War in Her Words:

Assia Djebar, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Hanan Al-Shaykh, and Ghada Al-Samman's Writing on Conflict and Feminism in the Arab World 1975-2000

Rahaf Alhamwi

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Literature

Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies (LiFTS)

University of Essex

Date of Submission for Examination: October 2024

Abstract

This thesis presents a new comparative analysis of selected writings related to the civil war in Algeria and Lebanon by the Arab Women Writers Assia Djebar, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Hanan Al-Shaykh, and Ghada Al-Samman during the timeframe 1975-2000. The literary texts that I analyse are *Algerian White* (1996) and *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* (1997) by Assia Djebar, *Memory in the Flesh* (1997) by Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Story of Zahra* (1980) by Hanan al-Shaykh, and *Beirut Nightmares* (1976) by Ghada Al-Samman. I focus on the narrative techniques that these writers use to establish their position within the domain of war literature and feminism. My study reveals how they experiment with different literary genres such as autobiography, short story, and novels to present a nuanced understanding of the demands of society, and to articulate women's experiences during conflicts, as well as to construct a collective memory of those events. It uses postcolonial, cultural, and narrative theories to examine the relationship between war narration and the writers' choices of literary genres and narrative strategies for exploring women's position in society. I argue that the choice of literary genres and narrative voice in each of the selected texts establishes consistent strategies to challenge patriarchal values. Their choices also demonstrate a politically resistant position for each writer. I also explain that this politically resistant position is shown through the strategic choice of language by Djebar and Mosteghanemi as a response to the linguistic policy imposed on Algeria before and after Independence and through the representation of a plurality of narrative perspectives by Al-Shaykh and Al-Samman in response to the sectarian division in Lebanon.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

This PhD thesis is the culmination of a journey that was filled with hard work and plenty of moments of excitement, happiness, fear, and anxiety. This journey was also filled with moments of doubts which were related to my health condition, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the conflict in my country Syria. However, I reached to the end of the road with the full support and unconditional love of my family and friends.

This work would not be in its actual form without the constant guidance and the unwavering support of my two supervisors Professor Shohini Chaudhuri and Professor Katharine M Cockin. Your wisdom, patience, and help have been invaluable, leading to numerous fruitful discussions, and recommendations that shaped this thesis. I am totally indebted to Professor Shohini Chaudhuri. Thank you for believing in me. I am grateful for your consistent and affectionate support which was integral to my academic life. Thank you for always reminding me that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Also, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Katharine M Cockin. Thank you for the passion and the encouragement that you showed me to complete this thesis. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to work with you both on this journey. I also would like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Joanna Rzepa whose enthusiasm and recommendations have influenced the direction of my PhD thesis. I would also like to thank Professor Susan Oliver for showing an interest in my project.

To my family, mother, father, my sister Rawan, and my two brothers Mohamed and Addul, I know that we have been separated by the war in Syria but your wise words and love encouraged me to do all this hard work. My daughters Laiane, Lara, and Loulia, who were my inspiration to take this journey, and because of you, this journey began. To my friend, companion, and hero, Adnan, whose humour, love, and confidence gave me the strength to continue this road. To you all, I dedicate this work.

I would also like to express my gratitude to everyone in the general office in the LiFTS Department at the University of Essex with a particular thanks to Deanna McCarthy who offered me constant help during the difficult times in this journey.

A Note on Translation and Transliteration

I have used published English translations for the majority of citations from my primary texts. However, I have occasionally used my own translation from Arabic where the differences from the published translation were relevant to my argument, as indicated in the footnotes.

For the transliteration of Arabic words, I have loosely followed the American Library Association-Library of Congress Romanization system. However, I have not changed names or bibliographical references.

Introduction

During the Arab Spring which swept the Arab World after the revolution in Tunisia in 2010, the Syrian revolution took another bloody and violent turn. Indeed, the Syrian uprising marked a profound date in the modern history of the Arab World because of the ugly atrocities and the brutal massacres which resulted in a huge number of deaths and forced disappearances.[1] Syrians have witnessed a horrific war and they all suffered as a consequence. I still remember my mother's words when she described the fighting in Syria during the years of war, and those words could not be more symbolic. She said: "Like all around me, I feel terrified as if they have let a giant Ghoul run after people and swallow them during dark nights with no one hearing the screams of people or their pain." This is how war was depicted in my mother's words, away from sophisticated phrases and literary symbolism.

Similarly, the women writers who are the subjects of this thesis describe war and share various visions when it comes to putting war in words."How like death is birth in these ancient cities,"[2] is Ahlam Mosteghanemi's description of war. She compares death to birth in her city Constantine in Algeria because people cannot tell the line that separates death and birth because of the war. Assia Djebar imagines "the blood of the tongue—their own blood—does not run dry."[3]Djebar sees that blood and words are endless productions of the war and Algerians' blood is not running dry. This is a symbol of the continuous cycle of blood and death. Hanan Al-Shaykh, furthermore, says that "The war had become a perpetual, secure stockade, whose walls were, so to speak, decorated with hearts, and arrows drawn in blood."[4] Al-Shaykh observes that Lebanon turned into a war zone where stockade becomes the main feature of Lebanese society and that the hearts and the blood of the Lebanese are the decorations of this stockade. In Ghada Al-Samman's portrayal of war, "I saw ears being severed and cut to pieces in every darkened corner of the city. I saw fire and knives

[1] That does not mean that other countries in the Arab World have not suffered.
[2] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, trans. Baria Ahmar Sreih and Peter Clark (London: Arabia Books, 2008), 224.
[3] Assia Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood Does not Run Dry: Algerian Stories*, trans. Tegan Raleigh (London, Seven Stories Press, 2010), 212.
[4] Hanan Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra*, trans. Peter Ford (London: Quartet Book Limited, 1986), 137.

inscribing figures on people's bodies […] I saw served legs running away without their bodies […] I saw heads whose features had been erased […] I saw them emerging from the ovens of torture and fire."[5]Al-Samman's narration about the horror of the war takes the reader to another level. She says that parts of human bodies are being served instead of food in Beirut, heads have been decapitated and the war machine is turning people into numbers. Al-Samman's description of the violence of the war is shocking and one could imagine that this is only an exaggeration from a writer's imagination. The current events in the Arab World show even worse pictures than those portrayals. When someone from my generation who once lived the hope of a future in the region before the Arab Spring, reads those texts, they don't have to imagine how horrific and real those sentences are because we see war as a daily routine and its events occupy a huge space in our lives.

