in the sense that they form an active field in which the wider collective may engage in a cathartic process. In this way, therefore, the novels go beyond a cathartic antidote to individual post-traumatic stress, and evolve into an attempt to reconstitute collective national memories as part of a healing process.

Through the figure of Khaled, however, Mosteghanemi presents an alternative purpose for writing. For Khaled, the written word represents an opportunity to redefine the glorious past that he feels is slipping through his fingers. By writing, Khaled can shape the narratives of the past that he feels have been stolen from him: “I did not know then that I was planning some words that would suit this book as an escape from disappointment. The idea of writing it was perhaps born that day. I wanted to challenge you and to challenge the city” (*MIF*, 223). Khaled represents the collective anger within Algerian society regarding the failed aspirations of the revolution. His approach is

aporetic in that he tries to write in order to escape from the disappointment. Unlike Ahlam, for him, writing does not have a cathartic function.

Through Khaled and Ahlam, readers are confronted with the hopes, despair and trauma of the post-revolutionary Algerian generation. Furthermore, it is through these two characters that the cathartic process can begin to be approached. The process of Ahlam's writing is more thoughtful and reflective than Khaled's painting, however. Ahlam's writing is much more reflective, self-conscious and critical, while Khaled's painting is a kind of self-indulgence, rather than self-critical.

Gendered Art and National Pasts

Mosteghanemi's engagement with the question of gendered art is rendered more complex by its intersections with the question of collective memory and national pasts. Khaled states, "With nostalgia I would recall the special vocabulary of other times and of other *revolution*" (*MIF*, 130). The question of national remembrance is central to Mosteghanemi's work in that the protagonists are intimately tied up with the liberation struggle in Algeria's recent past. Many postcolonial critics have rejected trauma theory because it "deflects political understanding: the concept of the cathartic role of literature as testimony overlooks political concerns and thus constitutes a limit to postcolonial theory" (Visser 278). Much of the pioneering work in the field of trauma studies—including the work of Scarry, Caruth and others—developed out of an engagement with Holocaust testimony, literature and history. Trauma studies' engagement with the non-Western world has not been free of Eurocentric bias. Such instances of "cross-cultural witnessing" are normatively framed in an asymmetric relation of exchange, appropriation and instrumentalisation of the suffering non-Western subject in the service of articulating European trauma (Craps & Buelens 18). For instance, Herman

makes a simplistic argument that the trajectory of recovery from trauma remains essentially the same, be it individuals or entire communities (241). In doing this she seems to generalise situations as far apart as political dictatorships, ethnic violence and human rights violations.

For Mosteghanemi, it is not so much a question of accepting or rejecting the claims of trauma theory. Rather, her writing implicitly draws on aspects of it to illuminate contradictions in contemporary Algerian social life. Even as she selectively draws on the notions of “belatedness” and “traumatic repetition”, her work also distances itself from them, and instead makes a claim for new links between trauma studies and postcolonial theory: “we experienced love stories and emotional disappointments. Some people use them to create wonders of international literature, others turns them into psychological disorders” (*MIF*, 213).

Mosteghanemi’s representational strategy of articulating a gendered critique of trauma studies through a layering of meaning of bodily trauma also articulates a postcolonial dimension. It is as if her novels cannot but engage with the troubled legacy of national memory. Bodily memories, as trauma, are re-experienced in the body, as opposed to psychological memories, and often add a collective and social dimension which produces insidious effects on the self-image of the victim (Craps & Buelens 3). This may be understood as a historical specificity of trauma memory in postcolonial societies. In a context where, historically, both the repressive colonial administration as well as the anti-colonial nationalist resistance framed all matters of politics and power in terms of communitarian identities, the inflicting of violence and its avenging could not but have a collective dimension. The recent history of many of these nation-states continues to be scarred by brutal ethnic violence, which often makes women its explicit targets.

In a study of the artistic repertoire of several francophone Algerian artists, Amy Hubbell suggests that “the traumas of the Algerian War are not as much unspeakable as they are unheard” (306). Postcolonial Algerian society has, in many ways, failed to recover from the trauma of war, and unresolved antagonisms of ethnicity, class and gender sporadically erupt in violent confrontation. Such an environment makes it impossible to establish the appropriate conditions for deliberation and reconciliation with regard to the nation’s remembrance of the time—even as voices raise questions about the egalitarian basis of the new nation-state, they remain unheard and unreciprocated.

Even though Khaled lives abroad, his remembrance and consequently his art are constantly engaged with this question of the national past—of the horrors of the war, its legacy and its promises. The figure of the emasculated male becomes a signifier for the condition of the postcolonial subject who cannot recover his lost powers. Indeed, for an exile living in the country of his former colonisers, there is an additional dimension. In a place that is hostile, or at best, ambivalent to his experiences of the war, Khaled cannot express his anguish in words, but hopes that at least in his pictures something of his past will be there for others to understand. In France, especially, there is a widespread cultural policy of “willful forgetting” (Hubbell 307) and in the case of the *pieds-noirs*, whose families were complicit in the causing of significant pain and suffering, there exists a conflicted memory of the Algerian past. Khaled undergoes a similar experience, except that it is made more acute by his status as an exile:

I had lost all senses of direction from the day I left home. I had cut myself off from history and geography and from the challenging years that were outside latitude and longitude. Where was the sea and where was the enemy? What lies before me and what is there behind me? Only the homeland is beyond the sea.

Before me is only the whirlpool of exile. Only I am between them. Who am I declaring war against when around me is nothing but frontiers of memory? (*MIF* 261)

On one hand, he feels the guilt of having abandoned his people to come and live in the relative luxury of Paris, while on the other, he is still drawn by constant memories of the bridges in Constantine, which draw him forever back in time to his youth in Algeria.

Khaled, in *Memory in the Flesh*, departs from Algeria and seeks to capture in his paintings the essence of the city of Constantine during its period of resistance to colonial rule. However, Ahlam, in *Chaos of the Senses*, remains in Algeria and explores her own personal memories and turbulent emotions through her writing: “That was a city that wasn’t satisfied with annihilating you one day after the next; it even murdered your dreams” (78). The city of Constantine that Ahlam engages with is subject to continuing atrocities, with many sudden murders and violent outbreaks, meaning that both old and new sources of trauma lurk around every corner. Khaled, however, is located at some distance from Algeria, and thus his ongoing trauma is experienced more through his memories of the past; as a result, he admits, “only then I realized that we don’t paint what we live in, but what lives in us” (*MIF*, 106).

Gendered Memory in *Chaos of the Senses*

The second novel in the series depicts Ahlam, a woman who has remained in postcolonial Algeria and embarked on a successful career as a writer. At first sight this appears to be a similar strategy to that of Khaled in *Memory in the Flesh*, because Ahlam also seeks to create an alternative, fictional reality in her art. She keeps a notebook, and gathers observations and thoughts which are later reworked into her writing. Through her creative activity, Ahlam explores emotional issues that are hidden

in her sub-conscious, and only realises what they were once she has finished writing, as for example when she reflects on her first short story about a woman's break-up with a mysterious lover: "I loved this story, without realizing exactly what I had written... I don't know how this story was born" (10).

Ahlam makes deliberate comparisons between her own gendered experience and the political trajectory of Algeria, with its continuing violent struggle for stability as an independent nation: "Women, too, are like nations. If they want life, then destiny must respond, even if a high officer rules its fate, or a small dictator disguised as a husband" (148). Mosteghanemi is also acutely concerned by the populist Islamist movements that were gaining popularity in Algeria at the time. Ahlam uses religious imagery to make sense of these limiting rules and show how she triumphs over them with determination and persistence:

At the first rays of dawn I discovered that 'No' was a seven-headed snake. Every time I killed one, another 'No' appeared before my face, for different reasons every time. Nevertheless, I beat them all and slept, biting the apple of lust before the snake's very eyes. (149)

This analogy with the snake in the Garden of Eden and the biting of the forbidden apple show Ahlam identifying with the character of Eve, and it is interesting that she seeks not only to defy the patriarchal "No," but also to exult in the process of doing so by eating the apple while the snake looks on. The breaking of moral taboos gives her peace to sleep, and this shows that Ahlam is not content to carry on the traditional wifely role that is expected of her.

This rebellion in thought is as easily translated into action. At the end of the novel, Ahlam reflects on the power of the writer: "I had always admired those writers whose greatness was found in their ability to say the most serious and painful things

with a stunning lightness. I have always wanted to be like them” (213). This lightness, which proved so infuriating to Khaled because it made her elusive, also allows her to dress in provocative clothing and buy cigarettes, as outright challenges to the religious authorities.

This question of rebellion in thought and action is also explored by Mosteghanemi with regard to the relations between the women in her novels—Ahlam herself, her mother and her grandmother. She revisits her memories in the present to reflect on the complex ways in which women come to be constituted as gendered subjects. Mosteghanemi’s descriptions of Ahlam’s relationship with her grandmother illuminates the ways in which *storied memories* can become the locus of new imagined communities. The idea of community is further explored through Ahlam’s relationship with her mother. There are some frustrations in their mother-daughter encounters, but there are also some comforting reminders of the past for Ahlam; for example, in the contours of her body, since as a girl Ahlam would “dream of the day when I would have a body exactly like hers” (135). However, in the gender-segregated rituals of the Turkish baths, Ahlam perceives a very different, feminine kind of reasoning: “I actually understood her logic. The bath was the only place where she could meet all the women of the city. She could gossip and tell them what was happening to her” (135). For Ahlam, going to the baths with her elderly mother is like visiting what Nora would call a “site of memory” (*lieu de mémoire*). This location evokes the past because when Ahlam sees her mother’s familiar personal objects in these steamy surroundings, she notes that “Nothing had really changed in twenty years” (135).

At the same time, the environment that is supportive for her mother is painful for Ahlam, since she recalls the discomfort of a young girl who has not yet developed in to a woman:

There one learned from others' looks how to renounce one's own body, suppress one's desires, and deny one's femininity. They taught girls that not only was sex something to be ashamed of but femininity as well and everything that revealed it, even in silence. (136)

With the benefit of greater knowledge of the world, the older Ahlam rejects the moralising influence of the Turkish baths. She experiences a sense of affinity with women who transgress the social order, such as a group of prostitutes who provoke disdain in the eyes of "respectable" women. The older Ahlam projects her writerly identity onto her experiences with her mother in the baths:

Perhaps I was secretly amusing myself *by writing* comments in my head, there in the middle of steam, water, lust, and female hypocrisy. I stood at a fair distance from both chastity and sin, where every writer and every normal person is supposed to stand. (138)

The act of writing about these practices enables Ahlam to distance herself from them. She is both able to perceive the oppressive power of social norms and to resist them. Ahlam will not repeat the oppression that her mother and grandmother suffered. She aligns herself not with the hypocritical matriarchs, but with the possibility of a community of "every writer and every normal person" (138), that is not founded on a patriarchal order of power. In this sense, the future that Mosteghanemi envisions is not one that is built around a notion of the collectivist instincts of women, or sisterhood. As she shows, this community of women may also be a space constituted within the relations of patriarchy. For Mosteghanemi, such a claim to the natural community of women once again frames the question of gender and patriarchy in essentialist terms. The alternative, according to her, is to think not so much about a community of women

as a community that acknowledges difference and multiplicity, a condition for configuring a new Algeria that Mosteghanemi's work argues for.

The adult Ahlam still aspires for beauty, but it is a different kind of beauty, and one that will not survive in the suffocating heat and damp of the segregated baths, but by implication has the potential to thrive in the outside world. Ahlam has taken this place and these potent memories, recognising their stifling influence on her as a child, but has transformed them into something else that she can use in her adult life. This marks her therapeutic approach to memory. She does not deny memory, but uses it to make fictional worlds out of personal, lived experiences. At the same time, it is clear that this act of writing past experiences is not just an act of individual, personal recovery. They are being invoked in her writing so as to hold them up to a critical perspective that has itself been developed out of many years of struggle and negotiation in the social realities of postcolonial Algeria. Mosteghanemi asserts, "you rid yourself of things every time you wrote about them, as if you killed the problems with words" (*MIF*, 120). The work of writing enables the critical distance from the past, transforming it to make possible a reconsideration of the present.

The responsibility of the writer is, in this sense, deeply social—for Ahlam, writing becomes an instrument with which to wreck patriarchy, allowing women to claim their rights as real participants in building a new, egalitarian Algeria. This new enunciatory position requires the uncompromising rejection of patriarchal norms, but also a critical appraisal of relations amongst women. It is not enough, for Mosteghanemi, that women should inhabit the Turkish baths as enclaves of women's community amidst a social existence framed by patriarchal excess—the women must now demand to be heard beyond these confines as well.

In exploring the position of the woman writer in Algerian society, Mosteghanemi returns, as it were, to a bodily metaphor—the disembodied hand. In contrast to Khaled’s constant memory of loss, symbolised through a vividly physical metaphor (his amputated arm), Ahlam’s relationship to her writing is depicted somewhat differently. She accesses through her writing a sense of plenitude, as the words written on the page acquire an almost physical reality. She reflects that she might have half-realised as a child that “from the beginning I was just born to be *a figure of ink and paper*, diluted by all that water and steam” (136). Elsewhere, Ahlam describes the ambiguous space between fiction and reality, materialised in the sensuous words: “I believe that my voice died with the last verse. When I closed my notebook over the poem, it seemed to me that I had become part of a movie” (216). Once again, Ahlam situates herself between the tactile sensuousness of writing in her notebook and the disembodied experience of being a mere character in a film. The metaphor of the cinematic character is significant—on one hand, it emphasises the disembodied relation between actor and character, while on the other, it situates her within a “larger” narrative of which she is a part. Thus, while Khaled is consumed by the experience of disembodiment, Ahlam is acutely conscious of the same, and for that reason aware of its constraints and possibilities. For Khaled, his decapitated arm is his misfortune, but for Ahlam disembodiment is a feature of existence itself because of his inability to reconcile with the trauma of his past. Writing becomes an act through which the individual may come to terms with life after a traumatic event or experience. While Khaled yearns to live in the fullness of an idealised world that existed “before” the trauma, Ahlam represents a radical approach of embracing the disembodiment of the post-traumatic subject, and of reconstructing fragmented memories through the act of writing.

The written word delineates a thin line between life and death. Far from being an incomplete existence, this opens up the idea of literary inspiration to a radical temporality. The work of writing engages with presence and absence, life and death, through pathways of inspiration and influence, through which the writer defies the temporal bonds of everyday causal explanation. Ahlam aligns herself with the poet Henri Michou and cites lines of poetry about the death of al-Taher Jaout, noting that he was buried with pens instead of flowers: “You will not find him there, with the other graves. He has no gravestone, merely a few pens. Every evening, his hand wakes to continue writing” (216). The disembodied hand of the dead writer is quite dissimilar to the missing arm of the living Khaled. Where Khaled’s missing arm symbolises aporetic suffering, the image of the disembodied hand symbolises therapeutic suffering which allows something powerful to live on, even beyond the grave. The writer’s prerogative to cite and contest the work of others, across the barriers of time, space and language, is an implicit call for the establishment of a new sense of community that cuts across the lines of class, gender, ethnicity and age. Mosteghanemi’s writing thus calls for the domain of literature to be recognised as a space where historical traumas—and their attendant effects on individuals, social groups and nations—may be expressed without inhibition, as a prelude to their subsequent resolution.

This sentiment is reflected in Ahlam’s symbolic act of leaving her notebook on the grave: “It resembled her to the extent that it made me think I was avenging the past for her. She enjoyed making up heroes on paper and killing them in books, the same way life loved and killed for no reason” (217). Having thus established the possibilities of incorporating the insights of feminist and postcolonial theory in the understanding of trauma in contemporary Algeria, Mosteghanemi’s explorations approach the uncharted

terrain between memory and history. In doing so, she offers what may be understood as an alternative mode of historical representation.

Mosteghanemi's male and female characters identify very strongly with Algeria, and they unconsciously live out the Orientalist metaphor of the conquering and the conquered. Memory is embodied in the two fictional characters, but also in the images they hold in their minds in relation to their art. Khaled sees his art as a form of conquest of Algeria-as-beautiful-virgin. The excess of this gesture, however, is itself a symptom of his emasculation as an exile in Paris. Ahlam chooses a different medium, but in similar ways she accepts the age-old narratives of Algerian history. She, too, relives the period of the Algerian war, but in her memory she plays the role of the abandoned and dispossessed child, robbed of her father and condemned to a childhood among grieving women. Even as she adopts the conqueror/conquered thematic that has historically underpinned the Orientalist construction of Algeria, with its attendant markers of gender and ethnicity, she does not reproduce its political and ethical dispositions. This is evident in the way the conqueror-conquered pairing is shown repeatedly to be a failed metaphor. Even as the individual subjects may place themselves in these roles in an attempt to overcome historical trauma, such strategies are shown to eventually fail.

In Mosteghanemi's postcolonial feminist perspective, the void that Khaled seeks to fill with his nostalgic paintings of Constantine emerges not from personal trauma—they are subjective expressions of irreducible antagonisms in the social formation of postcolonial Algeria itself. Ahlam's recourse to writing is an attempt to make good this loss and to recover some control over herself and her surroundings. The act of writing is personally therapeutic, but it also contains some small seeds of collective solidarity, drawing upon relationships she witnessed in her youth, with her mother and in the

gender-segregated social spaces of Algeria in the past. At the same time, Mosteghanemi also shows the limits of such an activist-literary agenda in the Algerian context.

Mosteghanemi turns the question of community into a meditation on the possibility of a new society. The depiction of Ahlam's relationship with her brother Nasser is particularly significant in this regard. Ahlam is aware of the contrast between her own memories of childhood and those of her brother. The latter was named after the Egyptian leader Abd al-Nasser, who was a prominent supporter of pan-Arab union, and a photograph of this revered figure was prominent in their family home during their childhood. It was later joined by a photograph of their father taken from newspaper reports of his role as resistance leader and his death during the War of Independence. Ahlam discovers these images in their house in exile in Tunis many years later. Finding these two old photographs banished to the attic in a metal trunk, Ahlam immediately uses them as a focus for her early memories: "I remember how happy I was to find those two pictures. They awoke something in me, or a certain time that was so far away that it seemed as if it didn't really exist" (133). She reflects on what to do with these images, thinking first of "leaving them in the *dustbin of memory*" (133), or taking just one and not the other, because "In the eye of memory I could no longer distinguish between them" (133). The images have a power that resonates with her in ways that she cannot fully comprehend, since she refers to "something within me" (133) without specifying what it is. The past is recalled, and in the process brought back into existence through these images.

In the end she decides to show the pictures to her brother, knowing that "those memories belonged to me alone, perhaps to Nasser and myself, but to no one else" (133). In the event, however, Ahlam is surprised by her brother's silence in front of the pictures "as if he weren't the third one" (134). This term "the third one" implies that she

sees an ancestral succession between the father figures, with the patriarchal role falling now on her brother. This shows that Ahlam is seeking to link the past with the present through her brother, making him aware of his connection, and by implication suggesting that he will carry on their political role in the present troubled time. This line of thinking appears not to be shared by Nasser, however, and Ahlam reflects:

I did not want to coax him into childhood confessions that might have been erased by the logic of masculinity. I only watched his silence before them and concluded that he had perhaps forgotten his *childhood* love of one of them and his paternal love for the other. He left them to me to become my obsession alone. (134)

These references to *the dustbin of memory* and *childhood* draw attention to the complicated relationship between remembrance and forgetting. Anne Whitehead draws attention to the difficulties between the two as she writes: “forgetting seems important to survival itself and can, in addition, work against the solidification of narratives into too static or monumentalized a form. At the same time, however, forgetting cannot simply be prescribed in a manner that overlooks its difficulties, nor should the moral and ethical burdens of remembering be discounted” (*Memory*, 122).