To listen to stories written by women is to listen to their suffering, agonies, fears, and dreams, and, more importantly, to listen to their resistant voices in their texts. These voices define their own rules to shape reality from their perspective. As Pam Morris explains,

> Women's stories help us live and dream as women […] Finding their own emotions, circumstances, frustrations and desired, named and shaped into literary form gave (and continues to give) many women, some for the first time, a sense that their own existence was meaningful. Writing by women can tell the story of the aspects of women's lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned, mystified and even idealized in the majority of traditional texts.[6]

This thesis, therefore, focuses on war and feminism in the work of four Arab Women writers in the Arab World.[7] It aims to present an analysis of specific literary works inspired by the civil war in Lebanon as a representative of the East of the Arab world (*Al-mashriqe Al-arabii*) with the Lebanese Civil War, and Algeria as a representative of the West of the Arab world (*Al-maghrib Al-arabii*) with the Algerian Civil War. These literary writings are by the women writers Assia Djebar (1936-2015), Ahlam Mosteghanemi (b.1953), Hanan al-Shaykh (b.1945),

[5] Ghada Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* trans. Nancy. N Roberts (London: Quartet Books, 1997), 63-4.
[6] Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 60.
[7] Women writers might be a problematic term; however, in this thesis, women writers or female authors will have the exact meaning considering the cultural and historical background of those writers. I would also like to note that during my research I have come across the term "women writers" very often and scholars and critics like Miriam Cooke, Evelyne Accad, Hanadi Al-Samman, Anastasia Valassopoulos, Joseph T.Zeidan, and many others have used this term to refer to female authors in the Arab World.

and Ghada Al-Samman (b.1942). The literary texts that I analyse in this thesis are *Algerian White* (1996) and *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* (1997) by Assia Djebar, *Memory in the Flesh* (1997) by Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Story of Zahra* (1980) by Hanan al-Shaykh, and *Beirut Nightmares* (1976) by Ghada Al-Samman. [8]

I have chosen these texts because they produce a space to study the writers' choices of narrative voices in different literary genres such as short story, autobiography, and novel. I argue that the choices of narrative voices within the frame of those literary genres illuminate the political position of these writers in their writings as responses to war particularly their stance against division as well as women's voices marginalization in society. Their choices also articulate the experiences of women in wartime. The original contribution of this thesis lies in its comparison between the writers' choices of narrative techniques and literary genres that aim to portray collective suffering and create a collective memory of these conflicts. Highlighting the multi-layered historical, socio-political and religious contexts of the two civil wars in Algeria and Lebanon adds to the literary works' various dimensions and enables my comparison to challenge dominant narratives of these wars.

As I will argue, in their literary choices, these writers defy the division that caused the civil war in Algeria and Lebanon and that resulted from these two wars. The common factor that any civil war depends on is division. This division, as I will show in my account of the historical context of the two wars, emphasized the linguistic conflict which is related to the history of colonialism in Algeria, and in the case of Lebanon, it has enforced a sectarian identity rather than Lebanese Arab identity. My study compares Djebar's and Mosteghanemi's adoption of language as a tool to defy the division in the Algerian Civil War. In my analysis of Al-Shaykh's and Al-Samman's works, I show how they create collective perspectives on the Lebanese Civil War to challenge the sectarian division in Lebanon. The writers in this thesis show different literary responses to the war in their literary texts using their voices as resistant voices and as expressions of a political position. Thus, this thesis will

[8] These texts were originally written in Arabic and in the case of Djebar in French. I read those texts in their original language and in the English translation:; however, my study refers mainly to the English translation in its citations.

present a new comparative study of these writers' literary voices and literary choices in the selected texts.

One aim of this thesis is to analyse the authors' understanding of feminism, locating their works within the context of Arabic feminist writings. Their narrative techniques in various literary genres such as autobiography, short story and novel, and the comparative study between the choices of the writers are considered as a political statement and a response not only to the war but to the marginalization of women's voices in society. In particular, this thesis also offers a new approach to understanding the marginalization and stereotyping of women writers in the Arab World through the lens of translation. It highlights the role of the translator as a collaborator with patriarchy in the Arab World contributing to the silencing of women writers and women in general to achieve a similar domination. This thesis, therefore, not only questions the marginalization of women during war-time. It also challenges the stereotypical representations of women not only in the Arab World but also in the Western World. Another important aim of this thesis is to show that women's voices could be studied and heard loudly by focusing on defeated masculinity in times of war, adding to the scholarship of gender studies within the field of war literature in the Arab World.

This thesis makes an original contribution to the existing critical literature on the selected works and authors by reclaiming these works for the map of Arabic war literature. Therefore, one of its important aims is to offer a new way to comprehend war literature in the Arab World as playing a key role in bringing attention to the several cultural, political and social dilemmas created by the war. This thesis also highlights the purpose of war literature in preserving collective suffering at a time when the agonies of people are being silenced and almost erased by war leaders and politicians.

The body of writings about literature and war in the Arab World has been considerable and scholars have contextualized the Lebanese and the Algerian Civil Wars in various approaches. In her book *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (1990), Evelyne Accad has focused on the connection between sexuality and war writings in texts written by Lebanese women and men writers. Her approach depends on clarifying the differences in writing strategies between women and men writers when analysing sexuality

in the context of the Lebanese Civil War.[9] Miriam Cooke in *Women and the War Story* (1997) studies the war genre by concentrating on contemporary Arabic literature in general.[10] Anastassia Valassopoulos in *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (2007) offers a vast coverage of women writers from different Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, and Palestine to explore issues of post-colonial, cultural theories and conflict in novels only.[11] Lindsey Moore in *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2008), treated the writings of Algerian women writers in the context of representing their resistant voices in contrast to their invisibility during the Algerian Civil War in literature and films.[12] In *War's other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (1988), Cooke observes that:

> Nevertheless, even when women did write, their writings were often suppressed not so much by censorship but by neglect and the trivialization of their content. In few places has this censorship of women's voices been more effective than the Arab World. Novels, short stories as well as poetry written by women, were relegated to the margin, excluded because of their irrelevance to mainstream concerns.[13]

Therefore, the knowledge this thesis adds to the writings about the two civil wars is by studying the voices of those writers in comparison, in different literary genres that stand as a political position for the writers. Each chapter in this thesis opens the door to various aspects of criticism which create a study that concentrates on the writers' choices of voices as a political position. The writings of those writers offer multiple and varied perspectives on war and its effect on the cultural, political, and social dimensions of their countries. My selection of these writers depends on the thematic, narrative techniques, and various political issues that open the texts in this thesis to new ways of reading them concerning war and women's voices.

---

[9] Evelyen Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York University Press, 1990).
[10] Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (University of California Press, 1997).
[11] Anastasia Valassopoulos, *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (London, New York: Routledge Taylor&Francis Group, 2007).
[12] Lindsey Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (London: Routledge, 2008).
[13] Miriam Cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 53.

This thesis interprets the selected texts as a part of war literature by the women writers in the historical period between 1975 and 2000. The Algerian Civil War and the Lebanese Civil War are considered profound complex political and social environments that gave writers the chance to theorize the war and to find a space to criticize patriarchy and other forms of oppression represented by colonialism within the context of war. Anicee al-Amine Merhi explains about the damage that civil wars leave as:

> In traditional war between two countries hatred and spite are gathered together and thrown at the enemy, while love flourishes within society […] In Civil war, the reverse happens. Hatred turned towards the inside, and does its damage within the country's social network. Every citizen became a potential enemy to the other; this creates a gap in society and fosters suspicion, caution, fear, and introversion.[14]

Therefore, this period of history was very complicated because Algeria and Lebanon witnessed those two horrific civil wars at a time when most of the Arab countries gained their independence with all the ambitions these political victories brought. This period brings to the history of the Arab World challenging critical debates about patriarchy political conflicts, nationalism, gender, and the historical continuity that shapes our contemporary times. However, these two civil wars also brought political and social challenges and obstacles for people in the two countries and the division that caused and resulted from these two wars offered the women writers in this thesis various complicated political and social issues to write about. Cooke observes that in Lebanon, "the civil war (1975-82) opened opportunities for women to express themselves and to publish in a situation where norms had given way."[15] The Lebanese civil war offered writers generally and women, in particular, a fertile space to present distinct content in style and form and Al-Samman's and Al-Shaykh's texts in this thesis will demonstrate how the Lebanese Civil war offered them a space to criticize all forms of oppressions using different voices and literary genres and styles that have not yet been critically explored as I will explain later. On the other hand, in their writings on the Algerian Civil War with its heritage of colonialism, both reflected in the writings of Djebar and Mosteghanemi challenge the wave of oppression and interpret it through language and the narrative voices within their choices of literary genres.

---

[14] Anicee al-Amine Merhi, "Conflicts and Wars: Women's Silent Discourse," in *Arab Feminisms: Gender and Equality in the Middle* East, ed. Jean Said Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi, and Rafif Rida Sidawi (London:I.B.Tauris,2014):244.

[15] Cooke and Badran, xxxiv.,

War Literature by Women Writers in the Arab World

War is not only about battlefields or armies. War is a huge stage of different narratives that contribute to the lives of nations. Studying war literature expands to studying the representations of other voices that articulate war in their texts with all the socio-political backgrounds that those texts provide. War literature is not about what politicians and war leaders tell their audience. War literature contributes highly to constructing the awareness and the history that any society develops. The modern history of the Arab world from the turn of the twentieth century until now has witnessed different wars and almost every citizen in the Arab world has experienced the atrocities and the tragedies of these wars or has inherited a miserable legacy from one of these wars in the form of collective trauma and the agonizing economic situation. As Hanadi al-Samman states, the Arab World has been the site of various wars because of "the Western colonial projects in the region that were unwelcome outcomes of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire".[16]These include colonial conquests by English, French and Italian troops between 1918 and 1945. Additionally, the annexation of Palestine and the war of *Al Nakba* in 1948 followed by the war of 1967 and 1973 were important political marks in the history of the Arab World.

There are many other wars that Hanadi Al-Samman does not mention, such as the War of Independence in Algeria in 1962, the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990, the Algerian Civil War of 1990-2000, the Gulf War of 1990, the invasion and occupation of Lebanon by Israel in 1982, the Israeli shelling of Beirut in 2006, and the American and British-led invasion of Iraq in 1990-2011. The Arab Spring brought new versions of conflicts that destroyed Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Syria. Along with the Arab-Israeli conflict that has destabilized the region, individuals' lives have been almost shaped by experiencing or seeing wars.

This reality appears in the writings of Arab intellectuals. The atrocities of these wars have been documented and archived in political genres in the Arabic literary canon. For

[16] Hanadi Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings* (Syracuse University Press,2015)*,* 66.

example, the body of literature depicting the war of 1948 is known as *adab al-nakbah* (literature of catastrophe) and the body of literature that described the war of 1967 is known as *adab al-naksah* (literature of defeat). Therefore, the political genre or war literature has a strong presence within Arabic Literature, and it helps to reflect a deeper look at the status quo of societies. It also can provide examples of how women engaged more with political life and represented this life in literary works.

Arab women writers who decide to write about the war often find themselves torn between writing about the nation and its independence and writing about women and their position in society. Therefore, the genre of political literature helps women authors achieve a distinctive integration between identity, nationality, and resistance. Joseph T. Zeidan explains that "recent political events in the Arab world, from the loss of Palestine in 1948 to the Lebanese Civil War, have left their mark on the minds of Arab writers, including women writers. When national identity itself was in danger, personal concerns seemed either to diminish or to find expression in the collective struggle of existence."[17] The commitment towards one's nation and its freedom seems to erase other issues in writings, according to Zeidan's approach.

By contrast, Al-Samman believes that female authors are challenged to produce a unique perspective about war because this narrative "imposes more thematic and textual challenges to the female author."[18] How can a female author narrate the destruction that an invader causes to her land, while at the same time, she cannot narrate freely about those who try to abuse and diminish her voice? Hanadi Al-Samman even says: "Although writers of this contemporary political genre in the Arabic literary canon have been members of both genders, a study of the literary production of Arab women writers in this field yields more than a political commentary of a standard war narrative."[19] Al-Samman defends her argument by testing the ability of the female author to create a voice that demands the freedom of the nation from the external colonizer. Thus, the female author is required to articulate a strong voice to seek independence from the internal colonizer represented by patriarchy and the external colonizers. Arab women writers who choose to narrate about

[17] Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women's Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 226-27.
[18] Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure*, 144.
[19] Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure*, 144.

the war show multiple layers of criticism and analysis of gender relations, economic, and social realities while engaging with war narrative.