Thus Nasser represents a male figure—a “son”—who seems reluctant to bear the mantle of patriarch. In his own rejection of the demands of patriarchy on men, he seems to forget his childhood. His “forgetting” seems a therapeutic gesture aimed against the social norms of masculinity and authority that he is expected to reproduce. This process of forgetting, however, brings its own problems. While for Nasser this was a gesture of breaking free of the past, it was for Ahlam a moment of abandonment—she is left alone with her obsessions. This moment is particularly significant in that it introduces a new dimension to the question of trauma, memory and forgetting. Mosteghanemi seems to

emphasise the need for any process of recovery to be intersubjective in its dynamics. Forgetting cannot be a solitary act, it must always play out in a social context, within and through which the subject is constituted. It is only when subjects communicate with each other in an open, trustful way that recovery is possible. At the same time, any such act of intersubjective communication is always a fraught and precarious process. Words do not carry within themselves any guarantee of full meaning, and are always subject to the individual's work of interpretation. Moreover, each is conditioned by their own individual histories and their respective positions in the given social and historical context. Consequently, "forgetting" may mean different things for different people, and each must in turn be conscious of this irreducible difference. In this sense, like memories, forgetting too must be an intrinsically shared act, with each aware of both the possibilities and limits of what can be forgotten. Nasser's way of rejecting patriarchy, while successful in a narrow, individual sense, is ultimately a failed endeavour. Ahlam's sense of betrayal is also his "failure"—despite his forgetting, the gendered relationship between him and his sister remains divided by unresolved contradictions.

This emphasis on forgetting as a necessarily collective endeavour differs from the tension Whitehead traces between remembering and forgetting. Mosteghanemi's novels problematize this binary by drawing attention to the social dimension of forgetting. While Whitehead foregrounds the ethical dimensions of the question (*Memory*, 122), Mosteghanemi emphasises its social aspects. In doing this, Mosteghanemi accomplishes a significant conceptual shift: while trauma theorists tend to frame the question of remembrance-forgetting as an ontological and ethical problem, Mosteghanemi sees it as a historical and political question. In this final theoretical gesture, Mosteghanemi establishes a critical distance from the trajectory of art as

therapy that traces the development of Ahlam/Hayat's character. In doing so, she disrupts the reader's desire to establish an identificatory relation with the character.

Mosteghanemi's novels deal, for the most part, with the relation between Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, and the way she traces the trajectories of their aporetic and therapeutic approaches, respectively, allows the reader to form the impression that the novels implicitly privilege the latter over the former. In this sense, it becomes possible for the reader to identify with the liberating narrative of resistance and reclaiming of Ahlam/Hayat. This engagement with Nasser, however, is significant in that it relativises the validity of the particular mode of engagement with traumatic experience adopted by Ahlam. The difference between Nasser and Ahlam draws attention to the constitutive difference between different practices of remembering and forgetting being attempted in society. In doing this, Mosteghanemi reframes the question of memory, and its multiplicity, as a question of history.

David Lloyd suggests that "a non-therapeutic relation to the past, structured around the notion of survival or living on rather than recovery, is what should guide our critique of modernity and ground a different mode of historicization" (212). Mosteghanemi's novels offer just such a mode of historicization as they bring to light the deep antagonisms around which everyday life in postcolonial Algeria has come to be concentrated. The project of emancipation from patriarchal oppression finds itself at an important juncture, where the postcolonial narratives of liberation are increasingly being questioned, on one hand by populist Islamist political movements questioning the secular basis of the nation-state, and on the other by new feminists who see the nation-state as an extension of traditional patriarchy, intensified by colonial intervention.

Mosteghanemi's implicit critique of both these perspectives attempts to open up a new possibility of writing a history of the present that is not transfixated by the violence

of the colonial encounter as the originary moment of trauma. Both the alternatives seem to reject the historical effects of colonial modernity—while the Islamists believe in the possibility of a return to a utopian past, the latter are deeply cynical about the effects of the modern state as such. Following Mosteghanemi, however, it may be argued that both these narratives serve as modes of fundamentally disavowing the constitutive rupture of Algerian society brought on by the colonial encounter and function ultimately as modes of recovery that cannot properly come to terms with the present.

The future, for Mosteghanemi, is one where the Ahlams and the Nassers of present-day Algeria will together find new solutions to the problems that they have inherited from the past. She does not devalue the suffering of men or of women, and does not deny that there needs to be space for them to work out their own survival (Hassan 420), using whatever tools and strategies are available to them. In an enigmatic gesture towards this new, imagined future, Mosteghanemi ends *Chaos of the Senses*, as already noted, with the following sentence: “I was on the point of requesting some envelopes and stamps, when...” (224). Like the seasons, the writer’s creativity renews itself between projects, and the memories of the past are thus integrated in to the life of the present, with some meanings retained, and others transformed. The ambivalence and uncertainty about what is fictional and what is real is a fruitful source of inspiration for the writer. Ahlam thus engages with her memories in a therapeutic way, and in so doing contributes her highly personal acts of revenge for Algeria’s past wrongs and engagement in the struggle to build a society that is not trapped by the limitations of traditional gender roles.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of Mosteghanemi's literary strategy of representing trauma, I have argued that the question of gendered art is able to foreground the ways in which the memory as well as the narrative representation of traumatic experience is constitutively gendered. Her work calls on the reader to question the notion of memory in the singular—for Mosteghanemi, remembrance is always negotiated through gendered subject positions. Through her exploration of Khaled's painting and Ahlam/Hayat's writing, she is able to show how different modes of artistic practice can be articulated in relation to specific questions of gendered social experience. Even as she explores the possibility of art as a therapeutic mode of engagement with trauma, she is careful to qualify this. Mosteghanemi makes the assertive claim that in so far as patriarchy is an important component of social domination, art can be therapeutic only if it can take into account the normalised forms of the same in artistic practice itself. Specifically, there is a need to reconsider deeply embedded notions about the relations between the author and their work, between art and reality, and the importance of art as an aporetic/therapeutic medium that is useful to come to terms with trauma.

Mosteghanemi also explores the collective, national dimensions of traumatic experiences, their remembrance and their representation. Euro-American trauma studies, in its interactions with non-Western experiences of trauma, has reproduced the moral and epistemic formations of Orientalist knowledge—it turns the Other into a philosophical mediation through which it obsessively returns to its own trauma. Mosteghanemi offers a literary strategy of resisting this dominant paradigm of representation. Even as she draws on the West's resources of knowledge and art in her own endeavour to represent the historical experience of postcolonial Algeria, Mosteghanemi is equally aware of their limitations. Her attempt to develop a literary

prose consonant with this historical specificity thus functions as a wide-ranging critique of Orientalist paradigms of trauma, subjectivity, community and history.

Through her work, Mosteghanemi contests the prevailing consensus that allows the post-colony its memory, but reserves for the West the right to interpret and heal the same. Her mode of split representation, operating in a discursive tension between the characters of Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, offers not testimony but history.

Mosteghanemi's history, however, offers no promise of recovery—her critical self-reflexivity places in question the redemptive promise of literary identification as such. Rather, she offers a mode of survival, premised on the painstaking work of putting together the pieces of Algeria's intellectual and political legacies in order to fashion new instruments of thought adequate to the demands of the present. The past bears no temptations—only fragments to be interpreted in the present. This work of interpretation, in turn, must confront the inequalities of gender, ethnicity and class that also form part of this historical inheritance.

This will for survival, for Mosteghanemi, necessitates a radical rethinking of literature and its function in contemporary Algerian society. Mosteghanemi's novels thus stand as radical formal experiments in Arabophone literature that render visible for the first time the intersecting forces that constitute the trauma of the Algerian war and the independent nation-state that resulted from it. At the same time, she draws attention to the exclusions that mark the Arabic-language literary sphere as a social space. Offering a critique of the prevalent Romantic idea of the artist as lonely genius, she demands recognition for the autonomous agendas of women writers in contemporary Algeria. Through her critical engagement with the past, Mosteghanemi opens up new ways of thinking about the future. The deep antagonisms that divide Algerian society today, she believes, can also become a productive meeting ground that challenges

Algerian men and women to transcend the limits of the present in order to transform their futures, with the work of women writers leading the way. Mosteghanemi's literary and philosophical exploration of these two distinctly different, and at times greatly divergent (as well as at times polyphonic), gendered ways in which contemporary Algeria attempts to come to terms with its traumatic past is accomplished, as the next chapter argues, by framing a present that is constituted out of a dialogic discourse of polyphonic voices, which ultimately splinter into a kaleidoscopic mosaic of traumatic memories and perspectives that inform a new configuration of nation.

Chapter Six

The Polyphonic Imaginary: Collective Memory and Writing Nation

“There was nothing more beautiful than meeting our opposite because it was the only thing that enables us to discover ourselves.”
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 46)

In earlier chapters, I have argued that Mosteghanemi's novels are deeply inscribed in a kaleidoscopic fashion with the historical, geographical and cultural contexts from which they arise. In this chapter I analyse Mosteghanemi's layered, polyphonic narrative strategies as integral to her project of engaging with the ways in which Algeria's traumatic past is currently being dealt with by its citizens. Mosteghanemi's narrative structure, used to frame the present, is initially constituted out of a plurality of positions, parallel, yet sinuous, or polyphonic, intermittently interwoven in and out of accord with each other. Out of this complexity, the narrative nevertheless moves towards a future, visible as the overlapping patterns of the kaleidoscope of qualitatively differentiated experiences of trauma.

Drawing on the theories of Bakhtin, I foreground Mosteghanemi's strategy of meta-narrative as a “polyphonic layering” that critiques the prevalent discourse in modern Algerian Arabophone literature, with its tendency to allegorise the nation in the figure of the woman. In terms of polyphonic layering, even as Mosteghanemi exposes patriarchal impulses behind the symbolisation of nation as woman, she does not altogether reject this allegorical representation, but rather explores its dynamics from the stance of a critical, yet engaged observer, for the purposes of forming an idea of the history of the nation as an act of active *remaking* that is oriented towards thinking through the present, rather than a static, nostalgic, notion of nation as *remembrance*. In a present that is characterised by the onset of civil war, accompanied with a widespread

sense of frustration and disillusionment with the ideals of the Algerian nation-state, Mosteghanemi's novels trace multiple returns to a particularized moment of origin—the violence of the liberation struggle—and argue for the importance of writing as both an act of transformation and a coming to terms with the trauma of the past.

Transformed into a figure of the living dead, unable to come to terms with the past, Khaled's failure to die on the battlefield as a soldier of the revolution leaves deep scars on his life that continually haunt him. To have been left alive, but without his arm, forces him endlessly to ruminate on his failed aspiration to become a martyr. In contrast to Khaled, Ahlam/Hayat explores her relationship with trauma primarily through her writing. Through it she finds solace and is thereby able to transcend her grief and trauma, as well as deal with the loss of her father. Ahlam's more productive use of memory, in contrast to Khaled's obsessive memory of trauma, should be understood as emblematic of the strength of Algeria's women. The divergent trajectories of these two characters represent the different ways in which the nation's traumatic past is being remembered in the present.

Polyphonic layering occurs through the dual narration of Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, which converge at times as points of intersections as well as more often dispersing into multiple layers of discourse. For instance, Mosteghanemi's critique of gendered social relations is overlaid with the utopian imagery of homeland and motherhood, while the gendered imagination of the nation is transformed through access to the repressed domain of folk memories that subsists underneath the dominant narrative of national unity and progress. Similarly, the contrast of remembrance and remaking is overlaid with a sustained engagement with the questions of nation, community, trauma, as well as the temporality of past, present and future. Through an extended critique of the polyphonic discourse that forms this nationalist allegorising of

woman as nation, I assess Mosteghanemi's call for a remaking of the nation in the present, rather than a remembrance of an idealized past.

Polyphony and Nation

Bakhtin's theories are useful for my analysis of the nation-forming effects of Mosteghanemi's narratives in several ways. However, given the emphasis placed on gender in her novels, I must first address the problem of gender in Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. Thereafter Bakhtin's notion of "double-voiced discourse" (*Dialogic Imagination*, 325) becomes particularly useful in understanding the complex tensions that constitute the postcolonial imaginary of nation, namely the co-presence of multiple suppressed voices that speak out against the homogenising narrative of the recently-independent nation-state.

Through his studies in Russian literature, Bakhtin introduces a number of critical concepts, such as "polyphony, dialogic, heteroglossia, and double-voiced discourse", theories that have been useful to scholars in examining more deeply questions of how relations between democracy and literary representation are formed and for what purposes. Polyphony, for Bakhtin, means "multi-voicedness" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 279). Earlier critics importantly recognized that Bakhtin's polyphony may be understood as a "new theory of authorial point of view" (Clark & Holquist 3). Specifically, a text becomes polyphonic when the author allows complex, interweaving and un-schematised representations of characters, events and so on, that thus allows greater freedom than more traditional linear formations of the novel in interaction between characters. According to David Lodge, Bakhtin considers a novel to be polyphonic when "a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and

judged by an authoritative authorial voice” (*After Bakhtin*, 86). As a multi-voiced text, a polyphonic narrative allows for different—and often conflicting—ideological perspectives.

Referred to also as “dialogic” or “dialogism,” for Bakhtin this means the process by which meaning evolves out of interactions between author, text and reader-listener. Thus Bakhtin’s use of the concepts of polyphony and dialogic narration necessarily overlap to a great extent. Bakhtin claims, “The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through” (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 40). In fact the two terms are virtually interchangeable: “The phenomenon that Bakhtin calls ‘polyphony’ is simply another name for dialogism” (Clark & Holquist 242). Lodge also treats the two terms as transposable: “In Bakhtin’s theory, ‘polyphonic’ is virtually synonymous with ‘dialogic’” (*After Bakhtin*, 86). In Mosteghanemi’s novels, the protagonists are engaged in a dialogic relationship. No voice is subordinated to the other as mere character speech through which the monological development of the protagonist is explicated.

In moving from the monologic, traditionally linear novel, and developing his theories, Bakhtin worked extensively with the novels of Dostoevsky, noting that the latter’s narratives are a plurality of independent and unmerged voices, each of which is considered equally valid. Unlike the conventional monologic novel—with its linear development of plot or character resulting in exposition and closure—the polyphonic novel seeks to capture the pluralistic character of human social existence. The plot in polyphonic novels does not locate the characters or events along fixed trajectories:

Plot in Dostoevsky is absolutely devoid of any sort of finalising foundations. Its goal is to place a person in various situations that expose and provoke him, to bring people together and make them collide and conflict in such a way,

however, that they do not remain within this area of plot-related contact but exceed its bounds. (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 276-77)

Further, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia allows us to conceive within novelistic discourse a representation of the plurality that also constitutes the social as such. He argues that "two voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (252). Part philosophical, part methodological imperative, here Bakhtin argues for the need to take seriously the foundationally *social* character of language and its production of meaning. This is true to the extent that it is the work of the dialogic novel to foreground this inherently social dimension of language and meaning. For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's formal departure regarding novelistic plot does precisely this—it moves away from the monophonic logic of the teleological narrative by philosophically reorienting the literary work towards an acknowledgment of its basis in social communication and the production of meaning. Thus the application of Bakhtin's pluralistic approach to Mosteghanemi's novels allows us to deconstruct the monophonic narrative of Algerian nationalism, which seeks to homogenise collective memories of the past under a single, unifying sign of nation—of a pure Algerian national consciousness, borne as cultural continuity from pre-modern times, defended fiercely through the years of colonial domination and, finally, the glorious rebirth of the ancient nation as a modern nation-state.

Turning back to Mosteghanemi's novels, I argue that deploying the meta-narrative techniques of polyphony or dialogism to represent the gaps and antagonisms that constitute the Algerian present offers the reader a dual narration of her novels, through the characters of Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, each representing different experiences and perspectives on the specific aspects of Algerian social reality that she seeks to investigate. The dual narrative of Khaled and Ahlam is a means through which

to express the trauma of the revolutionary period in Algerian history and the crises of identity and purpose that haunt the post-revolutionary generation. As Ahlam bitterly exclaims:

Was this a nation? Whenever we knelt to kiss its soil, it surprised us with a knife in the back and slaughtered us like sheep at its feet. There we were, with each successive corpse making a carpet of men who had once had the stature of our dreams and represented our greatest pride. (*COS*, 220)

Mosteghanemi's novels are caught between this tension—on one hand, the utopian ideals of the nation, and on the other, the betrayals that each successive generation must face at the hands of that nation itself. Mosteghanemi echoes Bakhtin's observation about two voices as "being the minimum for life," while simultaneously foregrounding the impossibility of reducing the inherent multiplicity of the social to a single voice or a unified, monophonic narrative. Her novels sketch a whole range of characters, each with a unique perspective on the context that the author tries to flesh out. Through the tension between Khaled and Ahlam, she explores the tensions in gender relations in post-revolution Algerian society, while the contrasting relations between Si Tahir and Khaled and Ahlam bring to light inter-generational tensions. Other characters, such as Ahlam's husband, provide an image of the life and perspectives of Algerian elite society. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Mosteghanemi also distributes textual meaning across different registers of discourse, from novelistic dialogue, to autobiographical passages, and extra-textual references to meanings located in deep layers of memory and recollection.

With their tendency to disrupt the linear narrative associated with the monologic novel, Mosteghanemi's novels connect with the historical experience of trauma itself. At the outset, the constant figure of the latency of traumatic experience that

characterises the memories of Khaled as well as Ahlam force a disruption, or trauma within itself, of the smooth continuity of linear narrative. This experience of latency is borne out by Khaled's constant returns to the traumatic experience, and the idea of repetition is used to represent the effects of the trauma—as seen in Khaled's obsession with painting the bridges of Constantine when living as a wounded exile in Paris. The narrator succinctly states his paradox of latency thus: “When we are miserable, we know it. But when we are happy, we're not aware of it until late. Happiness is always a late discovery” (*COS*, 178).

If, for Bakhtin, a narrative sustains a minimum of “two voices,” I extend Bakhtin's theory further by adding in the factor of gender. The two characters, Khaled and Ahlam, demonstrate divergent engagements with their art that, as I have argued in previous chapters, are gendered in many ways. While for Khaled his painting is an obsessive return to the Algeria of his dreams, for Ahlam her writing is a way to come to terms with the present and to instead engage trauma as a therapeutic mode. While I have already treated Mosteghanemi's gendered conception of trauma in great detail in previous chapters, I argue here that her novels further present a gendered conception of the nation itself, through which Mosteghanemi is challenging, specifically, the patriarchal equation of the nation with femininity, or an idea of Algerian womanhood, which enables, on one hand, an allegorisation of nation as woman, while, on the other, it reiterates the binary of the passive, woman-like nation in need of strong men to defend “her.” Mosteghanemi thus further engages with this traditional dichotomy of gender to illustrate how contemporary Algerian men have been rendered broken and inept by their past trauma, and how the potential reconstitution of the nation may be achieved through the empowerment of women.

Bakhtin's posits that the author of a "double-voiced discourse" will take an "objectified" discourse and infuse it with subjective intentions and consciousness, while still retaining the original speaker's intentions. For Bakhtin, "discourse has a twofold direction—it is directed both toward the referential object of speech as in any ordinary discourse, and also toward another's discourse, i.e. toward someone else's speech" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 185). In this way, the double-voiced discourse allows the reader access to the perspective of the first speaker as well as the second. The reader of a double-voiced discourse is "meant to hear both a version of the original utterance as the embodiment of its speaker's point of view (or 'semantic position') and the second speaker's evaluation of that utterance from a different point of view" (Morson & Emerson 65). The use of double-voiced discourse as a meta-narrative device allows the writer to complicate the notion of truth, authenticity and the referentiality of linguistic utterance. The concept of dialogism also precipitates an overhaul of the theoretical framework of consciousness, event and totality. Bakhtin argues that meaning is to be understood as not

the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. This interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively)—and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant. (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 18)

This affirmation of the multiplicity of perspectives and meanings is particularly relevant in the context of Mosteghanemi's novels. Her narrative style, as it switches between the contrasting points of view of Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, also attempts to

reconstruct the national memory of Algeria's traumatic past by placing it in conversation with the antagonistic voices of present-day Algeria—the disgruntled generation of the revolution, and the new generation whose faith in the national ideal has been shaken time and again. As I show in the course of this chapter, Mosteghanemi is convinced that both the available alternatives—of a frayed faith in the ideals of the revolution, and their explicit rejection—are ultimately monologic narratives that fail to take into account the multiplicity of voices that constitute the nation as such.

As a brief exemplification of Mosteghanemi's technique of using double-voiced discourse to represent antagonism between characters, one can turn to an intimate conversation between Ahlam and her lover, where he tells her "I prepared you for loyalty, without asking you to be loyal to me" (*COS*, 190). To this Ahlam replies, "I wish you could have said something else, it would have made me happy if you had asked" (191). Her lover replies:

But loyalty is never asked for, when you ask for it you are insulting love. If it isn't spontaneous, it is no more than an attempt to play a trick on the desire to betray, a suppression of that desire. In other words, it is another kind of disloyalty. Naming betrayal as the real risk is a perversion of truth. The real risk is loyalty, because it is infinity more difficult. (191)

Here, while the first quotation frames Ahlam as the object of the man's desire, the second quotation gives voice to the woman, infusing her character with autonomous intention. Each dialogue succinctly puts across their different perspectives on the question of love and loyalty, without the authorial voice presenting either as the true perspective. At the same time, these two voices are placed in a dynamic relation, as each seeks to bring to the fore the silences in the other's speech. We are drawn into their interior thoughts, feelings and fears as they express and attempt to deal with their

trauma. However, this is not done merely with the intention of fleshing out the characters' psychological state, or to offer information about the perspectives of the characters. Rather, Mosteghanemi places them in conflict with each other to show the disjuncture between them. In what is offered as proof of his love for her, the lover talks about the expectations he has of her. To this, Ahlam responds by, first, raising the question of her consent to bearing the burden of such expectations, and second, by hinting towards her own expectations, which her lover has failed by imposing on her the demand for "loyalty." The tension, however, is not resolved with her reply, as he responds again by talking about the ultimate undecidability that characterises both love and loyalty. This exchange thus exemplifies a dialogic approach that emphasises the relationship between the two voices and sees them as inter-dependent.

At the same time, the significance of this exchange is not limited to the quasi-philosophical engagement with loyalty, love and expectation. The distance between the two characters is simultaneously generational, gendered and traumatic. The irreducible difference in their perspectives is itself coded as emerging out of not some idealised notion such as "human nature," but the specific differences in their location, as being man and woman belonging to different generations and subject to different experiences of trauma. Thus, Mosteghanemi overlays the dialogic exchange between the two characters with a referential dimension that seeks to situate the text itself in conversation with the cultural context in which it emerges.

R. B. Kershner's observation about Bakhtin's three levels of dialogism is useful here. These include: dialogism arising from the interaction between authorial language and the protagonist's language, between the protagonist's language and other characters, and between the language of a text or a protagonist taken as a whole and other relevant texts to which implicit or explicit allusion is made (Kershner 8-19). This complex

elaboration of dialogism in Bakhtin's work further opens up the "possibility of employing on the plane of a single work discourse of various types, with all their expressive capacities intact, without reducing them to a common denominator" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 200). In the context of Mosteghanemi's novels, the first and second categories are particularly relevant: in the example of the conversation, Mosteghanemi expresses herself not only through the dialogue between characters, but also between the explicit discussion about romantic love and her own implicit exploration of the question of patriotism and ideological fidelity.

Bakhtin extends the notion of dialogism to develop the notion of heteroglossia. The novel, as a form of heteroglossia, is able to represent "a diversity of social speech types (on occasion, even languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 262). Through the notion of heteroglossia, Bakhtin historicises the novel form, arguing that the "internal stratification present in any language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite of the novel as a genre" (262-63).

The shift in theoretical emphasis from polyphony to heteroglossia situates Bakhtin's analysis on the terrain of social discourses, rather than individual voices. This shift is particularly relevant to the study of Mosteghanemi's novels, which are built around the deployment of multiple intersecting levels of discourse. This polyphonic narrative strategy allows Mosteghanemi to invoke contemporary political concerns, such as Islamist violence, assaults on writers, and a resurgent social conservatism and chauvinism, and to inflect them with a new emphasis that is geared towards an attempt to imagine a democratic society that acknowledges its inherent multiplicity of voices and positions.

This polyphonic narrative technique of overlapping multiple layers of discourse within a text is used extensively by Mosteghanemi. In a discussion between Khaled and Ahlam about religious faith and observances, for example, Ahlam says that religion and “its conviction, like all convictions, is a matter that concerns ourselves alone. Faith, is like love, a private emotion.” In contrast, Khaled responds, “Your words came to reconcile me with God. Me, who had not fasted for years. They reconciled me to home, and set me up against this crazy city [Paris] that was robbing me of a small part of my faith and past every day” (*MIF*, 157-158). In this exchange, Mosteghanemi uses the two characters to provide a polyphonic representation of the question of faith, as they each provide contrasting subjective voices on the matter. Her objective here is not to measure the validity of the one against the other—rather, she looks to describe in language the irreducible gap between the two perspectives, encouraging the reader to think of the two together, in their difference. It is also an instance of heteroglossia. Khaled’s words show how the religious observance of the fast itself comes to condense many layers of discourse—religion, his experience of exile in Paris, his memories of the past, and his feelings towards Ahlam/Hayat. Through the use of heteroglossia, the encounter between the two protagonists becomes more than a dialogue between two individual voices—each voice is shown to be composed of multiple layers of discourse. Thus their voices both reflect and demand a properly *historical* engagement, rather than a purely literary-philosophical one. In this manner Mosteghanemi’s novels may be understood as an extension of the Bakhtinian notion of polyphonic writing. She is pluralistic in her vision and looks to provide a plurality of voices that are also gendered and engaged in a dialogic relationship in the text. Mosteghanemi’s polyphonic representation of the nation represents the conflicting voices that compose the body of the nation in the present. At the same time, her work extends Bakhtin’s by showing the differentiations

of gender and trauma as constitutive of the social, because she consistently frames the differences in perspectives of various subjects through an implicitly gendered lens.

Through the polyphonic narrative and dialogic construction of the characters of Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, Mosteghanemi explores a range of questions—from traumatic experience, to art, to memory, to national reconfiguration and reconstruction. One may be tempted to read this as Mosteghanemi simply using the pairing of the two protagonists as a convenient instance to dramatise these conflicts. However, in doing so, one reduces the gender difference between the two characters to a merely contingent instance upon which other, presumably more important, questions may be overlaid. On the contrary, I argue that by situating the conflicts in the relationship between Khaled and Ahlam, Mosteghanemi is gesturing towards the need to take into account the difference of gender in each of these instances. By presenting these difficult questions through the multi-layered tension between the two, she actually resists any attempt to arrive at a holistic—and by implication, monological—understanding of traumatic experience, art, memory, and so on. Rather, she attempts to reveal each of these terms to be constitutively gendered. Far from being neutral, she foregrounds the politics of these categories, and the myriad ways in which they implicate subjects. She suggests the urgent need to reinvestigate these crucial aspects of collective existence, by acknowledging their social articulation as irreducibly marked by gendered difference. Moreover, through her insistent foregrounding of the question of gender, Mosteghanemi seems to suggest the extent to which all aspects of social as well as psychological life in Algerian society are constructed around normative gender binaries.

This strategy of gendering her representation of critical political issues is also seen in her depiction of the relationship between Ahlam and her brother Nasser. While I will return to this in detail later in the chapter, it suffices to say here that where the

question of past generational difference and national memory was gendered through the pairing of Khaled and Ahlam, the tensions and differences within the present generation is taken up through Ahlam and Nasser. Through the latter, Mosteghanemi explores the ways in which the present generation of Algerians is trying to cope with its historical legacy. Moreover, it is the pairing Ahlam and Nasser that allows Mosteghanemi to look at the different strategies through which gendered subjects try to come to terms with an awareness of patriarchal structures in society.

In doing this, Mosteghanemi's novels are concerned with the deconstruction of national narratives and the rebuilding of collective memories in such a way that the trauma of Algeria's recent history might be simultaneously confronted and transcended. In this sense, Mosteghanemi's work goes beyond the purely literary-aesthetic aspects of representation and engages with the question of writing as an agency of national reconstruction. As discussed in preceding chapters, Mosteghanemi's work is also an extended engagement with the aporetic and therapeutic understanding of art and trauma. Consequently, her work of deconstructing the monophonic narrative of Algerian nationalism aims also to restore the emotional and psychological dimensions to a national narrative. Additionally, she attempts to contest the homogenising national narrative with the dimension of folk memories.

Mosteghanemi's main concern in her narratives is reconstructing new collective memories for the Algerian people. Reiterating the power of literature to reconstruct a sense of national identity; she writes, "I could have written in French, but Arabic is the language of my heart. I can only write in Arabic. We write in the language in which we feel" (*MIF*, 56). As already discussed, Mosteghanemi's decision to write in Arabic is an important one and reflects the internal conflict within Algeria relating to use of the French language. Kaye and Zoubir explore the way in which the use of French by

writers in post-independence Algeria and Morocco was often interpreted as a form of collusion with the enemy, particularly in Algeria, where the suppression of the Arabic language was a material and cultural symbol of French hegemony. Algerian intellectual elites were divided on this subject, and many chose to actively appropriate French as a “privileged weapon” in the independence struggle (Kaye & Zoubir 69).

Kaye and Zoubir further argue that the choice of French as a language of literature and intellectual endeavours in the postcolonial phase in Algeria is indicative of an attempt on behalf of intellectual elites to retain their hegemony as an intellectual ruling class. Mosteghanemi’s choice to write in Arabic therefore has implications within a wider debate about social class in Algeria and the accessibility of literature to wider Algerian society. As Laachir states, “Language choice (if it can be called a ‘choice’) is certainly a complex issue that is still largely linked to colonial legacies” (26). Thus, by writing in Arabic, Mosteghanemi opens up her literature to a wider section of Algerian society, in an effort to create a cultural artefact that is inclusive and accessible. Mosteghanemi’s endeavour is to create a holistic and complex “Arabic” narrative of Algerian society that permits the reader to understand the nation in its plurality. However, the very process of writing and reflection reifies these constructed narratives.

Mosteghanemi is consequently as much a product of the society in which she is writing as she is actively constructing Algerian historical memory, even as she provides a meta-analysis of the very process of the construction of memory. Her work is complex and multi-layered, as much reflection and criticism as active co-construction, which is of course the very process she advocates for Algeria to heal its wounds of the past. She is actively advocating a healing process for the nation to which she belongs, and makes a considerable effort to ensure that what she writes is an honest portrayal of her country’s national psyche, rather than bowing to stereotypes of “Arab feminist”

representation. In this sense, her work must be read, not as a reflection of her individual life, but rather as an attempt as to “share this linguistic plurality” (Laachir 26), and to prompt a collective reimagining of the Algerian nation. Striving against a tendency to defend Arabic against the influences of an oppressor language and maintain its purity, Mosteghanemi uses language as a way to access the plurality of Algerian society, rather than restrict it within a univocal narrative of the national past.

Moreover, she is firm in her conviction about the role of literature in enabling this process of national healing and reconstruction. Mosteghanemi’s main concern in her narratives is reconstructing new collective memories for the Algerian people. Reiterating the power of literature to reconstruct a sense of national identity, she writes,

I made love and the beautiful word my primary cause, believing that the Algerian character was *sick* and void within, that all the edifices and revolutionary slogans erected around it after independence would not help to construct it. Only *language* and *emotions* are capable of restoring and *rebuilding* a *new Algeria*. Perhaps one of the causes of our present problems is our *neglect*, after the revolution, of the *emotional* and psychological make-up of people. (Faqr 82)

Mosteghanemi uses the word “sick” as a metaphor to describe Algerian society after independence and to differentiate her own concern in writing from other national narratives. Here, Mosteghanemi critiques the homogenising national narrative which has mainly been concerned with the outcome of the revolution, while ignoring other important emotional and psychological aspects of the Algerian people. Hence, Mosteghanemi challenges the construction of the national narrative in Algeria in the recent past and seeks to restore important emotional and psychological dimensions to this national narrative. Her purpose in writing is not simply to present a love story,

based on one-dimensional characters, but rather to symbolically represent the Algerian nation in such a way that “every Arab reader can find himself, politically, emotionally and sentimentally while reading about Algeria” (Baaqeel 148). The choice of a romantic plot at the outset situates her work in a genre with a far broader readership. The twists and turns of Ahlam’s relationships—be it with Khaled in *Memory in the Flesh* or her marriage in *Chaos of the Senses*—provide a dramatic frame on which Mosteghanemi is able to pin her extended explorations of the questions of trauma, memory and the nation. First, the specific locations of these encounters evoke deep historical resonances—for instance, the freedom fighter Khaled painting his beloved city of Constantine, while living a tortured existence in Paris, the capital city of the former colonial rulers. And second, by fleshing out the political, emotional and sentimental dimensions of each character, Mosteghanemi allows different readers to interpret them in a properly kaleidoscopic fashion, as shifting perspectives reveal new emerging patterns and themes for them to interpret. Finally, the depth and complexity of Mosteghanemi’s characters allow her to use them as a vehicle for the pluralistic Algeria (or Algerias) that she wishes to represent.

Nonetheless, she is aware of the collective anger within Algerian society regarding the failed aspirations of the revolution: “there were also those who realized, as the Second World War ended to the benefit of French and their allies, that France used Algerians to fight a war that was not their war. They had paid the price of thousands of lives in battles that didn’t concern them, only to return to their own slavery” (*MIF*, 18). Consequently, the theme of revolution is salient in Mosteghanemi’s work, as this constituted a moment when “politics and history become dominant realities for the imagination” (Cox 252). To extend this idea further, one can suggest that the cultural process of nation-building in the postcolonial society of Algeria relies, to a certain

extent, upon reflection on the nation's traumatic history, and Mosteghanemi's works provide a vehicle for this process by articulating individual and collective responses to a key traumatic and historical event within Algeria's past: "Now we are standing on our country's erupting volcano... No longer is our country ashamed to present itself so ineptly" (*MIF*, 12).

In this manner, her novels enable her readers to undertake for themselves a process of interpretation that would ultimately lead to a transformation of the existing narrative of the nation as well as its exclusions.

Nation as Woman—the National Allegory

"You are more than just a woman. You are the consciousness of a nation."
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF* 249)

Rethinking the Algerian national imaginary echoes Bhabha's notion that "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (*Nation and Narration*, 1). Bhabha argues that the idea of "the people" emerges from a "double narrative movement" (*Location of Culture*, 145), comprised of a pedagogic and performative aspect. According to David Huddart, "On the one hand, pedagogy tells us that the nation and the people are what they are; on the other, performativity keeps reminding us that the nation and the people are always generating a non-identical excess over and above what we thought they were" (72). It is this oscillating and conflicted "double movement" that Mosteghanemi approaches through her novels, as her Algeria seems to be caught in a present that is torn apart by the banality of frustration and violence, and the promises of the past and as well as the future. Caught between moments of revolutionary certainty and debilitating doubt, the characters in Mosteghanemi's novels are brought to embody the failures as well as the

possibilities of the Algerian nation. As Ahlam claims of the nation: “Nation? What nation was this that we had always dreams of dying for and now died by its hand?” (*COS*, 220). In Mosteghanemi’s reading of contemporary Algeria, the contradictions of gender as a social and cultural formation and the traumatic past become the principal anxieties around which the double movement of the nation and its people is played out.

Postcolonial feminists have extensively critiqued the nationalist mobilisation of women as ideal figures representing the purity and authenticity of the nation. In Mosteghanemi’s novels, a critique of the gendered construction of the nation is an essential aspect of the work of national reconstruction and reconfiguration that she seeks to accomplish through her writing. In this section, I address a prominent debate regarding the status of Mosteghanemi’s novels as “feminist” works. Rather than attempting to resolve the question, I will focus more on the ways in which the attempts to “prove” or “disprove” Mosteghanemi’s “feminism” seem to hinge on a more serious question of the historical significance of the allegorical mode of representation in formerly colonial literatures, and its deployment in the representation of women. In doing so, I seek to reveal some of the theoretical implications of misreading Mosteghanemi’s polyphonic mode of engagement with the allegory of woman as nation.

Anne McClintock notes that women are frequently mobilised by nationalist discourses, such as the figure of Marianne for the French nation, yet this happens with a simultaneous denial of women’s agency in the co-construction of the nation (90). By positing a feminine figure as emblematic of the ideals, character and role of the nation, she is immediately rendered subject to the patriarchal exercise of power and strength. Mosteghanemi’s novels explore at length the representation of the nation as woman through the figure of Ahlam/Hayat. Engaging with the feminist critique of loss of women’s agency, Ahlam is shown on one hand as having to bear the burden of the

nationalist allegory—being the daughter of her revolutionary father, as well as Khaled’s nostalgic ideal—while on the other she becomes emblematic of a remaking of the nation itself.

Aida Bamia and Lindsey Moore have also discussed at length Mosteghanemi’s treatment of the “woman as nation”. Bamia states that Mosteghanemi’s *Memory in the Flesh* “is not a feminist work, promoting feminist ideas. It is simply the outcry of an Algerian citizen, the daughter of a martyr and, in a certain way, a victim of the war” (86). She emphasises that “gender is not an issue but serves mainly the romantic structure of the novel” (86). Moreover, she reads the relationship between Khaled and Ahlam as chaste and non-sexual. Having thus rejected the questions of gender and sexuality, Bamia transforms the romantic sub-plot of the novels into a national allegory—in its “symbolic dimension” it comes to stand for “the citizen-homeland relationship, the unrequited love is more representative of the Algerian realities” (86).

For Bamia, the “lovers’ quarrels” are a symbolic representation of the inter-generational conflict of Algerian society. And as with nationalist narratives, this antagonistic difference is also the sign of a deeper bond: “Both are aware of the abyss that separates them, but they recognise their need for each other. Khaled represents the collective memory that Hayat is seeking in order to find her stability” (89). In a complete silencing of Mosteghanemi’s feminist critique, her nationalist retrieval reproduces the very male-centric perspective that the author seeks to contest: it is the male figure of Khaled that represents the collective memory, while Ahlam is an incomplete subject that must “seek” the fixity represented by Khaled in order to find stability. Bamia further holds an instrumentalist conception of Mosteghanemi’s choice of a male narrator. She reasons:

This offers valuable advantages: it sheds light on the fate of the women's emancipation anticipated after the war and it supplements the accounts given by other almost exclusively male Algerian writers. Mosteghanemi is able to stand at a distance to evaluate the situation, comfortably positioned behind the narrator Khaled. Her views of women are thus expressed freely, without the risk of being considered self-serving. (86)

Ignoring for the most part Mosteghanemi's extensive experimentation with the form of the Algerian novel in Arabic, Bamia also seems to have missed her emphasis on critiquing the deeply patriarchal basis of "authorial genius", and the formal innovations of narrative structure that this entails. Rather, for Bamia, Mosteghanemi's work ultimately emerges as a "supplement" to the work of male Algerian writers.