Al-Samman does not assume a male writer is superior in his place and more capable of producing reflective war literature. In contrast, her questions of national identity and the difficulty that the national discourse imposes on Arabic war literature suggest more difficult answers. An Arab male writer does not have inner restrictions that stop him from speaking loudly to defend his nation's independence or freedom. He owns the language and the authority of his texts. Therefore, this is one reason why it is easier for a male writer to write about the war. It is not a matter of questioning the ability of the Arab female writers but highlighting the effort they exert when they depict war, including all its themes, in their literature. Female Arab writers who effectively portray war are not regular storytellers. Their literature is a witness of a historical juncture in the life of the Arab nation. In this regard Anastasia Valassopoulos says: "I also ask whether it is possible to determine the extent to which writers participate in the construction of a new history and how they articulate ambivalence towards their role in it."[20] Indeed, texts that portray war and are written by female authors reveal the depth of their commitment to fighting not only oppression generated by the war-machine but also the oppression that is generated by patriarchy. Cooke explains:

> These stories offer some understanding and an alternative. They describe an experience of war that all can understand because it does not take place in a special privileged elsewhere but is rather the heightened awareness and management of lethal conflict that is different from ordinary life only in terms of its intensity. What women experience in war repeats in stereo the daily experience of violence that has become ordinary…in these stories women assign their own meanings to what they have felt and done.[21]

In her examination, Cooke argues that when women write they give the inner perspective of how women writers deal with a traumatic and a violent experience. They write from within that experience to resist and to show the depth of their commitment to their countries' aspirations, showing also a great deal of writing their ambitions. Therefore, interpreting war literature by women writers gives a meaningful sense of a living trauma and a representation of societal transformation.

---

[20] Valassopoulos, 55.
[21] Cooke, 41.

As I mentioned earlier, there have been considerable writings about literature and the Algerian and the Lebanese Civil Wars. My thesis presents a new study that combines the writers' responses to the war in their literary works and their choices of narrative voices and literary genres that unfold different literary techniques to inscribe their political positions. Assia Djebar's commitment to resistance is shown through her choice of autobiography and the short story, and strategically choosing to write in the French language in her two texts. Together these work as a political method to defy French colonialism and the official government powers in Algeria. Ahlam Mosteghanemi's ironic deployment of the male narrative voice in *Memory in the Flesh* highlights the fractured masculinity in Algeria and leads readers to unfold the voice of her woman character. Moreover, the Arabic language in Mosteghanemi's novel plays the role of preserver of Algerian Identity, comparable to Djebar's use of the French language. Hanan Al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* is presented through multiple first-person narrators to present multiple perspectives on the war to create a novel that could talk to all Lebanese. However, the translated text concentrates only on producing the image of Zahra, 'the main female character', by adopting an "ideologically motivated translation"[22] that enforces stereotypical images of women in the Arab World. Ghada Al-Samman, on the other hand, takes readers into the world of fantasy and absurdism to challenge the reality of the war in a novel that is told through her unnamed female narrator and other stories within the main story of the novel to present multiple perspectives on the Lebanese Civil War. These themes transform into strategies of resistance that inscribe those women's writings on the map of Arab Writers. These writers have presented their approach to war through different narrative voices, literary genres, and literary styles to achieve almost one aim which is defying oppression and division.

Feminism in the Arab World: A Short Historical Review

Pam Morris's definition of feminism suits my approach when she says that

> Feminism is a political perception based on two fundamental premises: (1) that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that the inequality

[22]Chantal Wright, *Literary Translation* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016),29

> between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences.[23]

Moreover, as Cooke indicates, "feminism is much more than an ideology [...] It is an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society.[…] Feminism involves political and intellectual awareness of gender discrimination, a rejection of behaviours furthering such discrimination."[24] In this thesis, therefore, feminism will be considered as a political and social movement that attempts to achieve equal positions for women in society and reach for freedom and justice for all individuals. It will be treated as a movement that defies any social or political domination that oppresses, marginalizes, and even eradicates female or women's voices in the Arab world whether in the fictional or non-fictional world.

In the above quotation, Morris depends on Simone de Beauvoir's ground breaking ideas about feminism in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir explains that the inequality between the two sexes has a long history and that inequality was supported by men of philosophy, religion and politics to produce a power structure in society that is only ruled and governed by males. Beauvoir says:

> The triumph of patriarchy was neither an accident nor the result of a violent revolution. From the origins of humanity, their biological privilege enabled men to affirm themselves alone as sovereign subjects; they never abdicated this privilege; they alienated part of their existence in Nature and in Woman; but they won it back afterwards; condemned to play the role of the other, woman was thus condemned to possess no more than precarious power: slave or idol, it was never she who chose her lot.[25]

These ideas explain Beauvoir's approach regarding the domination of men and patriarchy in society producing by that a margin where women were left and confined. Beauvoir observes that "woman is trying to escape from it [prison]," and that she tries to "emerge into the light of transcendence. And the male attitude here creates a new conflict […] He is pleased to remain the sovereign subject, the absolute superior, the essential being; he

---

[23] Morris*, Literature and Feminism,* 1.
[24] Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), ix, x.
[25] Simone de Beauvoir,*The Second Sex,* trans, Constance Borde and Sheils Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage, 2011),88.

refuses to consider his companion concretely as an equal."[26] This philosophy led the second wave of feminism in Europe to flourish, and demands for equality between the two sexes to have a bigger audience. This domination, as explained in Beauvoir's book, drove Helene Cixous, herself an Algerian-French theorist, in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' to consider that "Men have committed the greatest crime against women.[…] we [women] are the repressed of culture."[27] In Cixous's perspective, writing for women equals liberation from the "phallocentric system"[28] that silenced women. She says: "Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies." Cixous considers that when women write about women, it brings back the originality of writing about women's experiences and reclaims their position within male controlled narratives and also in society. She explains the reason as follows: " When I speak of male writing. I maintain, unequivocally, that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; […] writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy: that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated,"[29] Cixous even sees in writing the possible place of change.[30] She also observes that: "It is by writing from and toward women [that…] Women should break out the snare of silence. They should not be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem."[31] According to Cixous, the first step toward liberation of women is for women to write their experiences and to have their own frame of writings that are not under the rule of patriarchy.