Contrary to Bamia's reading of *Memory in the Flesh* as national allegory, Lindsey Moore argues that the novel "marks the limits of allegory, thereby signalling a threshold moment in Algerian literature" (85). Clarifying her departure from Bamia's reading, Moore argues that even as the use of a solipsistic first-person male perspective must be read as a "tactic" or formal device, "it enables the author to place a feminist subtext under erasure rather than eschewing one altogether" (83). She argues that Mosteghanemi's novels may be read as the utterance of a "postcolonial daughter" (85). Through an interweaving of complex narrative strategies, Mosteghanemi makes Ahlam/Hayat an "elusive character whose perspective and version of the story are inaccessible to the reader" (85). The character thus operates as a Derridean trace that emerges as supplement. Moore argues that Mosteghanemi's critique foregrounds the moments of violence that are disavowed in the construction of the fantasy of the nation as one. The novels offer an unveiling of the national allegory as "bearing traces of its

own bloody foundations in violence and the repressed narratives (and name choices) of mothers” (85).

As demonstrated above, Bamia invokes the allegorised, nationalist reading of Mosteghanemi’s novel, only to displace and render invisible the gendered critique of the *nation as woman*. The nation, for her, returns to once again disavow its patriarchal foundations, and foreclose the possibility of remaking the nation, which Mosteghanemi envisages. Moore’s reading instead draws on deconstruction and psychoanalysis to argue that Mosteghanemi’s work offers a critique of the allegory of *nation as woman* by placing the figure of woman as such under erasure. Ultimately, for Moore, “*Memory in the Flesh* is, over and above a wrenching portrayal of masculine desire, a canny deconstruction of the woman-as-nation allegory rather than, as Bamia suggests, ‘purely allegorical’” (83).

Both Bamia and Moore ultimately present monological readings of Mosteghanemi’s novels. While Bamia tries to fit the novels into a nationalist frame, Moore’s desire to see Mosteghanemi as a feminist author leads her to reduce the narrative trajectory of the character of Ahlam to a symptom of patriarchy, rather than a possible strategy of resistance to the same. Bamia adopts a clear strategy of de-sexualising the relationship between Khaled and Ahlam, reading it instead as a narrative of national memory. Even as Moore reads Ahlam’s character as a supplementary trace to Khaled’s narrative, this construction nevertheless also accepts the implicit dominance of the national allegory. Even as the question of patriarchy in Algerian society is an important concern for Moore, she reads Ahlam only as the unstable limit of Khaled’s fantasy, but never the locus of a divergent trajectory of ideas, actions and justifications. Ahlam is not a supplement to Khaled—rather she emerges as a dialogic counterpoint that makes the narrative of the nation open to a multiplicity of voices. Differing from

Moore's deconstructionist reading of *Memory in the Flesh*, I argue that Mosteghanemi adopts a kaleidoscopic approach that represents the characters as individual subjects who are independent of each other, and come together only conjuncturally. Contrary to Bamia's self-certainty about the national allegory, Moore emphasises the precarious nature of postcolonial Algeria by saying that Ahlam is "a postcolonial daughter, an elusive character whose perspective and version of the story are inaccessible to the reader" (85). While this theoretical gesture goes a long way in placing the nation under erasure, it does so at the cost of making Ahlam entirely inaccessible to the reader. This, I argue, is not Mosteghanemi's intention. An analysis of gender relations such as Moore's, I argue, is counter-productive, in that it reduces the skewed but dialogic relationship between the protagonists to a monological perspective of the male alone. Rather, Mosteghanemi implicitly accepts the irreducible difference between perspectives, even while trying to offer a way of imagining how to go beyond difference without disavowing it. The kaleidoscopic patterns—which bring together disparate characters, events and ideas—offer a provisional way of conceptualising their difference with their inter-connectedness.

Similarly, with regard to the cultural practice of Muslim women wearing the veil, Moore notes: "Veiling/unveiling the self and others becomes one technique through which women are able to reveal a legacy of marginalization and to expose pre-existing modes of apprehension without claiming absolute authority in redressing such histories" (76). For Moore, the veil is a metaphor that allows the "construction and deconstruction of difference between women" (76). The veil, in other words, becomes a strategy to negotiate the spaces of patriarchal society, and a way for women to "write themselves" into history. Moore's deconstructionist approach is significant in that it de-essentialises metaphors such as the veil, which have a long history in Orientalist

scholarship and representations of Algeria. However, her understanding of the practice of wearing the veil as a purely “strategic” practice is nevertheless problematic. This theoretical gesture risks generalizing a form of feminist cultural and critical practice with a specific history in Euro-American contexts to other worlds where it may not necessarily be applicable. At stake is, once again, an Orientalist question—is this reading of the veil as a “strategic” practice a gesture that disavows a question of epistemic difference between Euro-American knowledge formations and those in Algerian society? Does the veil not take on different cultural meanings in Algerian society, as a consequence of which it may not be seen as something that can be strategically taken up or let go, as the situation demands? Moore’s valorisation of Algerian women writers’ use of the veil as metaphor thus aligns them with her own feminist critical practice, which seeks to undermine patriarchy through acts of textual play. Mosteghanemi’s approach, I argue, is far more nuanced, in that she constantly engages with the social meanings attached to the figure of the writer in Algerian society, be it in the form of deciding what language to write in, or the historical responsibility of the writer in coming to terms with the nation’s collective memories of the past. For Mosteghanemi, the woman writer’s task is not just to write women into history, but to imagine a nation that acknowledges its multiplicity and embraces gender as one of the important axes of difference.

The issues emerging in this debate between Bamia and Moore may be approached through the contours of a debate on the status of allegory in “Third World literature,” which erupted between Fredric Jameson and a number of poststructuralist and postcolonial scholars, such as Aijaz Ahmad. Ahmad takes issue with Jameson’s statement that “Third World literature” cannot but be a form of historical allegory. He argues that “there is no such thing as a ‘third world literature’, which can be constructed

as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge” (4). For Ahmad, the phrase “Third World” is a polemical term with no theoretical basis. Ahmad argues from the perspective that the term “Third World” unifies under a single umbrella term a multitude of differences between nations and national cultures. Countries that are together designated “Third World” have nothing in common with one another. One may proceed with the truism that colonization played itself out differently in different parts of the world—on one hand, due to the differing strategies of domination adopted by the different colonizing powers, and on the other, due to the historical-cultural specificities of each of the colonized domains. However, this affirmation of multiplicity cannot ignore the establishment of a new hierarchy in international relations after World War II between a “First” and a “Third” world. While Ahmad is right to point out the differences in the experiences of the various countries that constitute this “Third World,” he nonetheless jettisons the relational and unequal aspect of the post-1950 global political economy.

In an intervention in this debate, M. Madhava Prasad takes a more nuanced position that is critical of both Jameson and Ahmad. He argues that while Jameson’s national allegory may serve as a productive critical concept, his specific way of invoking theoretical distinctions between “First” and “Third World” literatures makes it “curious that, at the moment of producing a theory of Third World literature, Jameson should find it necessary to embrace the essentialist self-image of the West as a homogeneous entity, and, in existentialist terms, lament ‘our’ failure to keep alive a sense of collectivity” (Prasad 74). Contrastingly, Prasad critiques Ahmad’s refusal to acknowledge the effectivity of the national form in the historical development of modern literary forms, in part due to the effects of European imperialism, and argues that “Ahmad’s argument against a theory of ‘Third World’ literature is an instance of

the return, by complicated ways, to an ultimately nationalist position” (71). In Prasad’s estimation, both Jameson and Ahmad only serve to “internalize libidinal preoccupations as ‘western’ and collective awareness as ‘Third World’” (74), in the process reinstating an ultimately Orientalist theory of literature.

Prasad’s observations on the persistence of Orientalist paradigms of cultural interpretation are particularly relevant to my discussion of Moore and Bamia. Even as the debate on the status of the national allegory does not explicitly broach the question of gender, it remains pertinent insofar as the Moore-Bamia debate also centres on Mosteghanemi’s engagement with the allegory of nation as woman—in other words, the woman as a site for the inscription of the national allegory. The terms of debate seem to coalesce around the polarity of the national allegory and the “private/libidinal” that has constituted the relation of anglophone academia with so-called Third World literatures (Prasad 73). Where Bamia recoups Mosteghanemi’s representation of Ahlam/Hayat as national allegory, Moore’s recourse to the concepts of psychoanalysis firmly situates her work within the libidinal paradigm, as she calls for a texturing of the national narrative with psychological and emotional truth (82). Where Bamia’s account emphasises the difference between so-called First and Third World literature, Moore implicitly reads Ahlam as “worthy” of being read as a libidinal text. For Moore, Mosteghanemi is an important writer precisely because she breaks away from the conventional recourse to the national mode of allegory, marking a “threshold” moment in Algerian literary history. At the same time, Moore can enact such a recovery only by presenting Mosteghanemi as firmly against the Third World paradigm of the national, as “the absent and silent ground upon which this entire critique of Algerian masculinist history and literary history is figured” (85). Implicit in this is an Orientalist gesture that reads the allegorical narrative (Oriental) as the pre-history of the modernist narrative

(Occidental). Thus even as Moore's reading of Mosteghanemi's self-reflexive textual strategies are particularly perceptive, her gesture of marking her as an exception amongst Arabophone writers only reproduces the binary, whereby Third World literature is eternally catching up with the literary standards of the West. In her attempt to foreground the construction of gender and the national allegory, Moore appears to lose grasp of the specificities of postcolonial literature that are equally important in Mosteghanemi's work.

The complex dynamics of this residual Orientalism in critical discourse is evident in McLarney's reading of Mosteghanemi's work. McLarney presents a gendered reading of Mosteghanemi's novels that discusses aspects such as her deployment of the male narrative voice in *Memory in the Flesh*. According to McLarney,

Though the work is composed in the form of a dialogue, as an address in the second person, Ahlam remains essentially unresponsive; her works are not 'read' as Khalid's [*sic*] text is read. In this respect, the female, or feminine, voice remains little more than a shadow throughout *Dhakirat al-Jasad*, vicariously experienced. The effect of this structure is that Khalid's voice eclipses that of Ahlam, and she is buried under layers of abstracted images, metaphors, and symbols. (25)

Thus, for McLarney, Mosteghanemi seems to be reproducing the allegorising of the woman as nation: "What is ultimately revealed (in the sense of unveiling, exposing, or baring) is simply what Khaled projects onto her—himself, his own image" (33).

I argue that McLarney undertakes a problematic reading of Mosteghanemi's novels. Moreover, the problem may be specifically pointed out as arising from errors of mistranslation. In one passage, McLarney translates a passage from *Memory in the Flesh*:

when he begins painting her [Ahlam], he [Khaled] says ‘you were suddenly clay that took the form of my masks (*qina’at*) with the form of my future ambitions and dreams... revealing (*kashafa*) to us the broad strokes of his new features. You were my next design. (McLarney 33)

In her reading of the passage, McLarney argues:

In Arabic, the juxtaposition of the masks or veils of *qina’at* with the revealing or unveiling of *kashafa* is extremely evocative, and alludes to the novel’s principle theme of revealing and concealing in *Dakirat Al-jasad*, Mosteghanemi demonstrates how the images of woman drawn by male authors have the effect of veiling their subjects. (33)

The subsequent translated edition of the novel, however, treats the two words somewhat differently. The same passage is translated as: “Khaled says ‘you were like a piece of putty suddenly taking the shape of my *convictions*, the shape of my ambitions and future dreams’” (102). Then Khaled adds

I remember a sentence I had read in a book by an art critic: ‘a painter does not present to us a picture of himself through his paintings. All he gives is a project of himself, *uncovering* the outlines of his forthcoming features’; and you were my next project, you were my forthcoming features. (102, emphasis mine)

The word “convictions” is completely different in its meaning and impact from the word “masks” used by McLarney. I argue that “conviction” (or belief, thoughts, principles) is the right translation for the word *qanaa’t*, and not “masks” (*qina’at*), as mistaken by McLarney. Similarly, the word *kashafa* is also mistranslated—the sense of “uncovering” here is not so much revealing as it is about discovering or finding. It must

be noted that McLarney's essay was published before the official English translations of the novels were released, suggesting that McLarney translated the above text herself.

The significant point, however, is that these mistranslations are not so much a technical problem as they are a symptom of the residual Orientalist dimensions in McLarney's reading of Mosteghanemi. Having mistranslated the Arabic words, McLarney describes Ahlam as an "empty container, blank temple and the passive blank page" (33). Unfortunately, this argument only serves to reinforce Western stereotypes about Arabic women and emphasises the notion of East versus West in Orientalist discourse. McLarney sees the novels as describing how male images of women have the effect of veiling their subjects. On the contrary, I argue that the novel demonstrates how the image of power and the strength of woman affect the man's attitude and change his beliefs and his principles.

The novel, in fact, shows the effect of Ahlam/Hayat on Khaled and presents woman as a source of strength and change. As Khaled laments, "you were my next project; you were my forthcoming features" (*MIF*, 102). After many pages he remembers their conversation about religion and admits: "Your words came to reconcile me with God. Me, who had not fasted for years. They reconciled me to home... Influenced by you, I decided to fast... I took refuge in faith from your darts" (158).

These sentences indicate the significance of Ahlam/Hayat in Khaled's life. They clarify how Ahlam affects Khaled's attitude and changes his thoughts and principles, and in turn implies the role of her in his life as the image of power and strength, and not as McLarney sees the novels as describing how male images of women have the effect of veiling their subjects. This, however, is a dynamic relation, where Ahlam/Hayat is not merely an image for Khaled. Rather, Ahlam is also shown to disrupt and to confront Khaled's idealisations in ways that Khaled is hard put to comprehend. At the same time,

it is not simply a relationship of refusal or challenge. Rather, she is engaged in a process of showing Khaled the gap between his dreams and his reality, and undertakes an attempt at transformation rather than simply opposition. For instance, in one encounter between Khaled and Ahlam, she visits him to look at a portrait he is supposed to have made of her. She is, however, disappointed when he shows her a painting in which she is depicted as a bridge. While for Khaled the bridge is a metaphor that condenses many levels of meaning, it is nonetheless a failed communication, as Ahlam rejects his representation. She asks, “How can you make any comparison between me and that bridge... I would have preferred you to paint me and not this bridge” (*MIF*, 109-110). Not only is she uncomfortable with the idealised image into which Khaled wants to place her, Ahlam is also troubled by her own personal experiences with Constantine’s bridges, which seem to evoke such nostalgic memories for Khaled. She says, “Constantine’s metal bridges suspending in the air are sad and scary. I can’t remember ever going across them on foot, or even trying to look down from them without feeling dizzy and frightened” (109). Rather than placing the figure of woman “under erasure,” Ahlam’s response presents a dialogical counterpoint to Khaled’s visualisation of her as the bridges of Constantine. Mosteghanemi here seems to implicitly suggest a way in which the deeply entrenched patriarchal recollections of the national past may be contested. Ahlam first resists the way in which Khaled visualises her as a bridge, then subsequently goes on to explain the same by making the bridges of Constantine the object of a narrative that is starkly different from Khaled’s idealisations—hers is a narrative of fear and trepidation rather than one of comforting familiarity and nostalgic reminiscence. For her, being depicted as a bridge is akin to being brought back into the presence of a moment from the past with traumatic associations, a symbol of all that she had been trying to get away from through her stay in Paris, and through the therapeutic

practice of writing. Thus, even as Ahlam's perspective appears to be revealed to the reader only in fleeting moments, Mosteghanemi's strategy is not to simply show their relationship from his perspective; as Ahlam says describing the bridge, "I can't stand the place, it's designed for suicide or insanity" (*MIF*, 131). In moments such as this, Mosteghanemi foregrounds the subterranean level of silenced traumatic narratives—such as Ahlam's—and then forces the dominant perspective to establish a dialogic relationship with them. Against mourning the tragedy of the silenced Algerian woman, the author offers an active strategy for her to speak.

The complex politics over interpreting Mosteghanemi's use of the allegory of woman as nation thus requires that we follow Prasad in adopting a historical approach. According to Prasad, it is not that Third World literature is more expressive of social realities. Rather, for historical reasons, its critical focus is on a collective social reality more than on (say) an individual's existential crisis (Prasad 74). Prasad argues that Third World nationalisms have historically emerged as counter-nationalisms, which produced national identities on the model of, but also against the domination of, European nation-states:

Their efforts to attain subjecthood (the effect of a self-generated historical momentum) were not due to any internal necessity but to external pressure—it is a requirement for 'voluntary' and 'self-interested' participation in the global economy. For this reason, the nation as a frame of reference is a constant presence in cultural production. (78)

In this sense, Mosteghanemi cannot "choose" to be allegorical or not. Rather, her novels, emerging as they do from a specifically postcolonial context, are inscribed with the question of collective social reality in various ways. I argue that even as Mosteghanemi brings forth the silences of the naturalised narrative around nation as

woman, it is not exactly the sort of deconstruction that Moore supposes. Rather, as I will show in the final section on the dialectic of remembrance and remaking, Mosteghanemi seems to acknowledge the historical force of the allegorical narrative. At the same time, she tries to produce a genuinely dialogic engagement with the national imaginary that is a pluralistic heteroglossia, different from the earlier monologic narratives of the nation, its legacy and its unity. In this, she echoes Prasad's own proposition regarding the analysis of literature: "It would be more accurate to re-inscribe all literatures in their national context, and then begin the analysis of the invisibility of the national framework in the western context and its hyper visibility in the Third World context" (73). I argue that rather than rejecting the allegorical form in favour of the modernist aesthetic of textual play, Mosteghanemi draws on "allegory's capacity for including (self)critical layers of discourse" (Prasad 79). However, in their debate, both Bamia and Moore obscure this aspect of Mosteghanemi's work—while Bamia simply situates her in a continuum of a self-evident Algerian national literature, Moore reads her as constituting a radical break from the tradition of allegorical writing.

The remainder of this chapter will look to validate this proposition by showing that in Mosteghanemi's works the gendered conception of the nation is a theme that underpins the entire narrative, and is represented at several different levels within the story. Khaled is presented as an archetypical Algerian male whose nostalgia for his hometown and relationship to the trauma of his revolutionary ordeal is entirely wrapped up with his conception of the nation, and in particular, his hometown Constantine, as a feminine entity. Ahlam/Hayat's representative status is derived from her position as the child of Si Tahir: the daughter of a martyr to the revolutionary cause, born at the same time as the independent state of Algeria, and the trapped object of Khaled's obsession and psychological perversity. For Ahlam, the trauma she must come to terms with is the

loss of her father, an instance one can read as symbolic of a loss of a traditional patriarchy that has left Algeria struggling to find a new way forward. Ahlam is engaged in a process of self-reflection that can only be facilitated by the externalisation of her trauma, the loss of her father, through her art.

I will argue that Mosteghanemi challenges the patriarchal equation of the nation with femininity, a construct which has its roots in colonial and postcolonial literature, and which results in the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes within Algerian society. Against Khaled's idealisation of Ahlam/Hayat, and by extension, of Constantine and Algeria itself, Mosteghanemi skilfully presents Ahlam's perspective as a counterpoint to Khaled, thereby exposing his instrumentalisation of her, and of the nation, in pursuit of his own nostalgia and trauma. She manages to transcend her condition and face her trauma squarely, and so overcome, or *become*. She is emblematic as she takes on the role of the nation in the woman-nation allegory, yet she manages to explode the patriarchal confines that Khaled constructs around her. In writing Ahlam in this way, Mosteghanemi is constructing an emblematic female heroine for contemporary Algeria. In the unveiling of the patriarchal act of masculine desire acted out upon Ahlam, Mosteghanemi establishes the grounds for change within the gendered narrative formation of the female form. Thus the exposition of the act encourages the challenge of nostalgic patriarchal configurations of national identity that reside within Khaled, allowing for the necessary reassessment of these structures of thought to take place.