I chose these theoretical frames about feminism because it will help my research to illuminate the relationship between critical reading of literature written by women in the Arab world about different wars and feminist movements in the region. It will also have a certain connection to the particularities of feminism and its perception in the Arab World. Additionally, it will provide a background for understanding this term and how it affected women's writings in general and during conflict in particular.

---

[26] Beauvoir, 770.
[27] Helene Cixous " The Laugh of the Medusa," in *Feminism Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* ,ed. Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndi, (Rutgers University Press,2009) ,418.
[28] Cixous,422.
[29] Cixous, 418-9.
[30] Cixous,419.
[31] Cixous,420.

The emergence of the term "feminism" in the Arab World has a long complicated social and political history and it will be a challenging task to summarise this history in few pages. Thus, I will choose the most related historical junctures and events with their prevailing political and social atmosphere in the Arab world and their relation to this term to understand feminism within its Arabic cultural context as it pertains to my thesis. Qasim Amine explains that "It is impossible to understand women's present status without an adequate knowledge of their position in history [...] we need to be familiar with our starting point, which will then enable us to predict the direction of change that will be facing us."[32] Therefore, it is important to understand women's writings in their historical timeline formation within the Arab World. Judith Butler explains this point by considering feminism as a project framed by historical and political circumstances. It is impossible to look at feminism as a fully constituted project without taking into account the actual changing social and political environment that surrounds it. Butler advocates the possibilities of mobilizing the project of feminism throughout history and relating this project according to historical junctures. Therefore, comprehending the historical and political conditions that created this project will emancipate it and open it to different unanticipated political meanings. It will also release it from any restrictions that bind this project either to the present or to the past. The reception of feminism in the Arab World, though, was extremely controversial. It was and still is affected mainly by the political plight that accompanied and still accompanies the history of the Arab World. During the period spanned by my selected texts, feminism was restricted to the women's movement and women's voices in society. On the other hand, with the development of the conflicts in the Arab World, feminism should care particularly about the suffering of all individuals in society.

According to Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, the term feminism first appeared in Arabic in a collection of articles in 1909 by Malak Hifni Nasif entitled *Bahithat al-Badiya* which means 'Seekers in the Desert'.[33] The term appeared as *Nisāiyāt* which promotes improving women's life and more representation in the political and social aspects of life. However, this term creates an ambiguity because, in the Arabic language, it can mean

[32] Qasim Amine, *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 119.
[33] Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, ed. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writings* (London: Virago Press, 1990), xvii.

femininity and feminism at the same time.[34] However, that ambiguity existed even before female writers began to produce literary works that promoted women's empowerment in society in the Arab World around the end of the nineteenth century. They managed to discuss different issues in society despite their lack of education, the tough economic and social environment then, and lack of public appearance due to socially restricted rules which imposed segregation between men and women, together with the lack of representation in political life. Cooke mentions the names of several female writers who engaged in producing literary works that encouraged women's involvement in life, such as the Lebanese women Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914), Labiba Hashem (1880-1974), and May Ziyada (1886-1941) and in Egypt Aisha Taimuriyya (1840-1902). Cooke stresses that those names should be "considered the pioneers of Arab women's literary history."[35] These women wrote fiction, as well as politics, and other topics to promote an awareness of women's position in the Arab world. By the early twentieth century, these writers and others were not yet categorized as feminists. Yet it could be seen that they had used their voices to question their presumed roles in their society. Their voices became the spark for raising awareness of women's position in the Arab World.

Before the fall of the Ottoman Empire and around the turn of the twentieth century, an intense debate about human rights and the project of Arab nationalism was led by significant Arab scholars such as Abd al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi.[36] Roots of national consciousness started to appear in the Arab world as a reaction to long years of colonization. This consciousness developed even further within the next period of colonization, the British and French mandate. In this atmosphere of political conflict which was exemplified in asking for independence from the Ottoman Empire and regaining a distinctive Arab nationalism for Arab subjects in the Ottoman Empire, women found a path for their voices as well. They demanded that their voices needed to be heard through their narratives on different aspects of life and that their voices could not be marginalized anymore. The highly intense debate about nationalism and liberation for all individuals of society in the Arab world emerged as a result of identity awareness. Indeed, nationalism

[34] It is important to mention that currently this confusion is resolved because this term is translated to *Naswai* or *Nassawiyat* and specifically means feminism.
[35] Cooke*, Women claim Islam*, 2.
[36] Abd al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi was a Syrian author and intellectual who promoted Arabic nationalism against the Ottoman Empire.

and feminism since they share the same objectives, which are freedom and equality, developed in the Arab world together. Nawar al-Hassan Golley says: "In the Arab world Feminist consciousness has developed hand in hand with national consciousness since the early nineteenth century."[37] Therefore, there is no doubt that these two concepts are in principle aiming for the same conclusion, which is independence. There is also no doubt that they seek liberation from different colonizers.

The publication of 'Seekers in the Desert', as mentioned earlier, and other significant moments in the history of Arab women, such as the publication of *Tahrir al-mar'a* in English as *The Liberation of Woman* (1899) by Qassim Amine, [38] indicated the start of feminism in the Arab world. However, this start lacked any coherent body of concepts or ideology. Indeed, Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke explain that "Much of Arab Women's feminist expression has eluded people because of its invisibility."[39] One of the reasons for this invisibility is sex segregation that was practised at that time. This segregation left the voices of women confined to the world of women only. Therefore, feminism was not clear in structure and was not easy to interpret into actions. Furthermore, the audience in the Arab region did not have a vivid understanding of it. As a result, female authors could only embody ideas that brought attention to their voices to demand more visible freedom for women at that time.

The historical context of that period resulted in a different approach to feminism. Scholars such as Qassim Amine and other Arab male scholars, who spent time in Western countries at the turn of the twentieth century, brought to their countries a version of feminism that in its ideas was influenced somehow by the West. Badran and Cooke use two terms "feminism of women" and the term "feminism of men" to describe this complex situation.[40] These two terms do not indicate the existence of two different bodies of thought. Rather Badran and Cooke meant that the term of feminism of men was initiated because of the direct contact with Europe, whereas the feminism of women was generated from women's observation of their own life and testing their position in their society. As a

---

[37] Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 16.
[38] Qassim Amine, an Arab-Kurd was a prominent scholar at the turn of the twentieth century. He defended women's rights in education in Egypt.
[39] Badran and Cooke, *Opening the Gate*, xviii.
[40] Badran and Cooke, xix.

result, the audience in the Arab world encountered two interpretations of the term feminism. One is largely presented through the thinkers and reformers who believed in Western values then, and one is largely manifested through the voice of female authors in their literary output in the Arab world.