Deconstructing Nation

“*Are women really like nations?*”
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 178)

In this section, I take up two aspects of the construction of nation as woman that are the particular focus of Mosteghanemi’s critique. First, I argue that Mosteghanemi’s work invites us to understand the inter-generational tensions in post-independence Algeria through a gendered perspective. I demonstrate that in her novels, both Ahlam and Khaled’s mother are subjects constructed as instances of the allegory of woman as nation. While Ahlam bears the burden of her father’s legacy, Khaled’s transformation into an underground fighter is intimately connected to his idealisation of his mother, and her subsequent death. Second, I will show that, additionally, Mosteghanemi returns to another critical marker of the integrity of the nation—its landscape as symbolisation of the “homeland.” Khaled and Ahlam are each shown to have a different relationship to the city of Constantine. While Khaled is caught up in his nostalgia for the Constantine of his childhood, Ahlam is left to contend with the violence, killing and social tensions that constitute the realities of the time when the utopia of liberation seems to lie in tatters.

In her polyphonic engagement with the questions of motherhood and homeland, Mosteghanemi invokes a distinction between two distinct levels of collective discourse—namely, national and folk memory. Pierre Nora posits a fundamental opposition between history and memory, arguing that whereas history is rooted in temporality, memory exists in the material, in the everyday gestures, images and objects that constitute our everyday lives. For Nora, the materiality of the cultural artefact indicates folk memories, which are antithetical to the historicised memory typified by top-down narratives, such as the institutionalised narratives of the nation-state (9).

While Nora's suggestion about the materiality of cultural artefacts is interesting, his assertions regarding the opposition between history and memory are problematic. While it is possible to suggest the ways in which artefacts are implicated in the formation of cultural memory, the unbridgeable difference between national narrative as history and folk narratives as memory is untenable. Historically, the nation-state has often turned to the wealth of folk cultural practices to construct a modern idea of "national culture," that is representative of "the people" who constitute the sovereign basis of the nation-state. The domain of folk cultural practices has always been implicated in the processes of modernisation and nation-state formation. This process played out with much more urgency in the newly formed postcolonial states as they tried to construct a narrative of the formation of the nation-state within a continuity of a nation that has supposedly existed since time immemorial. Folk songs, stories, heroes and glorious battles that hitherto circulated were appropriated as narratives of this past glory of the nation and its people. In this sense, folk culture constitutes a reservoir of nostalgia, which the nation must periodically turn to so that it may legitimise its temporal continuity and its cultural-ethnic unity.

Situated in the postcolonial context of Algeria, Mosteghanemi is surely acutely aware of the dangers of invoking the autonomy of folk memory as a refuge against the homogenising forces of modernity, nation-state and history. Her novels, in fact, often grapple with the simultaneous, often conflicted, co-existence of these two realms—of history and memory—that is Algeria's present reality. However, unlike Nora's sweeping generalisation, Mosteghanemi is far more circumspect. On one hand, by showing these two realms as co-existing, she gestures towards an as yet unresolved conflict between the state and modes of traditional authority. On the other, she is acutely aware of the impossibility of a return to the utopian past symbolised by these folk

memories; even as they “exist” in the present in antagonism with the narratives of history, they have nonetheless been fundamentally transformed in the process of this confrontation. In an attempt to represent honestly the dimensions of this apparent paradox—of traditional modes of authority being transformed by the forces of modernity, but not yet completely dismantled—her representations of the folk always appear as fragments. Resisting the nationalist gesture of romanticising the folk idyll, for Mosteghanemi the dimension of the folk is approachable only as fragments that are being constantly refigured through cultural practices of reiterations and citations. Her work is an attempt to patiently explore these antagonistic fissures in their complexity, rather than offer hasty prescriptions. As Khaled says, “I abandoned my memory the day I made the amazing discovery that it was not exclusively mine. It was shared. I shared it with you. Each of us had our own version even before we met” (*MIF*, 246). The shared collective (and, perhaps, unifying) memories that emerge from Khaled and Ahlam’s recollection of Algeria’s past are not grounded in shared narratives but rather in shared iconography, objects and experiences. These cultural objects and icons, in turn, are the site where polyphonic voices come to articulate their commonalities as well as differences.

Mosteghanemi’s pluralist approach thereby simultaneously deconstructs and reconstructs national narratives: she replaces homogenising national narratives alongside folk memories that are constructed from the bottom up, through individual words, deeds, experiences and remembrance. Mosteghanemi mobilises a range of cultural objects, ranging from the intimate bracelet, gold jewellery, clothes, perfume, to the iconic bridges of Constantine, in order to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of Algerian collective memory. As the detailed discussion of Ahlam’s bracelet in the following section will make clear, while these different objects serve different functions

within the text, they all serve to illustrate the plurality of collective memories, which must be accepted rather than subjected to one homogenising, idealised narrative of the Algerian struggle.

The Nation's Mother

"This was the nation I had one day substituted for my mother."
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 189)

Khaled's story of his early life foregrounds a deep connection between his sentiments for his mother and for his nation. The principal motivation that Khaled appears to have in his early life as a revolutionary is the death of his mother:

The revolution was entering its second year and I was in my third month as an orphan. I cannot remember now exactly when the country took over the character of motherhood and gave me an unexpected and strange affection and a compulsive sense of belonging. (*MIF*, 14)

We are told that she died "from sickness and a broken heart and a father too busy with the demands of a younger bride following the departure of her husband, Khaled's father, for another wife" (14). Khaled's loss of his mother leaves a deep and permanent scar, and we are actively told that he compensated for her loss by imbuing the nation with the image of motherhood: "I was an orphan, and I realized this profoundly all the time because the hunger for affection is a fearful and painful feeling that continues to tear you from the inside and stays with you until, one way or another, it finishes you off" (14). Khaled's description of the trauma of this loss is gut-wrenching; he describes the nausea experienced at his mother's departure and consciously compensates for her loss with his revolutionary struggle. Khaled's inability to protect his mother is compensated for by his participation in the national struggle: Algeria is imbued with a feminine form

and must be protected by the men of the country. The feminised nation, the motherland, signifies vulnerability. The masculine nation, on the contrary, invokes feelings of pride, strength and solidarity. The motherland invites martyrdom and sacrifice; hence, for Khaled, the dual images of his mother and Algeria are inextricable:

I went on putting all the effort I could into proving my heroism to him as if I wanted him to witness my manliness or my death, to witness that I belonged to no one else save this country, and that I was leaving behind nothing but the grave of a woman, my mother, and a younger brother for whom Father had already chosen a new mother. (19)

This conceit is mobilised by Mosteghanemi in different contexts, and demonstrates the way in which she understands the “woman as nation” allegory as fundamentally patriarchal. For Khaled, the desperation he feels at the loss of his mother is fused with that of his country having lost its freedom to the French rulers. Throughout his struggle as a freedom fighter, the thought of the attainment of independence and the recovery of Algeria’s lost glory is inseparable from his desire to be reunited with his mother. While Moore reads this desire as a libidinal structure (82), in contrast, I argue that Khaled’s desire emerges after the transference between mother and nation is established. In this sense, “mother” is here only retrospectively signified as the marker of tradition, purity and authenticity. While this marks the inauguration of a particular relationship of identification, the relationship does not have libidinal overtones. Whereas Moore argues that Khaled’s freedom struggle is only a displaced desire to return to his mother, I suggest that the desire for national independence emerges out of the traumatic break in cultural continuity brought on by colonialism, and “mother” is one of the figures through which this desire becomes metaphor.

Intended as a critique of the nationalist idealisation of motherhood—as a specific instance of the “woman as nation” allegory—Mosteghanemi goes on to explore the complexities of this re-signification through the icon of the bracelet. When he first meets Ahlam in an art gallery in Paris, Khaled is instantly transported to his past life:

I look at you and recall Si Tahir’s features in your smile and in the colour of your eyes. How beautiful it is for martyrs to return that way in your looks! How beautiful for my mother to return in the bracelet on your wrist, and for my homeland to return today in your presence! How beautiful it is that you are! (40)

In her analysis of the above quote, Valassopoulos has argued that “already, in their encounter, is the conscious knowledge, as well as the concealed wisdom, of the failure of this encounter to ever work on the grounds of a shared history, yet it is this shared history that can unite them” (118). Drawing on a notion of the undecidability of an encounter with a stranger, Valassopoulos suggests that here Mosteghanemi captures the dynamics at play when people meet, particularly in a context where a sense of socio-cultural knowledge about the other is taken for granted and inspires the impression of a closeness or intimacy that may not actually exist (118). She states that the meeting allows Mosteghanemi to enact the “unknown and unfathomable capability of bodies to produce knowledge at the moment of the encounter—to spill or ‘leak’ over into the social and even psychological space without them ever being completely aware of it” (119). While Valassopoulos’s reading of this passage is illuminating, it is also somewhat restricting in that it reduces the encounter between Khaled and Ahlam to a purely philosophical exploration of the ethics of the encounter. However, as I have argued over the course of this dissertation, Mosteghanemi’s plotting of the two protagonists and the conflicts between them is multi-layered. In addition to the philosophical question foregrounded by Valassopoulos, Mosteghanemi also engages

with a number of purely historical-cultural questions through the two characters. The meeting between Khaled and Ahlam is an encounter between two different generations of the Algerian nation, a confrontation between two divergent ideas of the nation, and an attempt to reframe the question of collective history and memory. Moreover, Mosteghanemi's heteroglossic technique seems to affirm the possibility of a transformed national imaginary in the future, rather than simply reiterating the eventual failure of such attempts to create shared meaning. Thus my reading focuses more on Mosteghanemi's kaleidoscopic representation of multiplicity *with* difference, rather than the eventual failure of all attempts at meaningful communication.

As mentioned above, Mosteghanemi's narrative is articulated through heteroglossic effects that incorporate multiple levels of discourse within specific plot situations. In my reading, the encounter quoted above is not simply an instance of philosophical meditation on an encounter between strangers—it marks the ways in which the latency of Khaled's traumatic past returns to the present as a structure of repetition of the metaphors of mother and nation, through Ahlam herself and the bracelet. The features of Ahlam's smile and the colour of her eyes cause Khaled to reminisce about his time with her father. This becomes an instance of Mosteghanemi's extension of Caruth's notion of traumatic repetition, namely, the inclusion of bodily features alongside "place" and "time" as triggers of traumatic repetition. What Valassopoulos reads as bodies "spilling over" into the social space, I argue, is better understood as an instance of Mosteghanemi's layered, heteroglossic narrative—its brings to light not the "unknown and unfathomable" in the body but the ways in which bodily features are inscribed in structures of traumatic repetition. This bodily inscription of trauma is not an excess that spills over, rather a lack that leaves the subject "incomplete". The emphasis on fragmentation of memory and its sedimentation in

bodily features, as well as everyday objects (the bracelet), foregrounds the ways in which the body's sense of internal unity and separateness from the outside world are ruptured by the mechanisms of traumatic repetition. Moreover, the "otherness" of a "familiar stranger" in an encounter is always mediated through the subject's own psychic history of trauma rather than any objectively given markers of "shared" culture.

In the generational gap that separates both characters, Khaled is well aware of Ahlam's detachment from his own concerns. He discusses the bracelet he saw her wear at their first meeting in the art gallery, the bracelet that brought back memories of his own mother. Ahlam complains that the bracelet is sometimes heavy. The following passage reveals gendered dialogic perspectives: Ahlam says, "I wear it for some occasions, but it's heavy and hurts my wrist." Khaled replies:

Memory is always heavy. My mother wore one for years on end and never complained of its weight. She had it on her wrist when she died... I was not criticising you. There was remorse in my voice, but I did not say anything. You belonged to a generation that found everything heavy to carry, and so swapped the old Arab dresses for modern ones made of just one or two pieces of cloth.
(76)

In this passage, the bracelet that Ahlam wears is redolent with signification: it represents Khaled's mother and, in turn, Algeria, his motherland. The bracelet acts as a fragment of "authentic" memories of the Algerian past. At the same time, Mosteghanemi emphasises the differing attitudes of the two characters towards the bracelet, to indicating the pluralistic, and often contradictory, nature of such folk memories. In contrast to Khaled, for Ahlam, the bracelet is heavy, signifying the weight of Algeria's past that she yearns to escape. The bracelet also represents a highly intimate and individual folk memory, recalling Khaled's mother and demonstrating the ways in

which Ahlam's generation have, in small ways, sought to break free of the weight of Algeria's past trauma.

Mosteghanemi's deployment of Bakhtinian heteroglossia is evident in Ahlam's simple, almost mundane response to Khaled's question. In Khaled's response to her statement that "it is heavy" Mosteghanemi looks to foreground the way in which he immediately anchors the significance of the bracelet as an artefact of folk memory within his idealised image of national memory. Khaled clings to a number of other such symbols that remind him of his mother. Khaled states "I remembered her clothes, her personal possessions and her favourite dress... It carried her perfume and her personal scent, the fragrance of old jasmine and a blend of natural aromas, for me the scent of motherhood" (164).

Ahlam's response is situated in the mundane everyday. Her answer is not, as Khaled reads it, a sign of the apathy of the younger generation. Rather, her response serves to return the object of "national heritage" to the everydayness of folk memory. Mosteghanemi's dialogic technique is clear here. She does not replicate Khaled's perspective as the narrative perspective. Rather than making Ahlam's short response a conventionalised device to "move" Khaled's narrative forward, it affirms the autonomy of plural perspectives. Not only is the exchange of dialogue polyphonic, as two different narrative voices, but it is also a heteroglossic discourse. Through her gendered representation, Mosteghanemi shows the monologic narrative of the nation (represented by Khaled) as incomplete. Through a representation of the gaps between the perspectives of the two characters regarding the bracelet, Mosteghanemi affirms the plurality of voices that is constitutive of the social.

For Khaled, the fact that Ahlam's generation has discarded symbols of national heritage and continuity, such as the bracelet, is indicative of its decline, which makes

him frustrated and disappointed with the post-war generation. Khaled, after all, invests his hopes for the nation in Ahlam/Hayat from the moment of her birth:

This was the first time I heard your name. I heard it as I was bleeding, in a faint state between life and death. I clung to that name like a feverish man clinging to a word in a moment of delirium. Like a messenger clinging to his message, afraid of losing it. Like a drowning man clinging to the vestiges of a dream.

(*MIF*, 21)

Khaled here recalls the context in which he and Ahlam first met, after he travels to Tunisia at the behest of her father, his friend Si Tahir, martyr of the revolution. Si Tahir asks him to carry a message to Ahlam's mother, indicating that she should be given the name Ahlam, as opposed to Hayat. The two protagonists meet, therefore, when Ahlam is just a baby, and it may be suggested that Khaled invests in her the hopes of a nation reborn after the revolution.

This critical juncture in Mosteghanemi's exploration of the relation between the nation and its women is doubly inscribed. In a second reading, from the perspective of the woman in the incident, it is clear that the name given to her by her mother, Hayat (meaning "life"), was replaced with that chosen by her father, Ahlam ("dreams"). As Moore argues, "the idealized nation, born with Ahlam, is here reconstrued under the sign of the law-of-the-father, bearing traces of its own bloody foundations in violence and the repressed narratives (and name choices) of mothers" (85). In addition to the movement of allegorisation observed by Moore, I argue that we must also take into account the generational question. Khaled's desire to see his mother in Ahlam/Hayat marks a nationalist imperative to establish the ideal woman as the bearer of continuity of the national community. Ahlam, contrastingly, is shown as reluctant to bear this

burden, preferring to come to terms with her trauma and productively reconstruct the possibility of a freer and more equal Algeria.

Khaled's sense of bitterness towards the choices made by the post-revolutionary generation is shown through his feelings towards Ahlam's marriage. Khaled and Ahlam embark on a doomed relationship in Paris, after which, we are told, she leaves him, first for a Palestinian fighter—an embodiment of the “permanent revolutionary” (Moore 48)—and later for a marriage into the new Algerian elite—the parasitic class who have failed in their duties to the revolution. When Ahlam's uncle invites Khaled to her wedding and says “he is a good man in spite of all that's said of him”, Khaled reveals his contempt, saying,

but Si X [the man who wants to marry Ahlam/Hayat] was a lot more than that. He was the man of secret deals, the man in the front row, a man of hard currency and hard tasks. He was a military man, a man of the future. With all that, did it matter anymore if he was good or not? (*MIF*, 177)

Ahlam's capitulation—in Khaled's eyes—to this pragmatic marriage, which to him is economically expedient, but devoid of passion, is indicative of the generational gap between them. Khaled cannot cope with his own sense of loss, as Ahlam, in whom he had invested so many of his ideals of feminine nationhood, fails to uphold his illusion. Moore has discussed this in some detail. The fact that Ahlam is ultimately engaged in a politically expedient marriage reinforces Mosteghanemi's point that the fundamental patriarchy within Algerian society, and within Algerian national narratives, remains pervasive. Moore suggests that Ahlam—and by extension Algeria—remains enthralled by the designs and transactions between men themselves (86). In Moore's reading, Ahlam's marriage into the elites of Algerian society “extracts the price of her virginity” (85). Even as it is clear that Moore attempts to read Ahlam's marriage as part of her

reading of Ahlam as the allegorical woman-as-nation under erasure, it nevertheless reveals some problematic presuppositions.

At the outset, this, too, seems an Orientalist gesture. Rather than situating Ahlam's oppression in any specific historical context, Moore merely reproduces the stereotype of the traditionalist cultures of the Orient as being obsessed with the taboo on pre-marital relationships. Moore's reading is geared towards demonstrating that the woman is always already an object of exchange between men. The relations of power within which Ahlam's marriage, and her own decision to get married, are situated are here reduced to a simplistic, primordial construction of women's oppression. Not only does Moore's reading simplify women's oppression, it also nullifies resistance. I argue that, contrary to Moore's reading, Mosteghanemi's treatment of Ahlam's marriage choices is far more complicated than Ahlam's choice to marry—"for money," in Khaled's estimation—and shows precisely that she is not an object of exchange between men. Rather, she is a relatively independent woman who can decide and choose whom she wants to engage with because she selected a legal and legitimate way to carry on with her life "the marriage is legitimate" (*MIF*, 225). Moore effectively misreads Mosteghanemi's narrative technique—her choice in marriage is not about placing her character "under erasure" in order to represent the embedded patriarchy in Algerian society. Rather, through the voices of characters like Khaled, she shows Ahlam as a character who negotiates the patriarchal norms in Algerian society in a pragmatic way. This pragmatism, however, can appear to Khaled only as a betrayal, or "for money."

Ahlam is a pragmatic, mature and educated woman who is willing to resist the overbearing will of men attempting to control her choices in life. Although Khaled is not happy about her marriage, she challenges his desire and asserts her choice. It symbolizes her refusal to bear the burden of being the idealised centre of Khaled's

imagination. According to Moore, this is a conscious effort on Mosteghanemi's part to deconstruct the dominant allegory of the "nation as woman": "Khaled's generation's experience, and by extension, the construction of the nation through the prism of nationalist male subjectivity are here construed as one-dimensionally allegorical, fixated and passé" (86).