With this inherited background, feminism was often translated into a rejection on the part of people in the Arab World. Mainly, this rejection was attributed to the reason that feminism is alien to the Arab culture, as Badran and Cooke explain: "Some Arabs have attacked feminism as being: western—the cultural arm of imperialism or neo-imperialism out to destabilise local society and to destroy Indigenous cultural identity; anti-Islamic-undermining the religious foundations of the family and society, and elitist, and therefore irrelevant to the majority."[41] As a consequence, conservative Arab politicians and Arab traditionalists have declared that there is nothing called Arab feminism and it is only the product of Western imperialism, neglecting this structure that appears in women's writings. They mainly believed that "feminism is a product of decadent Western capitalism […] It is the ideology that [….] alienates women from their culture, religion, and family responsibilities,"[42] as Kumari Jayawardena argues.

After 1920 and specifically after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab World entered another period of colonization represented by the French Mandate and the British Mandate. In those times, Arab countries were not only affected by the heritage of colonialism economically and politically but culturally as well. The colonial project of westernizing the East and modernizing it was received at once by rejection by many, because of the unique Arab identity that it was believed the Arab world could not negotiate on. Others welcomed this project, presenting their acceptance by supporting new approaches such as globalization and modernization. The project of modernizing the Arab World overlapped with the feminist project and therefore those two projects received the same reaction from the audience there.

Lila Abu-Lughod clarifies the confusion that was created by the two terms feminism and modernization by examining those two terms within different historical eras in the Arab World. She finds that the term feminism, whether imported, borrowed, or reshaped, to

[41] Badran and Cooke, xx.
[42] Kumari Jayawardena , *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1986), 2.

appropriate a certain political goal (modernization), is definitely involved in problematic issues related to cultural identity. Abu-Lughod stresses the fact that any feminist project should be studied and placed within local historical moments to reconfigure the roles of women, whether it is political or social role. She explains that "Feminism's having become an unavoidable term of current debates across the Middle East, its stories which must include not just education, unveiling, political rights and domesticity but also unveiling and reinterpreting Islamic law are worth telling in all their messiness and contradictions."[43] According to Abu-Lughod it is important to distinguish carefully between modernization and feminism. However, she carefully insists that feminism was initiated by women's writings at the end of the 19th century and those writings promote awakening women and transforming their lives. Whereas female authors found modernization a platform to talk about their ideas, that should not give an excuse to conflate modernization and feminism. Abu-Lughod agrees with Badran and Cooke that feminism and women's writings both reflect each other.

Feminism before 1920 in the region was mostly located in Egypt because many newspapers and articles were published such as *Nisāiyāt* at that time. However, after 1920 and until 1970 feminism translated into different women's movements. This period witnessed the rise of women's public organized movements in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, and Iraq, according to Badran and Cooke.[44] Some of these movements were the Women's Congress in Damascus in 1930,[45] the Egyptian Feminist Union led by Huda Saharawi (1879-1947),[46] and The Christian Women's Solidarity Association in 1947 in Lebanon,[47] and these were few from many other women's movements in the Arab World that promote women's demands in education, politics and work.

During the mid-twentieth century most of the Arab countries that were occupied by British and French mandates gained their independence. In fact, in this period the project of feminism represented itself in women's movements and women's writings that sought

---

[43] Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1998), 25.
[44] Badran and Cooke, xxi.
[45] Pauline Homsi Vinson and Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, "Challenges and Opportunities: The Women's Movement in Syria," in *Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A Century of Transformations from Within*, eds. Pernille Arenfeldt and Nawar Al-Hassa Golley, (The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 67.
[46] Miriam Cooke, "Telling their Lives: A Hundred Years of Arab Women's Writings," *World Literature Today* 60, no.2 (1986):213.
[47] Rita Stephan, "Women's Rights Activism in Lebanon," in *Mapping Arab Women's Movements,* 115.

independence from any control that the nationalists tried to impose on them, or from the model that is a Western production. Cooke and Badran describe the writings of women writers at this time as "a constant struggle to find a space of their own."[48] Ghada Al-Samman, Assia Djebar, "Huda al-Naamani in Syria; Emilly Nasralla and Nadia Tueni in Lebanon,"[49]and many other names were from those women whose voices started to resonate and attract attention to their causes in this period. Indeed, there is a strange relation between feminism in the Arab World and nationalism. Jayawrdena observes that "most Third World feminists recognize that the historical relation between [...] nationalism and Third World[50] women has been tumultuous, although Third World women often worked in tandem with nationalists in their anti-colonial and independence movements."[51] The work within nationalist projects against occupation in the Arab World absorbed women writers and did not give them a distinctive identity.

Feminism and nationalism shared the same goals in the Arab world but the nationalist projects in the Arab countries tried to silence those movements and constrained women's voices. Nationalism defined the national identity as a masculine identity that worked only to empower male dominance in Arabic society. Nationalist and independence movements that called for freedom somehow absorbed women's demands and reproduced them within the nationalist patriarchal discourse, erasing the voices of women. Ranjoo Seodu Herr argues that "male Third World nationalists have consistently subscribed to an essentialist and masculine conception of nation and nationalism predicated on the subjugation of women."[52] Women's voices and demands were lost to the side of masculine nationalism in the Arab world. Again, women were excluded from the nation's narration. Although women tried to be a part of the national projects in their countries they were lost between reconfiguring their rights and adopting a national identity that gave them justice and public

[48] Badran and Cooke, xxxiv.
[49] Badran and Cooke, xxxiv.
[50] Although the term "Third World" refers to a colonial connotation in classifying different countries in the World, however in this context it applies to the Arab World.
[51] Kumari Jayawardena, 7.
[52] Ranjoo Seodu Herr, "Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism," *Meridians* 12, no. 1 (2014):7.

visibility. Indeed, any independence project in the Arab countries was attributed to male leadership including politicians, scholars, and even fighters.[53]

Feminism in the Arab World often did not have a clear body of ideas. It was absorbed by the nationalist movements and then by traditionalist Muslims especially with the rise of different theocratic governments in Saudi Arabia and Iran, taking into consideration the strong influence that those countries have over the rest of the Arab World. Therefore, until the 1970s the feminist movements in the region were best described as secular and alien to the Arab-cultural background, as Badran calls it.[54] Mervat Hatem observes that: "The rise of political Islam in the Arab World since the 1970s, its popular support and successful re-Islamization of the discourses of many Arab societies have been viewed with hostility and suspicion by the secular and nationalist intelligentsia and feminists alike."[55] Therefore, in response to religious, political, and social frames that were in place because of the conservative traditional society, the concept of Islamic feminism then rose as a reaction.

The question of women's rights within Islam started to attract an audience; it is in this context that Islamic feminism appeared. Badran points out that: "By the 1990s some observers detected the emergence of a new feminist discourse in parts in the Middle East."[56] Islamic feminism reflects the intellectual and cultural movement that was initiated by women reformers who encouraged people to look back at the original spirit of Islam that gave women an equal position in society. They asked for new interpretations of the verses of the Quran and the Hadith (Prophet's Traditions) that had been manipulated and presented according to the patriarchal ideology in society.

Islamic feminism also came under attack. The cooperation between Islam and women's demands has not saved those who adopted this "contingent contextually determined strategic self-positioning,"[57] identity as Cooke calls it, from criticism and rejection. By contrast, those who supported this new trend had to face two extremes. On the one hand,

---

[53] See Valentine M Moghadam for examples of how nationalist movements manipulated women's emancipation in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994).
[54] Margot Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no.1 (2005):6.
[55] Mervat Hatem, "What Do Women Want? A Critical Mapping of Future Directions for Arab Feminisms," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no.1 (2013):98.
[56] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic,"9.
[57] Cooke, 59.

intellectuals who defended Islamic feminism found themselves in conflict with the Islamist traditionalists who refused any reforming aspects of the law of Islam (Quran and the Hadith) which are related to women and family in the Arab world. This refusal was because they "have shown themselves to have conservative social and political gender agendas."[58] On the other hand, Islamic feminists had to demonstrate that there is a possibility of mutual cooperation between Islam and feminism to those who believed that feminism was and still the product of Western influence on the Arab World.

Arab feminism, whether secular or Islamic, faces many challenges within the Arab World. Suad Zayed al-Oriami acknowledges some of these obstacles as decolonization in which the focus was on "the evacuation of the colonizers from the land", religious movements which consider that "there is no such a thing in Islam as gender-specific thought," and political conflicts.[59] These challenges limited the perception of feminism to be widely accepted within the audience in the Arab World. Hoda Elsadda points out that "There is a general perception of feminist movements in the Arab World as weak, due to their distance from cultural and social realities, or their failure to introduce fundamental changes on the cultural and political levels."[60] Indeed, Arab feminism has called for improving women's position and directing this change. These calls might have achieved some social and political recognition. One of these is a more representations of women in the political domain in the Arab World.

However, these calls often might have failed women on different occasions when it comes to the context of war. Although "all over the Arab World, women fought alongside men, as they still do in Palestine, Lebanon,"[61] they have been silenced on these narratives and they were excluded from the public life and their roles were defined. The writings of women writers in this thesis criticize the marginalization of women's voices in society during the conflicts in their country. Each writer in this thesis shows a literary engagement with feminism, and all of them present in their writings different literary attitudes toward

---

[58] Hatem, 98.
[59] Suad Zayed al-Oriami, "Arab Feminism-Obstacles and Possibilities: An Analytical Study of the Women's Movement in the Arab World," in *Arab Feminism: Gender and Equality in the Middle East*, ed. Jean Said Makdisi,Noha Bayoumi and Rafif Rida Sidawi (London: I.B.Turis, 2014),135-36.
[60] Hoda Elsadda, "Gender Studies in the Arab World: Reflections and Questions on the Challenges of Discourses, Locations and History," in *Arab Feminism Gender and Equality in the Middle East*, ed. Jean Said Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi and Rafif Rida Sidawi (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 20.
[61] Zayed al-Oriami, 134.

feminism. Djebar and Al-Samman in their texts both adopt a visible position of classical feminists. Al-Shaykh refuses to be classified as a feminist, as I will explain. Mosteghanemi, on the other hand, approaches feminism in a challenging way, as I will show.

Methodologies

This thesis aims to analyse selected texts by contemporary women writers from Lebanon and Algeria during the civil wars. It focuses on the narrative strategies that they use in their texts to establish their position within the domain of war literature and feminism. To understand the connection between war narration and these writers' political choices of the literary genre and the narrative strategies for exploring women's positions in society, I have read these texts through the lenses of post-colonial, cultural, and narrative theories. My aim in this thesis is to show how the cooperation of different theories opens our comprehension of varying interpretations of war literature by these writers. My thesis relies on the principle of political and historical comparison between the selected texts. The scope of this thesis also includes multiple aspects of analysis and comparison regarding the use of language, literary genres, techniques of narration, and literary styles that the writers use in their texts. This will result in an understanding of the political stance and position those writers achieve by comparing and analysing their methods of writing within the context of war literature in the Arab World.

For example, in Chapter One Assia Djebar's approach toward the French language in her writings will be analysed in comparison with Ahlam Mosteghanemi's approach toward the Arabic language in Chapter Two, while both writers write about the civil war in Algeria. The connection between these two writers' approaches to language clarifies the tension that upstaged Algeria during the civil war. The close analysis of the texts in those two chapters paves the way for a better understanding of the linguistic, social, and political phenomena that happened in Algeria during the civil war. The use of post-colonial linguistic theories leads my argument to clarify the positions of both Djebar and Mosteghanemi with regard to the linguistic drama and conflict that swept Algeria during the civil war.

My aim in this thesis to understand the positions of these women writers depends to a great extent on analysing a broad spectrum of fictional genres, autobiography, short stories, and novels and how each one of these genres works as a strategic political choice that

resists the classification of these writers in certain frames. The choice of literary genre also works as a profound political statement for Djebar and Mostaghanemi. Djebar's choices of short story genre and autobiography bring attention to her female characters and herself while they are narrating about the history of Algeria. Mosteghanemi, on the other hand, shows how important the novel genre is while engaging with the history of Algeria and the Arab World.