Ahlam's pragmatic and realist perspective is not just a symbolic rejection of the idealist, utopian worldview embraced by the likes of Khaled. The past, for women of the present like Ahlam, is not the refuge of beautiful memories—it is a field of trauma and patriarchal violence that is to be left behind. When Khaled asks Ahlam why she is getting married, she replies, "it is my *ready* destiny" (*MIF*, 181, my emphasis).⁴ Unconvinced, Khaled asks, "I had expected another destiny for you. How can you agree to be bound to him?" However, in this moment Ahlam goes beyond simply negating or refusing Khaled's "destiny." Rather, she sets up her refusal within a far broader question of the destiny of women in general, and then goes on to situate her refusal within an independent trajectory of motives and actions. Revealing the wide chasm that exists between Khaled and Ahlam in the way they understand her situation, she replies, "I don't. I'm only running away to him, from memories that have become uninhabitable. I have fed on impossible dreams and repeated disappointments" (181). The past that Ahlam refers to is the legacy of her father as a freedom fighter, and the burden of expectations that this places upon her, as his daughter. In this genuinely dialogical moment, Mosteghanemi shows the contrasting ways in which Khaled and Ahlam relate to the legacy of the liberation struggle. While Khaled cannot accept the fact Ahlam has chosen to marry a man who is the perverse antithesis of the ideals of the

⁴ This sentence has been translated incorrectly in the English edition. The translator has missed the word "ready."

revolution, as fighters like him had understood it, for Ahlam the most urgent thing to do in the present is to get away from the shadows of that time of idealism and struggle.

In this sense, Mosteghanemi's work offers a more radical critique of the Algerian national narrative than Moore's reading suggests, by offering new ways to think of an alternative narrative. Moore is only able to show Ahlam as a symptom of the repressions that constitute Algerian civil society—indecipherable and opaque. For Moore, Ahlam awaits her "proper" interpreter who can read her symptoms and help to cure the psychoses of contemporary Algerian society. I argue that Mosteghanemi refuses to render the woman as a sign that must be read by the (male) interpreter. Rather, Mosteghanemi traces for Ahlam a trajectory that is not determined by Khaled's desire. She seeks the legitimacy of her life choices not in the patriarchal authority represented by Khaled, but by the legal contract of marriage, that is governed by the authority of the rational, modern, secular state. Mosteghanemi explores Ahlam's own rationalisation for having consented to the marriage:

I realized that his fatherliness meant the most to me, and that the prestige of his military rank and political position only mattered to me insofar as it kept alive the memory of struggle I had grown up with, and the pride of an Algeria I dreamed of. I used to see my country in his stature, in his strength and loftiness, in his body that had experienced fear, cold, and starvation during the long years of liberation, I saw what justified my desire, and for the sake of memory I honoured it... A long time went by before I realized how foolish it was of me to mix up the complexity of the past with the opposite reality. (*COS*, 20)

This passage offers a clear statement of Ahlam's difference in perspective vis-à-vis Khaled. Where Khaled seems to spend every waking moment in an attempt to relive, recount and reconstruct the utopian past *in* the present, Ahlam has realised the folly of

such attempts. Unlike Khaled, she has got over her infatuation with the idealised image of the nation that she imagined in her husband. Where Khaled is caught up in trying to maintain a fidelity to the ideals of the past, Ahlam is intent on distancing herself from this and is pragmatic in understanding its effects on her living present.

Thus the idea that Ahlam is “capitulating” to her marriage with the elites is equally problematic. I argue that Mosteghanemi’s designation of the class of people as “elite” itself inscribes the dynamic relations of power within which the marriage is situated. Rather than a sign of Ahlam’s failure, it is a sign of an unequal society that has failed to concretise the ideas of pluralism and democracy in its political institutions, processes and public discourse. It is these inequalities that return in Mosteghanemi’s second novel to haunt the Algerian nation as spectres of civil war and cultural fundamentalism. Moreover, her marriage “for money” may alternatively be read as her attempt to navigate the terrain of patriarchal authority by strategically drawing on the limited legal rights of marriage that are guaranteed to her by the Algerian state.

The Homeland: Fantasy and Reality

“You were just like my homeland, with all its paradoxes.”
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 248)

Effectively deploying the techniques of polyphony and heteroglossia in describing Khaled’s relationship with the city of Constantine, Mosteghanemi illustrates how not only do the two characters, Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, have different subjective perspectives and ways of coming to terms with the realities of present-day Algeria, each is also shown to situate the city in different networks of meaningful associations. Khaled remembers Constantine as the city of his childhood as well as through fragments of memory from the mundane aspects of the everyday life of the city, from a time before

the war when it was a colourful, vibrant urban centre. However, for Ahlam, the city always brings a dark sense of foreboding. This arises partly from the ways in which her associations with the city are linked to her traumatic experiences of loss and loneliness during the war, and partly out of the prevailing oppressive climate of threats and violence against writers that constitutes everyday life in present-day Constantine.

Khaled refers to Constantine as “a female city.” At the same time, Mosteghanemi describes his obsession with Ahlam in terms intermingled with his paintings and his perception of the city itself:

With my masculinity I was painting the outline of your femininity. With my fingers I was painting all that the brush could not reach. With my one hand I was possessing you, planting you, harvesting you, dressing and undressing you and changing the curves of your body to make them fit mine. Woman! You became my homeland. Give me another chance to become a hero. (*MIF*, 120-121)

Khaled invests Ahlam/Hayat with his nostalgia for the country he perceives he has lost, and he views her as his salvation and an opportunity to validate his own heroism, taken from him when his chance to become a martyr was taken from him. The image is fiercely poignant, tracing the image of the mutilated Khaled in the reader’s mind, and emphasising his desperation to become a hero, a martyr of the revolution. The action of painting Ahlam is an act of taking possession, but it is also a way to fix Ahlam/Constantine in time, and to crystallise his own nostalgic, static image of her. Khaled’s memories of Constantine, and the significations embedded within his constructed image of Ahlam, are so intimately intermingled that neither can exist wholly without the other. The unconscious elision within Khaled’s speech when he refers to Ahlam and Constantine demonstrates the synonymous roles they have taken on in his psyche.

For Khaled, the land of Algeria itself, and Constantine in particular, are presented in feminine terms:

You are the woman who cloaked my nostalgia with madness, who gradually assumed the features of a city and the contours of a country. And then, when time was not looking, this woman became my world... you were Constantine's mulberry tree, every season in black. You were the city's love, its clothes, its joy, its misery and its lovers. (*MIF*, 8)

Khaled conflates the image of Ahlam, Constantine and Algeria itself, to construct a particular gendered perspective through which Algeria's national narrative is realised. He is similarly horrified at being confronted with the present reality of his home city, which has become morally corrupt. Here, he again returns to sexual imagery to describe the baseness of contemporary Constantine:

Such inherited baseness is everywhere, in the eyes of most women who are hungry for any man, and in the nervousness of men who piled up their lust until they burst out with the first women they meet. I had to resist my animal desires that day and not quit the city that was gradually pulling me down. (*MIF*, 218)

In addition to the equation of Ahlam with Algeria and Constantine, the presence of the landscape of Algeria, as presented through Khaled's eyes in a feminine form, also serves to highlight the way in which colonialist, postcolonial and nationalist discourses reinforce the gender prism through which Algeria is viewed, both internally and externally. This gendered filter of interpretation continues within the postcolonial legacy of Algeria, largely as a result of the ongoing trauma that plagues Algerian society. The continuing violence after the revolution appears to indicate that the only unity of purpose achieved within the days of the resistance was opposition to French colonial

rule. Without this common enemy, other oppressive forces have emerged within the country and provoked deep rifts within the population. In this respect, Algeria is continually recast as a feminine terrain that is a perpetual victim of male aggression. This reflects Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias's discussion of the victimisation of the geographical territory itself, in which the gendered discourse serves, in a way, to legitimise or explain the objectification and seizure of such a territory (Olaussen 6-8). Even postcolonial attempts to deconstruct colonial biases have tended to indulge in this overtly patriarchal approach to the study of postcolonialism, a critical act that itself represents a gendered trauma:

Woman! You became my homeland. Give me another chance to be a hero. Let me, with one hand, change your concept of measuring masculinity, love, pleasure. Oh, how many arms held you with no warmth? How many of those hands left the traces of their fingernails on your neck and their signature on you? They loved you in error and hurt you in error. Thieves and pirates loved you. Bandits, too. But they did not lose an arm. Only those who loved for nothing became handicapped. (*MIF*, 121)

Khaled's return to Constantine, the feminine city for which he bears so much love and nostalgia, completely shatters him, as he realises the incongruity between his memory of the city and what it has become. He curses the people of Algeria, who have been the recipients of everything that the revolutionary generation struggled for, and yet they have obliterated the sanctity of the nation. Khaled says to Constantine, "in return they have raped you before my very eyes" (*MIF*, 235). By mobilising this graphic metaphor, Khaled conceptualises Constantine as a vulnerable, defenceless feminine entity that has been corrupted by the lasciviousness of Algeria's post-revolution

generation. The virulence of Khaled's contempt for the post-revolution generation is only matched by its impotence.

Mosteghanemi shows that the nationalist fantasy of nation-as-woman, inscribed in the landscape and cities of Algeria, is incapable of constructively contributing towards the healing of the historical trauma of post-independence Algeria. Khaled's rage, ultimately, cannot help to rebuild contemporary Algerian society—rather it only helps to temporarily suture his shattered dreams as he is confronted with reality. Khaled thus poses profound questions to the way in which national narratives are constructed within Algeria, and the way in which the postcolonial study of the country ought to be approached. Khaled's demise in the face of the unrecognisable female nation he sees before him forges an incompatibility that leaves no avenue back to the splendour of his past.

Mosteghanemi, however, is not content with making a monologic critique of the gendered construction of the homeland. As part of her narrative technique that speaks to her pluralistic approach to deconstruct the national narrative and reconstruct collective memory, Mosteghanemi replaces the homogenising national narrative with elements of Algerian folk memories. Specific elements within the novels, such as the dominant presence of the city itself, the Algerian landscape, and the sounds, smells and colours that comprise the characters' memories, form cultural repositories for Algerian folk memories. Mosteghanemi invests material objects with a cultural significance. For instance, the association between Ahlam and his homeland is so strong that Khaled cannot help but conflate references to his country, his hometown, the martyrs and, above all, his mother. All these images are condensed into highly suggestive material objects and experiences that are a part of everyday life in Constantine:

I was witnessing your gradual transformation into a city that had haunted me since time began. I was witnessing your sudden change as day by day you took on the *features of Constantine*, its elevations, its grottos and memories and secret caves, visiting its *Muslim saints* and wearing its incense for your perfume and a big brown velvet skirt the colour of my *mother's clothes*. I could almost hear the sound of your *golden ankle bracelet* ringing in the caves of my memory as you strolled to and fro on the bridges of Constantine. (*MIF*, 92, my emphasis)

Khaled likens the contours of Ahlam's body to the terrain and physical features of the city of Constantine. Through the reference to the saints, she is imbued with a sense of fervour and mystery, while everyday objects like the skirts and the anklet take Khaled on a nostalgic return to the Constantine of his childhood and youth.

Similarly, the recurrent image of Al-Kudya, the prison that housed many of Algeria's revolutionary martyrs, serves to recall the violence of the struggle for independence and the sacrifice of the martyrs. At the same time the neglect of the historical monument and its significance in the freedom struggle, for Khaled, is as much a symptom of the corruption and apathy of the postcolonial regime, and the failure of the new Algerian state to live up to the expectations of the revolution.

Pluralism is present through several symbols that have multiple meanings in the novel, reaching back through many generations to the Garden of Eden, Berber traditions, Muslim practices and modern secular culture. In this way, Mosteghanemi inscribes within the national narrative the essential antiquity of the Algerian nation and an awareness of its multiplicity. For Mosteghanemi, the nation must be able to include in itself all these diverse cultures that constitute the lived reality of Algerian national identity—the nation must be inclusive towards its classical literary traditions, its Islamic

intellectual traditions, as well as the Berber folk traditions, all of which come together to form the identity of a modern, secular Algeria.

While *Memory in the Flesh* engages with the troubled, traumatic legacy of Algeria's War of Independence, *Chaos of the Senses* places more emphasis on the effects of that legacy on the political and social tensions in the present. Describing at length the effects of state repression, fundamentalist violence and political murder, Ahlam describes the real face of the new Algeria:

Week after week, death after death, I realized that I was living in a life still under construction, moulded here and there by major events and minor ones. At any moment and for any reason, my destiny could take another direction. I was a woman living between three men whose lives hung on the tip of a bullet. Their lives and fates were under the sway of those who designed death and terror every day in that country. I didn't know when one of them would be shot dead with an accusation, or the other with its opposite. (*COS*, 201)

This passage is particularly relevant not only because it casts a bare light on the realities of political violence in Algeria from the 1980s onwards, but because here Mosteghanemi overlaps her consideration of contemporary political realities with the specifically gendered way in which Ahlam must experience them. Where Khaled makes the woman the bearer of his utopian fantasies, Ahlam shows her position to be doubly articulated—first as bearer of the expectations of male fantasy, and second as subject to the threat of another violent, unannounced end to that oppressive relation. Thus, Mosteghanemi does not simply bring about the conditions for change, but rather she necessitates them to the extent that Algeria is left no choice but to pass through the trauma that colonial and patriarchal history has imbued upon the nation, to embark upon a process of collective healing.

Remembrance and Remaking

“Was it the eyes of the past and the disappointed of the present?”
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 203)

The gendered dichotomy posed by the dual narration of Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat throughout the two novels presents two antithetical views for the purpose of writing: *remembrance* versus *remaking*. By orchestrating these two extreme reactions to their trauma, Mosteghanemi attempts to transcend the divisive way in which Algerians react to the trauma of the colonial period and the War of Independence. These divergent views are presented in the novels in ways that reveal gendered attitudes toward ideas of nation. Mosteghanemi's novels seek a synthesis of these attitudes in order to create a new, pluralist perspective on the nation. This is revealed through the way the discourse of the nation is critiqued through the gendered descriptions of Algeria, especially in the complex exploration of the equation of Ahlam with Algeria through the allegory of woman-as-nation.

Mosteghanemi's pluralistic approach makes possible not just a deconstruction of the national narrative, but also a vision for the future and a reconstruction of collective memory. Mosteghanemi uses the narrative technique of polyphony to engage with the most complex questions in her novels—the contrast between Khaled's passionate but desperate desire for a utopian Algeria, against Ahlam's far more pragmatic perspective on the present. In doing so, Mosteghanemi's exploration of the different ways of engaging with the traumatic past is brought to the fore through a dialogic relationship between the two novels. It is significant to note that Mosteghanemi situates not just the two protagonists, but also the two novels in dialogue with each other. While *Memory in the Flesh* deals with the theme of the violence of the War of Independence, and the

euphoria as well as trauma that were its inheritance, *Chaos of the Senses* is concerned with the social realities of present-day Algeria, encapsulated in the city of Constantine. From the outset, therefore, Mosteghanemi establishes the writing of the novel as a central theme, allowing her simultaneously to explore her characters' relationships to Algeria's troubled past, and then positing the novel itself as a key site for the reconstruction of collective memory. For example, Khaled is disappointed with the way in which contemporary Algerians appear to have forgotten the heroic struggles of the revolution,:

Between the first and last bullets, objectives changed. Aims changed and our country changed. That is why tomorrow will be a day of mourning for the loss of dues that have already been paid. There will be no military parade, no receptions, no official commemorations. People will just hurl accusations at each other while we go and visit the graves. (*MIF*, 16)

Khaled's relation with the present is steeped in a sense of nostalgia for the revolutionary past, whose sanctity must be maintained through a process of remembrance. Khaled views the consolidation of memory through the written word as a means by which the past can be immortalised: "I used to think... that a novel was the way *writers* lived a love story a second time. Their way of giving *immortality* to those whom they had loved" (8). Khaled's desire to cling to his memory of Algeria's heroic revolutionary past is made evident through his understanding of the purpose of writing a novel. He is fixated on the past and grieves for the lost ideals associated with the revolution.

Khaled cannot come to terms with Ahlam's conceptualisation of Algeria's future, describing her justification for writing about the past in incredulous terms:

I remember a conversation we had that day when I asked you specifically why you decided to write a novel. What you said amazed me. I could not figure out to what degree you were telling the truth and how much you were lying as you answered with a smile, ‘I had to put some order into my life and get rid of some old furniture. Our spirits also need refurbishing, just *like any house* we live in. I can’t keep my windows closed indefinitely. The only reason we *write novels* is to *kill off* heroes and do away with people whose existence has become a burden. Every time *we write* about them we purge them from our system and *breathe in fresh air.*’ (7, my emphasis)

The home refers to Algeria, the broken homeland that needs to be re-imagined in the post-national consciousness, liberated from the homogenous narratives surrounding the independence movement. For Ahlam, the national home must be renewed, its broken furniture replaced, and the remnants of its revolutionary struggle must be discarded if the homeland is to survive, grow and endure. While Ahlam wishes to remake the idea of the homeland through a demolition of the past, Khaled views this obliteration as an act of betrayal. Although both characters are dealing with collective trauma in a post-revolutionary context, they do so in very different ways. For Ahlam, the past needs to be obliterated, to be renewed and replaced, whereas Khaled wants to see it memorialised. Thus they present two antithetical views on the purpose of writing: remembrance versus remaking.

Mosteghanemi’s writing about trauma notably reflects two antithetical views on the purpose of writing, *remembrance versus remaking*, in a way that gets expressed through the metaphor of “home.” Ahlam/Hayat’s mobilisation of the metaphor of home is particularly salient. Through Ahlam, Mosteghanemi posits the process of writing as a cathartic activity, but one that also importantly has a constitutive role. The process of

writing for Ahlam is a vehicle through which a new conceptualisation of the homeland and the nation can be articulated, as well as her liberation from the psychological baggage of the revolution. For Khaled, however, the written word is an immortalisation of the national struggle, ensuring that it will endure and never be forgotten. At the same time, Khaled cannot participate in his country's grieving process as he feels that the memory of the martyrs has been corrupted, lost in a "collective decline" (*MIF*, 15). Therefore, for Khaled, writing offers a way to indulge in his own nostalgia concerning the revolution, and his isolation is as much self-constructed as it is imposed by his surroundings. He cannot bear to engage in collective mourning, as it forces him to confront the futility of the martyrs' sacrifice and his own failed aspirations for the nation. He resorts to writing as an evasion of this, preferring isolation: "I do not wish to share my grief with my country. I prefer the dignified silence of a piece of paper" (16).

In *Chaos of the Senses* Mosteghanemi deconstructs the national narrative through the female narrator Ahlam, and offers an alternative to the vision of the nation offered through Khaled's eyes in *Memory in the Flesh*. Mosteghanemi looks to replace the national narrative of struggle, sacrifice, valour and strength with a more pluralist ethics of love, patience, loyalty and forgiveness. These values shape Ahlam's worldview as she faces the troubles of the new Algeria—the struggles after independence and the civil war that are destroying Algerian society. Mosteghanemi hints at this shift in register towards the end of *Memory in the Flesh*, when she depicts Khaled as beginning to acknowledge the problematic dimensions of the idea of the nation. At the very end of the novel, there is a glimmer of realisation that Khaled's youthful analysis of his country's geography as a place of heroic struggle between colonial oppression and the freedom of independence may be yet another comforting illusion. The reality of modern Algeria points to a much more complex space: "Si Tahir

died at the hands of the French. Ziad at the hands of the Israelis. Here is Hassan who dies at the hands of the Algerians today. Are there degrees of martyrdom? What if the nation is both the killer and the martyr at the same time?" (*MIF*, 257). The question of national belonging and patriotism becomes complicated—while Si Tahir and Ziad were martyrs, Hassan was killed by the Islamists, a different adversary. As recent Algerian history has shown, as in other Arabic countries in their struggles for independence, the patriotic avenger and the martyr may belong to the same country. Amid this killing in the name of the nation, the real question that needs to be asked is whether the problem is not so much specific "enemies of the nation," but the sequestered idea of national belonging itself.

Theorists of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson have argued that the nation must be understood as a form of "imagined community," which, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (6-7). He argues that the nation is a specifically modern form of community, made possible by the forces of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. Against the utopian enthusiasm for nationalist thought demonstrated by the likes of Anderson, Mosteghanemi seems to argue that the historical experience of postcolonial nation-states has been narrowed down to an ethnicised, organic unity; that the idea of the national community seems to have lost its relevance as a modular form for creative political thought, one which can make space for a multiplicity of perspectives and articulations of experience. Rather than being a modern form of political community, the postcolonial nation-state has ceded ground to traditionalist elements in Algerian society. The secular, democratic ideals and institutions of the newly independent nation-state were first taken over by traditional

elites entrenched in government and bureaucracy, and eventually overwhelmed in the 1980s by the Islamist political movement.

In a world in which death itself becomes an everyday trauma, Mosteghanemi calls on the power of love and forgiveness as the basis of a new collectivity:

You can't truly love a person without being haunted by a profound feeling that death will surprise you and steal him from you. You will be able to forgive those people you see every day of many things if you remember that they are not going to be here one day to do those small things that bother and upset you now. You will enjoy them more if every time you see them you think that such a meeting might not be repeated, and that you are bidding them farewell with every meeting. If everybody thought this way, they would love each other better. (*COS*, 192-193)

It is only the feeling of love towards others that can help the individual transcend the limits set upon them by the social realities of violence and intolerance. Love, however, is as demanding as it is powerful: "love is like all the other great causes in life. You must believe in it deeply, in all faithfulness and with persistence. Only then the miracle can happen" (193).

Mosteghanemi's idea of love as a form of imagining the collective is also situated in a tension between the ideas of truth and love. Talking to her lover, Ahlam says, "I am here because, as a writer I need to look for the truth; as a woman, it is natural that I look for love. But with you I cannot make a distinction between the two anymore" (158). He replies, "I will show you the way to distinguish them without making a mistake. Truth always expresses itself grossly, and love always looks more beautiful than it is" (159). After a long conversation, Ahlam eventually says, "there is never one truth, it is not a fixed point. It changes within us and with us" (170).

It is this tension between truth and love that is explored in Ahlam's relationship with her brother Nasser. As they talk about the disappointed nation, she describes him, saying, "every day he lost more of his elegance, as if he had decided to stick against life because the country itself did not match the elegance of his dreams" (*COS* 127). Nasser, for his part, is resigned to a sense of cynicism, even as he has a clear understanding of the evolving situation. He tells Ahlam: "Of course, the moment of gentle frustration has ended. Now is the moment of prisons, sudden death, and prearranged assassinations" (127). Even as Ahlam is aware of all that is happening around her, she is nevertheless shocked by her brother's lack of hope:

I listened to him like someone who doesn't believe the strangeness of what he hears. It was like someone raising the lid of a garbage can right in front of you without even apologizing for the rotten stench of those dreams you had put in that safe place you called homeland. (128)

She shows herself to be more resilient, refusing to give way to despair:

I don't think anyone likes to hurt another, or kill for the pleasure of killing. But everyone has started to think that if he doesn't kill, he will be killed. It's a matter of trust. We have lost faith in each other. We are being swept toward evil, and we must get carried away into riding that senseless train. Life is beautiful, Nasser, believe me. If only we put some love into it. (122)

Through Ahlam, Mosteghanemi laments the loss of the sense of identity of the national collective that stands above individual private interests. For Ahlam, one of the abiding effects of Algeria's historical experience of trauma has been the collapse of a common moral framework that could cohere the national community—fellow Algerians have lost faith in one another. At the same time, Mosteghanemi also appears to call for a

concerted effort towards resisting a sense of despair and inevitability. The future of Algeria must be rebuilt the hard way—through a rebuilding of broken human relationships, overcoming animosities, and ultimately, feeling a sense of “love” towards one’s compatriots. These divergent views are a polyphonic and dialogic representation of the reactions to the collective trauma of Algeria’s past. In presenting these contrasting images—of Khaled, Ahlam and Nasser—Mosteghanemi reveals her own pluralist narrative purpose, and presents an alternative approach to dealing with the traumatic Algerian past of which she herself is a part. By orchestrating these two extreme reactions, she attempts to transcend the divided way in which Algerians react to the trauma of the colonial period and the War of Independence.

Healing and transcendence cannot be achieved either by obliterating or fetishising the past. Instead, these processes necessitate a pluralistic and inclusive approach that accommodates diverse collective memories. This work of remaking the nation must necessarily be a collective endeavour that can accommodate the pluralism even of conflicting worldviews, which constitutes the present political situation in the country. It cannot surrender to the powerlessness of Khaled’s remembrance, nor can it follow Ahlam as she sets about demolishing the past. The only alternative is a collective commitment to a national imaginary built upon ideas of plurality, democracy and equality. This process of remaking must ultimately be understood as a way of creatively coming to terms with the nation’s traumatic past, in order to escape the vicious cycle of latency and repetition that are symptomatic of a traumatic experience that is yet to be reconciled.

Representing the revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations of Algeria, Khaled and Ahlam represent an unbridgeable rift between the two generations as well as traditional gender roles. Despite the apparent chasm between the two characters, their

divergent perspectives work as a pluralistic narrative that acts out the process of deconstructing national narratives in order to spur collective healing in the aftermath of trauma. Mosteghanemi's deconstruction of national narratives uses the form of narrative itself to construct a critical part of the healing process for Algeria as it struggles to come to terms with its past trauma. Mosteghanemi writes: "Nevertheless, I would go, not realising that writing, as my refuge from real life, was drawing me in a roundabout way toward it, throwing me into a drama that would become, page after page, my own story" (*COS* 20). Both Khaled and Ahlam cannot relate to the world around them and struggle with their own identities, with art becoming the site where these contradictions play out in all their complexity. Art allows both Khaled and Ahlam to invest their pain into a material object, to embody their suffering (Scarry 281).

Thus Mosteghanemi's conceptualisation of the problems within Algerian society is gendered as a social construction in important ways. Khaled is presented as an archetypal Algerian man, rendered impotent by the trauma of his nationalist struggle, unable to transcend the past and forge a new beginning. Similarly, Ahlam/Hayat represents the potential of the Algerian woman, stifled by the transition from colonialism to independence, and yet posited as a potential solution to the social and psychological problems affecting Algerian society. All Algerians are presented as victims of their own national story, and therefore the solution for Algeria's future can only be forged through a collective expression of trauma and reconstitution of the past. It is through art, and specifically through writing, in Mosteghanemi's view, that this may be achieved. To do so, these two divergent voices must become reconciled in a new way. In Mosteghanemi's work, polyphony is offered as this new alternative, as a way of representing the pluralism of Algerian society, without masking its antagonisms under an idealised image of unity. While her work ultimately seeks an Algerian national unity,

it gains its final representation in her work through the metaphor of a bridge as a “third space,” a figuration for the act of bringing together the Algerian nation that I take up in the following Coda.

Coda

A Bridge to the Future: National Reconstruction

“I held up my tongue and gathered up the draft of this book that were scattered around the bag, fragments of a book, fragments of dreams.”
(Mosteghanemi, *MIF*, 262)

Memory in the Flesh and *Chaos of the Senses* emerge out of the urgent need of their present. Mosteghanemi’s work explores the possibilities of national reconstruction at a time when the nation is caught between two forces that are equally determined to assert their dominance over the social order: the entrenched bureaucratic-political elites, who have parasitically grown on the body of the Algerian nation-state, and the rising tide of populist Islamism that imagines a return to a pre-modern, utopian past. Mosteghanemi returns to the traumatic past of the Algerian War of Independence for the purpose of addressing the lingering anxieties of national belonging and memory in the independent Algerian nation-state that followed. *Memory in the Flesh* is a portrait of two sides of revolutionary zeal—its idealism and its blindness; *Chaos of the Senses* tries to make sense of the political, social, and cultural crises of the present, all of which can be traced back to the originary moment of the trauma of the war.

My study approaches Mosteghanemi’s novels through a theoretical framework that draws on trauma studies, and postcolonial and feminist theories. My application of a kaleidoscopic methodology draws on postcolonialism’s critique of the universalism of Western theory to argue instead for the specificity of the Algerian context. I incorporate postcolonial feminism’s critiques of traditional postcolonial theory’s implicitly male-centric biases, as well as the patriarchal anxieties that support the discourse of postcolonial nationalism. Finally, my methodology draws on insights from trauma studies to theorise Mosteghanemi’s desire to return to the scene of the war as a site of

original trauma, through her use of repetition, and the sense of the “belatedness” of the postcolonial subject—as one who plays out the effects of an obscure origin that guarantees their sense of subjecthood. My seemingly piecemeal use of trauma studies, feminist theory and postcolonial theory selectively accepts the localised value of various critical insights, but also looks to extend them to new historical and theoretical framings. I also attempt to confront burdens of residual Orientalist epistemologies and masculinist assumptions that these theories place on the non-Western theorising subject. These fragments of theoretical concerns come together in my kaleidoscopic methodology as detailed explorations of the individual and collective dimensions of trauma, gender, art and remembrance; the multivalence of national memory; and the politics of translation and publishing in the Anglophone literary world today.

Re-writing History

As part of the project of national reconstruction, Mosteghanemi’s novels explore the questions of collective memory and its narrativisation as national past. The real and allegorical worlds become difficult to tell apart: on one hand, her novels make constant reference to real places, people and events; on the other, these historical referents are brought together in an allegorical narrative of the crisis and rebirth of the Algerian nation-state. In this manner Mosteghanemi first takes up the question of collective national memory, by tracing a geographical imagination of the nation (embodied by cities like Constantine and buildings such as Al-Kudya prison). Secondly, her narrative turns the conventionalized national allegory into a figure which interrogates the past and points towards the future. The idea of the nation as collective, in Mosteghanemi’s novels, thus attains a polyphonic dimension—the space of the nation must affirm a pluralist perspective which accommodates the multiplicity of hitherto unvoiced

experiences and perspectives. Mosteghanemi does not attempt to resolve these multiple and discontinuous perspectives within a univocal meta-narrative; instead, she seeks to foreground through language itself the gap between these multiple perspectives.

When engaging with the questions of trauma, memory and gender in Mosteghanemi's work, postcolonial theory has provided many useful tools: Fanon's writing on the psychology of the oppressed in colonial Algeria and Said's challenge to the epistemological basis of Orientalist thought through contrapuntal reading. Each of these theories has provided important perspectives in developing my kaleidoscopic methodology.

Fanon's passionate and extended engagement with the liberation struggle in Algeria led him to reveal critical new insights into the psychological subjection and deformation of the culture of the colonised, as well as the wide-ranging social effects of the extended and systematic oppression of colonial regimes. However, I argue that his insights into the Algerian struggle for independence are framed in a symbolic economy that sees Algerian women as tokens of exchange between the colonising male and the colonised male. For Fanon, the colonised condition is unbearable in many ways, but for the purpose of my work because it is implicitly an emasculation of the virile native man. The horror of being colonised, for Fanon, is the powerlessness of being feminised.

My kaleidoscopic theory overlaps in some ways with Said's theory of contrapuntal reading. Even as I find some aspects of his theory to be critically significant in challenging the foundations of Orientalist knowledge, I nonetheless find his method of contrapuntal reading to be constricting in its static dualism. It can only place two contending, discontinuous narratives side by side to highlight the difference between them—it does not afford the space to attempt the reconfiguration and re-signification of fragments of traumatic memory into new narratives that open out to the

future rather than return to the past. As Young has persuasively argued, postcolonial theory's denunciation of the epistemic violence of colonialism notwithstanding, it is only able to reproduce rather than dismantle the essentialist binaries of coloniser and colonised. Sharing Young's discomfort with the validity of any overarching theoretical framework that may be deployable in all historical instances (164), my kaleidoscopic theory of reading attempts to address the historical specificity of the Algerian context.

My engagement with these critics has opened up the possibility of exploring gendered memory in a way that simultaneously critiques the male-centric bias and invisibility of gender in much postcolonial theorising, while at the same time extending their theories in new directions. Following the critical interventions of postcolonial feminists like Meyda Yegenoglu and Lila Abu-Lughod, my kaleidoscopic mode of reading looks to engage with the "double articulation" of Orientalist discourse, which frames the Orient as object of knowledge and object of desire (Yegenoglu 25). Confronting the dynamics of desire and power, I reveal Mosteghanemi's writing as a kaleidoscopic patterning of the imaginary and the historical, which enables a critical reconstruction of Algeria's national memory through the perspective of gender. In doing this, I follow Abu-Lughod and slant my theoretical framework to the specificities of women's experience in the Arab world, so as to raise broader questions about the construction of patriarchal power in Algerian society. The feminist critique of nationalism and postcolonial theory calls for a rethinking of the place and significance of the War of Independence in Algerian national memory. In Mosteghanemi's novels, the war is a definitive traumatic moment. For her, the war was more than a nation winning back its freedom. It was an event that left deep wounds in the psyche of those who lived through it. The shadow of the war extends into the present. And it makes

itself felt in the present as a multiplicity of narratives which intersect and overlap without resolving themselves into a grand narrative.

Through her kaleidoscopic narrative style, Mosteghanemi opens up new ways of representing this multiplicity, by bringing together fragments of memories and cultural symbolisms in a discontinuous narrative which explores questions of collective memory. In doing this, she attempts a palimpsestic overwriting of the past into new narratives which can help Algeria come to terms with its own traumatic past, while looking forward towards building a new future for the nation, representative of the collective imagination. No single narrative perspective is held for any length of time, so that the reader is constantly encouraged to shift their gaze, in kaleidoscopic fashion. Her focus on minute details creates a kaleidoscopic confusion and/or overlap at times, but through this approach it is possible to discern fascinating patterns and important interlocking themes, which coalesce to a new configuration of the Algerian nation. Mosteghanemi's exploration of gender succeeds not only in representing the different roles men and women played during the Algerian War of Independence, but also the ways in which their "recollection and transformation" and their "frame of interpretation and the acts of transfer" might also be gendered (Hirsch & Smith 22).

Drawing on a wealth of postmodern literary technique, such as layered narratives, metonymy and stream of consciousness, Mosteghanemi's narrative style makes possible a far more nuanced representation of some of the more consistent themes in her novels—the difficult questions of trauma, memory, gender, art and nation. Avoiding emphatic pronouncements on these issues, Mosteghanemi is able to take up the tensions which constitute each of these categories in a specifically Algerian context. At the same time, she shows the incompleteness of any analysis that focuses on any one aspect in isolation. Through every shift in perspective that makes up her fragmented

narrative, she is able to simultaneously take up each in their specificity, while emphasizing their multifarious relations with other themes. Breaking free of the fixed spatial and temporal categories of the national imaginary, Mosteghanemi introduces disjuncture in temporal sequence as well as the spatial limits of the notions of “homeland” and belonging.

Chapter Two of this study provided a historical background of modern Algeria to present a context against which Mosteghanemi’s novels may be productively read; I argue that even though Mosteghanemi, for the most part, follows a pro-resistance narrative of the Algerian war, she is careful to engage with it in a critical manner. Through a series of memories, flashbacks and juxtapositions, Mosteghanemi is able to force the fixed national narrative of the freedom struggle to interrogate itself.

Chapter Three presented an extended theoretical discussion which situates my own approach in relation to current critical conversations in postcolonial theory, feminism and trauma studies. I further substantiate this with a discussion of how Mosteghanemi takes up three literary metaphors that have a particular salience in the context of Algerian history and culture: the veil, the bridge and the mutilated body. In an effort to dispel the prejudice that has come to be attached to the Muslim veil in Western eyes, Mosteghanemi takes it up as a metaphor of Algerian women’s complex and nuanced negotiating of the embedded male-centric bias in Algerian society. The bridge constantly returns in her text as a way to explore questions of exile, memory and belonging. While the mutilated body is a stark reminder of the bodily and psychological aspects of national trauma.

In Chapter Four, I argued that Mosteghanemi rewrites the history of Algeria through gendered perspectives, as her novels’ characters attempt to retrieve a sense of Algerian identity as a new, collective national memory. Mosteghanemi’s kaleidoscopic

narrative style is intimately related to the central idea of trauma in her two novels. The continuities of space and time are consistently broken up to reveal patterns that echo Cathy Caruth's notion of latency with regard to traumatic memory (*Unclaimed Experience*, 4). The author deploys devices such as stream of consciousness and flashback in an attempt to capture the repetition of memory fragments and the disjointing of experience that have been described by trauma theorists as the quintessential effects of a traumatic event. The effects of trauma, however, are not simply psychological, as the characters' experiences seem to be almost inscribed on their bodies and ordinary everyday physical objects: for Khaled, his disability is as much an open wound that symbolises the deep-seated and virtually indelible effects of his experience. Such is the void left by the traumatic disruption of his life by the war that Khaled obsessively turns to his painting as a way to relive his past traumas. In contrast, Ahlam engages with her own experiences of loss and violence by turning to writing as a way to reconstruct the fragments of her past into a new configuration that can open up new possibilities of post-traumatic recovery. These difference in approaches are understood through what Visser calls the aporetic and therapeutic approaches to theorising trauma (274).

The latency and repetition of traumatic experience are reworked by Caruth and are particularly useful in understanding Mosteghanemi's character Khaled and his repetitive practice of painting the bridges of Constantine. However, I argue that Caruth's notion of latency (*Unclaimed Experience*, 92) must be extended beyond its application to "place" and time" alone. In the case of Khaled, his traumatic memories are triggered most importantly through his meeting with Ahlam for the first time in the art gallery—she sets off his nostalgic reminiscences and he must keep "returning" to her in order to relive his traumatic experience again and again. Thus, through Mosteghanemi,

we may add the idea of “person” to Caruth’s “place” and “time” as triggers of traumatic repetition. This extension of Caruth’s concept, however, raises other important questions. For instance, if a person who is indelibly linked to another’s traumatic repetition must always be implicitly inter-subjective, then is it possible to talk of a singular, undifferentiated notion of collective trauma? In this study, I have argued that it is not. I have extended Caruth’s ideas by producing a specifically gendered difference in the ways in which Khaled and Ahlam remember the traumas of their past.

As these concepts of trauma studies are applied to Mosteghanemi’s writing, we gain an implicit critique of the limitations of the aporetic and therapeutic approaches to understanding trauma. Mosteghanemi’s work takes up the question of trauma as the experience of a collective—the nation—rather than an individual. By situating her narrative in a non-European context, she challenges the conventionalised understanding of the notion of “collective trauma” in Western academia. It demands a reworking of the theoretical apparatus of trauma as well as a restating of the key propositions and problematic of study, much of which this study attempts to address.

The collective of nation is also taken up through the characters of Ahlam and Khaled, who are allegories for the different ways in which men and women in Algeria have experienced and looked upon their past. Attempting to break out of the constrictions of entrenched binaries of gender, Mosteghanemi rethinks the idea of gender as a fluid continuum of collective memories and fragmentary perspectives that are socially constructed. I argue that her work on gender is best approached through Butler’s, who understands gender as an effect of the “relative points of convergence” (*Gender Trouble*, 10) in culturally and historically specific sets of relations. Where Butler argues for the space between representation and materialisation as a constitutively unstable space that opens up possibilities of re-materialisation through

performative citation, Mosteghanemi inhabits that very space of instability to explore a more porous and dynamic range of gendered roles. Her extended engagement with the relationship between trauma, memory and art must be understood as an exploration of this gap between representation and materialisation for a gendered subject who is caught up in the dynamics of traumatic repetition. It is through their differences in social position, experience and modes of enunciation that subjects come to be gendered.

It is significant that both protagonists are deeply engaged in different artistic practices: Khaled is a painter, Ahlam is a writer. In Chapter Five, I explored the significance attached to artistic practice via Scarry's work on trauma, art and recovery. In her ground-breaking analysis of the effects of torture and prolonged violence, Scarry approaches the question of trauma and recovery as one of art. She focuses on the creative aspects of art, and its potential in re-integrating traumatised subjects into the symbolic order of language and inter-personal communication. In my analysis of Mosteghanemi's ideas on art, I have problematised Scarry's account by showing the process of recovery to be more complex, less optimistic and always haunted by the possibility of failure.

I demonstrated that the protagonists' respective choices of painting and writing may be understood as one of the ways in which gendered reactions to trauma play out. Through the poignant symbolisms of the mutilated arm and the disembodied hand, Mosteghanemi explores not only the possibility of overcoming traumatic experience through art, but also the ways in which this is framed through a gendered difference. Mosteghanemi's choice of art forms for her protagonists is a subtle but unmistakable attempt to displace traditional representations in the modern Arabic literary tradition of prose writing as a typically masculine art form.

In Chapter Six, I argued that Mosteghanemi's novels look to deconstruct national narratives with the aim of facilitating a process of collective healing. Through a subtle switching between the twin perspectives of Khaled and Ahlam, Mosteghanemi tries to place in conversation the opposing voices in contemporary Algeria—those who continue to believe in the promise of the revolution, and a new generation that has grown up seeing the ideals of the nation being shaken and corrupted time and again. Mosteghanemi's novels consist of an elaborate exploration of various aspects of Algerian national life—its shared cultural, ethical and political meanings—through an extension, as well as an implicit gendered critique of, the Bakhtinian theory of heteroglossia.

For Mosteghanemi, the prevailing tendency in Algerian literature to allegorise the nation in the figure of the woman appears in two pernicious forms—first, as a tendency to feminise the nation in an attempt to reinforce the masculine authority of authorial agency, and second, as the demand made of women to embody the purity of the nation. Mosteghanemi makes a far-reaching critique of the entrenched patriarchy of national discourse. Following Prasad's argument about the historical status of allegory in postcolonial literature (74), I argue that Mosteghanemi adheres neither to a nationalist allegory, nor a post-structuralist rejection, rather attempting a creative re-deployment of the allegorical mode.

Given Mosteghanemi's achievement as the first Algerian Arabic-language woman writer, and her immense popularity among readers and critics notwithstanding, the reception of her work in the Western academia has been largely unenthusiastic. The few critical engagements with her work, as I have demonstrated, have all been problematic in their own ways. Postmodernist readings of the character of Ahlam have tended to reduce her to a symptomatic representation of Khaled's patriarchal fantasy.

Such interpretations of Mosteghanemi's work, I argue, have not only limited its efficacy, but also demonstrate a residual Orientalism that implicitly disavows the agency of Third World women. As I sought to show in the case of McLarney's mistranslations, Western critics of Mosteghanemi have missed the subtleties of her nuanced account of the relations between Algerian men and women, preferring rather to read the figure of the woman as a blank surface that is inscribed with the fantasies of the Third World male.

Such critical "slips" are a reminder that the effects of colonialism remain real. Moreover, it is only one of the ways in which Arab women writers find themselves caught up in a hegemonic Eurocentric feminism that places the terms for their reception outside the region. Each engagement ultimately becomes one more instance to turn them into new representatives of the Orient. In substantive terms, it would appear that the critical reception of Mosteghanemi's novels has failed to go beyond patronising the Arab woman for "daring to put pen to paper" (Amireh, "Publishing in the West").

One of the major reasons for Western feminism's reluctance to engage with Mosteghanemi's work is her explicit refusal to endorse the postmodern idea of the death of the author. For Mosteghanemi, as for many other Arab women writers before her, the author has a social role, within which she must intervene as an active agent. What seems to have been missed by critics is that, for writers such as Mosteghanemi, the real struggle is to affirm the legitimacy and indispensability of the woman as writer, rather than to efface it under the sign of textual play. Mosteghanemi's choice to reconstruct the allegorical mode of representation, rather than discard it altogether, must be seen as part of the series of decisions that the Arab woman writer must make, in terms of themes, narrative form and authorial voice. Writers such as Mosteghanemi are engaged in a complex strategic engagement with the enunciatory position of the author and the range

of its social effects. Following Winifred Woodhull's suggestions for the revaluation of the literature of the Maghreb (xi-xii), Mosteghanemi's writing must be understood as entailing a performative dimension, with the text being the site where the social processes of subject formation may be staged as well as displaced.

While feminist writers such as Assia Djebar and Nawal al-Sadawi have articulated in their writing, in distinct ways, the complex lives of women in the Arab world, Mosteghanemi's relationship to feminism is ambiguous at best. Even as her novels explore at length the gendered dimensions of trauma, memory and art, she does not necessarily identify herself as a feminist. The critical difference in Mosteghanemi's engagement with patriarchy is that she engages with equal urgency in the work of resisting patriarchy and ending cultural and language-based imperialism. In her conscious decision to be an Algerian woman writing in Arabic, Mosteghanemi asserts simultaneously, on one hand, a defence of Algerian Arabophone literary culture as national culture, against French cultural imperialism as national culture; and on the other, a demand for Arabophone literature to acknowledge and reform its male-centrism. Thus, even as her work affirms the power of art in reconstructing national memory, she also calls for an equal awareness of the political-epistemological constraints within which such a statement is made. This awareness, in her case, is manifest in her more nuanced approach to the equally critical questions of cultural decolonisation and the dismantling of patriarchy.

As I argued in Chapter One, Mosteghanemi's engagement with feminism finds its significance within the broader field of what may be called Arab feminism. Mosteghanemi's work, I argue, represents a distinctive articulation of the historical concerns of Arab feminism. Resisting the temptation to romanticise the subjectivity of the pure subaltern, Mosteghanemi's feminist project does not claim to give a voice to

the authentic subaltern. She instead presents a description of a particularised positionality, namely of woman in postcolonial Algeria. In articulating this position, Mosteghanemi is well aware of postcolonial critique of Western feminism, as well as the patriarchal blind-spots of postcolonial theory.

Notwithstanding her evocative rendering of the traumas of the Algerian freedom struggle, Mosteghanemi's novels do not claim to "bear witness" to the traumas of Algerian national memory, or to demand the same of the reader from the position of abject victim. Rather, her work is acutely conscious of the residual Orientalism of such gestures. Spivak argues that the Orientalist gesture is characterized by the "slippage from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 285). Following Spivak, my kaleidoscopic method tries to bring to light, on one hand, the history of repression, and on the other, the ideological strategies through which such violence is placed "out of sight," to produce the authorised histories of the Algerian nation-state. Elements of this history often slip below the surface, out of recollection, and out of the archive. My gendered kaleidoscopic reading looks at a history of oppression that produces the silences of the present.

In doing this, I have tried to avoid the pitfalls of trying to speak as, or speak for, the "subaltern" Algerian woman, or write her "into history." To judge Mosteghanemi as writing "women's history" would thus be problematic in that this only reproduces the Orientalist gesture of turning the Algerian woman into an "object" of literary discourse. In her discussion of Foucault and Deleuze, Spivak's most scathing criticisms are directed at the "banality of their self-knowing," whereby in naively claiming to represent the subaltern, "the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent" (275). Against this studied complicity in "the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self's shadow" (280), she suggests that the intellectual must be aware of their own

positionality as they speak of, for, or about, the “subaltern”. As she shows in her discussion of the manifesto of the Subaltern Studies group of historiography, the epistemic violence of imperialism often forces such oppositional projects in formerly colonial countries to take the form of a discourse that articulates itself by instituting moments of difference and antagonistic opposition to established positions, even as it uses the same “old-fashioned” vocabulary to do the same (288-289). Mosteghanemi’s writing may be understood as a web of differences—between Khaled and Ahlam, between two generations of the Algerian nation, or even between herself as writer and her namesake in the novels, who is also a writer. Through such an articulation of differences and complicities, Mosteghanemi’s novels are able to produce a kaleidoscopic patterning of ideas that forces a disruption of prevalent representations of Algerian society.

Thus, Mosteghanemi’s novels represent a new direction in Arabic literature, by attempting the arduous task of thinking through literature the possibility of a new idea of the nation, constructed from a polyphony of narratives. Mosteghanemi’s version of the nation-as-woman allegory presents an assertive new image for women in Algeria today. Mosteghanemi’s Ahlam is a strong, level-headed woman who is acutely conscious of her oppression. Unlike Khaled, she is conscious of the entrenched forms of patriarchal oppression which characterise Algerian society, and is clear in her understanding that it is possible to overcome the collective trauma of the past only by accounting for the gendered violence that was an integral part of it. In this sense, Mosteghanemi’s work represents a radical overturning of the symbolic economy of Algerian Arabophone literature. For her, it is in the interest of her homeland that the Algerian people must replace the “broken furniture” that is the remnants of the revolutionary struggle. Where Khaled is caught up in the impossible task of reliving the

past, Ahlam's eyes are on remaking the future. It is only by acknowledging the polyphonic co-existence of these narratives of remembrance and remaking that Algerian society will be able to reconstitute itself on a new democratic, pluralist basis.

Any process of recovery and reconstruction must be inter-subjective in its dynamics and pluralist in its vision. The therapeutic process of forgetting can never be a solitary act—gendered subjects may adopt different strategies to “forget” their trauma, but neither is able to complete the process of recovery by themselves. Each subject, in their own way, is caught up in the limits of their individual perspective. But this is a necessary moment in the process of recovery itself—that the subject must come to confront the blind spots in their perspective. It is only when the men and women of today come together with this new realisation in mind that they will be able to come together on an equal footing to confront the problems they have inherited from their past. The most urgent task in this endeavour is to clear a space where such a conversation may become possible.

Mosteghanemi, as an Arabophone woman writer, poses new and difficult political, ethical and, most importantly, aesthetic questions that have remained invisible in Algerian literature and criticism. My kaleidoscopic method opens up a possibility of reading postcolonial literature without relying on the categories of authenticity and nativity. Each of these, as postcolonial criticism has made us well aware, are but empty nationalist reversals of binaries that are paradigmatic of Eurocentric thought.

A Bridge to the Future

At this juncture, it becomes possible to return to the bridges of Constantine one last time. Only this time it will not be through Khaled's impassioned visions, nor Ahlam's fear of heights, but rather through the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope which

enables a reordering of elements as well as a shifting of multiple perspectives, from the past towards the future. The metaphor of the bridge holds a unique significance in Mosteghanemi's symbolic economy. It is the most appropriate representation of the kaleidoscopic approach, as it layers multiple levels of discourse, bears multivalent memories, and finds a different place in the unique perspectives of various characters in its attempts to connect disjointed experiences and perspectives⁵. The bridges of Constantine, for Mosteghanemi, are situated between reality and imagination, national history and folk memory, exile and belonging, and gendered difference. The bridge occupies what Bhabha has called the nation's space of "liminality"—a space for the construction of culture as difference. Attempting to understand the question of culture from a postcolonial perspective—that is, after the ravages of the epistemic violence of colonialism—Bhabha develops the concept of the "liminal" to describe an interstitial space developing out of the "overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (*The Location of Culture*, 2). Cultural and political identities of nation, class, gender and community are formed in this liminal space, and this is the domain where the intersubjective and collective experiences of community constitute subjects. The liminal, according to Bhabha, is a creative space where strategies of representation come to be formulated (2) and where identities are transformed from static, pre-given categories into fluid entities that can only exist in collaborative, dialogical or even antagonistic relation to other identities.

Bhabha thus seems to be arguing for a kaleidoscopic patterning of identities and representations in ways that will situate individual subjects in the interstices of dense and complex networks of cultural meaning. The concept of liminality is also useful in understanding the creative practices of characters like Ahlam, who uses the

⁵ See Appendix, fig. 2.

representational possibilities of literature to articulate a perspective on Algeria's past and present, which can truly come to terms with the sense of "in-betweenness" that haunts Algerians of Mosteghanemi's generation—who find themselves, on the one hand, disillusioned by the optimism of the revolutionary generation, while on the other, equally desperate to exit the circle of ethnic violence in which they find themselves trapped in the present. Mosteghanemi's novels force the reader to creatively confront "the nation split within itself" (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 148). In a political and cultural context where the ideologies of nationalism as well as populist Islamism seem to call for decisive action—and look upon indecision as a sign of fatal weakness—Bhabha's efforts to explore the productive and creative dimensions of the undecidability of the liminal spaces of the nation is a particularly important intervention. And Mosteghanemi's refusal to take for granted the monological narrative of national history is a literary expression of what for Bhabha marks the postcolonial condition as such—namely, the very introduction of the ideas of European modernity in the colonized world in an inorganic manner, through a disruptive break of epistemic violence, which itself creates the historical conditions for colonial subjects to engage with ideas such as the nation in a non-essentializing manner. This possibility of adopting a synthetic rather than organic approach to the idea of nationhood, I argue, is kept open through the courageous efforts of writers such as Mosteghanemi, who refuse the temptation of projecting the unity of the present-day nation into the distant past, its continuity ensured through an unbroken ethnic lineage.

The metaphor of the bridge is inscribed differently in the minds of Khaled and Ahlam. For Khaled, it is simultaneously a reservoir of nostalgic memories about his childhood and a symptom of his experience of traumatic repetition. The bridge stands as a perspective from which one can critically engage with the simultaneous dichotomy

and continuity of past and present. Between Khaled's desire to find refuge from the present in the past, and Ahlam's desire to rebuild the present out of the fragments of the past, the bridge remains as a metaphor whose meaning cannot be filled out by either of these two versions. It exceeds any individual act of signification. In its excess, it marks the impossibility of any one imagination of the nation becoming the dominant one—the bridge affirms the inherent plurality of perspectives and the divergent trajectories of differentially situated subjects. It designates a position that cannot be fully occupied by the perspectives of either Khaled or Ahlam. Rather, the bridge—existing between its material existence and its spectral reality, between past and present—occupies a place that demands critical alternatives.

Mosteghanemi's novels must be understood as a play of articulation in the liminality of the nation-space. As I have demonstrated through my kaleidoscopic mode of analysis, the horizon of this liminal space is firmly situated within the dichotomies of gender that are embedded in contemporary Algerian society. It is for this reason that the questions of trauma, nation and history/memory all come to be articulated through a complex play of gender binaries that looks to render visible the limits of the nation-space as such. Thus, even as I take on board Bhabha's engagements with the creative possibilities in the nation-space, I argue that we must also be able to contend with the critical question of patriarchy that Bhabha is often oblivious to. In other words, the liminality of the nation-space must also be seen as disavowing gendered difference. This, I argue, has a double effect: on the one hand, it represses the formations of patriarchy that constitute the normative idea of the nation; while on the other, it fixes the idea of gender itself in ways that cannot engage with the specificities of Algerian society, with its history of colonial violence, and multi-layered legacy of Berber and Arab Islamic culture. Thus, to neglect how gender constitutes the liminal space of the

nation is to not only miss the patriarchy of Algerian society, but to reproduce in a displaced manner the Orientalist constructions of gender itself.

Finally, it is in the spirit of the bridge that I envisage my future research on Mosteghanemi's work. The theoretical framework developed in the course of contending with the difficult questions raised by Mosteghanemi's writing, I believe, will serve as a way to approach a more detailed study of Algerian women's writing. Specifically, I believe that my kaleidoscopic reading of Mosteghanemi's novels raises important new questions about trauma, gender, memory and nation, that demand a more nuanced translation of her use of language. It is perhaps through such an endeavour that a bridge may be built between the worlds of anglophone and Arabophone literature, one which is not supported by a foundation of Orientalist prejudice and imperialist ambition. As Bhabha might have argued, it is only through the opening up of liminal spaces like the bridge that the attempts of any political ideology to claim "transcendental or metaphysical authority for themselves" (*Location of Culture*, 148) may be effectively challenged. And it is only when this liminal space acknowledges its gendered construction that the national task of recovery and remaking may be undertaken on a collective and genuinely participatory basis. Through the bridging function of cultural production, it may be possible to bring opposing perspectives of the past together in new ways, to form a collective future.

The impulse towards integrating opposing perspectives into a new imagination of the nation-space will also serve as a methodological framework for my subsequent research into Mosteghanemi, as well as other Algerian women writers' work. And, in an effort towards constructing a bridge, my future research plan will engage seriously with the question of translation. While this study delineates the significance of

Mosteghanemi's work in the Arabic-language literary culture, I assert it is equally important to study further her reception in the English-speaking world.

Different translations of her novels have been published by the American University Cairo Press and Bloomsbury. Moreover, as I indicated briefly in my Introduction, the titles and book covers for the Bloomsbury translations attempt to construct a particular image of the "Arab Muslim woman" that ultimately lives up to the readers' expectations from a novel by the first Algerian woman writer in Arabic. In the process, Mosteghanemi's subtle and complex work must at the outset bear the burden of living up to an Orientalist representation of the Arab woman writer, who appears before the West as a voice on behalf of her silent fellow women who are still in the bondage of primitive Arab patriarchy. Subsequent research questions will draw out the implications of Mosteghanemi's translation into English, and whether her work is able to resist the ultimately homogenizing impulses of corporate publishing, as they categorize her work into the convenient, marketable category of "Arab woman writer." Moreover, is her work able to alter in some way the received notions in the West about Arab women's writing; and to what extent is this made possible, or obstructed, by her construction in the popular imagination?

Therefore, I plan to analyse these translations from a comparative literary and cultural studies perspective. Finally, I plan to situate the third novel in Mosteghanemi's trilogy within her broader intellectual-literary project. Translated into English under the title *The Dust of Promises*, this novel has been susceptible to a similar politics of naming, where such a title plays on a Western idea of the 'romance' of the Algerian desert. Not unlike the previous two novels, the title of the third novel in the trilogy was as much a compromise on complex questions about gender and the body like those I have treated in this study. What ought to have been translated from the Arabic as *The*

Bed-Hopper, was eventually given the far more “romantic” and sentimental title of *The Dust of Promises*.

Thus, in a self-reflexive gesture, in my subsequent research, I will move from merely representing in English what Mosteghanemi writes in Arabic, to the formations of the literary and cultural perspectives, which modulate how she comes to be represented in the English-speaking world. In this way, I hope to occupy a properly liminal space, between the two different and unequally related worlds of English and Arabic, where the creative work of imagining a new form of collective human existence may begin anew. Out of the re-negotiation of Algeria’s traumatic past will emerge not just a new national future, but also another future—albeit distant—that is beyond nations and borders and built on the idea of difference and multiplicity rather than a single destiny.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Bridge, Constantine (Algeria). Source: Wikimedia Commons / Library of Congress (LC-DIG-ppmsc-05573).



Figure 2: Bridge, Constantine (Algeria). Source: Wikimedia Commons / Yves Jalabert.



Figure 3: Suspension bridge, Constantine (Algeria). Source: Wikimedia Commons / Zizou Enzo.



Figure 4: Sidi Msid Bridge, Constantine (Algeria). The highest bridge in the city of suspension bridges. Source: Wikimedia Commons / Aziza Kharouâ.