Hanan Al-Shaykh and Ghada Al-Samman, in chapters three and four, both use the novel genre as a political statement to highlight the collective trauma in Lebanon and to present multiple perspectives on the civil war. The use of multiple first-person narrators in Hanan Al-Shaykh's text offers readers the chance to see the war from different aspects. Ghada Al-Samman's text reflects the reality of the war through literary experimentations such as absurdism and fantasy to question the ugly reality of the war. Al-Shaykh's deployment of the novel genre and use of multiple narrators to reflect the Lebanese Civil War works as evidence to show the collective suffering of the Lebanese. In Ghada Al-Samman's text, the use of the novel genre which is narrated by the unnamed female narrator and other stories within her story reflect multiple perspectives of the war.

The Civil Wars in Algeria and Lebanon: Brief Historical Contexts

This section will give a brief introduction about the complex political and historical backgrounds of the Algerian and the Lebanese Civil War. In framing these two backgrounds, I will introduce the linguistic conflict in Algeria and roots of sectarianism in Lebanon.

On the Algerian Civil War

Algeria has suffered from a protracted history of violence due to several wars and also from a loss of identity and deep division. Omar Carlier illustrates the case of violence and its history in contemporary Algeria:

> Here more than elsewhere, history is violence and extends over a long period. Algeria has had two wars of independence, exceptionally drawn out and destructive, at the beginning and end of colonial domination, and two world wars in which it was heavily involved. It has also known a range of forms of war: revolutionary war in the liberation from colonial rule[62]and two civil wars […] These wars have nonetheless

[62] Algeria was under French occupation from 1832-1962.

> been experienced and perceived in different ways by different individuals: the collective memory of this contemporary history of violence retains more than the most tragic effects and events.[63]

After a hundred years of colonization, Algeria gained independence from the French in 1962. The question of Algerian identity remained a complex issue during this period of colonization. Algeria was a true colony of France in a way that the history of the French in Algeria is more complicated than in many of France's other ex-colonies.[64] The French colonizers tried to change the Algerians' identity. The mission of French colonization was not only to conquer the land but also to dominate the minds of Algerians with the colonial culture. To change the Algerian national identity, it was important to destroy the cultural heritage of Algerians which was represented by their language. The French colonizers fought the Arabic language extensively, and in the first decade of the colonial period in Algeria between 1830 and 1844, "the communal lands […] that were funding the teaching of Arabic language and were also paying for the upkeep of schools, were confiscated by the colonial authority."[65] As a result, the French colonial government imposed the French language at all levels of society and "relegated Arabic language to the status of foreign language denying at the same time Algeria's national culture."[66] French language was the only language that was taught in schools and it was used for trade, political and business communication. Therefore, the attempt to change Algerian identity and culture by French occupation succeeded to some extent in creating a new Algerian identity that excluded Arabs and Berbers who refused French culture.

The Arabic language and other spoken languages such as the Berber language remained for the use of the family in private spheres in Algeria. Annedith Schneider explains that French education was to be available to all children, but in practice "very few Algerian children attended French schools."[67] As a consequence, the French colonizers succeeded to some extent in preventing many Algerians from education. Therefore, the new Algerian identity applied only to people who believed that they were superior to Arabs and Berbers.

---

[63] Omar Carlier, *Entire Nation et Jihad: Histoire Social des Radicalismes Algeriens* (Paris: presses de la FNSP, 1995), 11.
[64] Annedith Schneider, "Mourning in Minority Language: Assia Djeba's Algerian White," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 19, no. 2 (2006), 42.
[65] Samia Dokali, "Language Policy Implications on the Economy: Arabisation Policy and Economic Development in Algeria," *Journal of Economics* 114.no, 1 (2013):74.
[66] Dokali, 77.
[67] Schneider, 42.

According to Faize Aitel, the creation of the Association of Algerian Writers in 1942 enforced the presence of this new Algerian Identity. She notes that: "The establishment of this new identity in Algeria required the near erasure of its non-European inhabitants, at least to allow for the sociocultural imaginary to cohere and function. As a consequence, Arabs and Berbers[68] are almost totally absent or invisible in this colonialist literary vision."[69] The colonial system in Algeria managed to establish a new identity that assimilated into the French project of colonizing Algeria. This entailed excluding different Indigenous ethnic groups such as Arabs and Berbers but also labelling them according to the cultural project initiated by the French colony. It is not only the exclusion from the new identity that the indigenous people of Algeria suffered from but also a linguistic division that separated the Algerians. This conflict of languages in Algeria will be studied in Djebar's and Mosteghanemi's texts to show that the choice of language turns into a strategic political choice.

After Independence in 1962, the policy of Arabization was initiated by the official state in Algeria announcing that Arabic was the official language in the country and that it should be taught in schools and universities instead of the language of the French colonizers. The goals of Arabization "were to integrate the new nation, consolidate power and demonstrate unity with the other newly independent nations of North Africa."[70] Several Algerian writers such as Kateb Yasin, Abdelkader Alloula, and Assia Djebar resisted this movement because it marginalized the diversity of languages in Algeria and enforced a single identity on Algerians which is Arab identity, as Aitel notes. Indeed, Aitel asserts that: "The objective of Arabization was not simply to eradicate the language of the former colonizer (French was the language of communication and culture) but also to eradicate the Berber language and references to Algeria's pre-Islamic past."[71] This linguistic drama forced itself on Algerians and practised an exclusion that somehow pushed towards the violence after Independence.

Besides the linguistic conflict corruption, unemployment, and poverty flourished in Algeria despite the numerous promises from successive governments to empower those

[68]Arabs and Berbers (Imazighs) are the original inhabitants of Algeria. The Berbers have a distinguished language and culture that is different from the Arabic language and culture.
[69] Fazia Aitel, *We Are Imazighen: The Development of Algerian Berber and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture* (University Press of Florida, 2014), 30.
[70] Aitel, 111.
[71] Aitel, 113.

who were marginalized and neglected during the French colonial period. During that period, the distribution of wealth and social inequality prevailed and it continued after Independence. At this time, Algeria struggled to create a new identity and to establish a stable political and economic system. However, corruption has risen and demonstrations and riots have erupted. The nation felt that it had been betrayed and a new party, the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF), was formed to stand against the secular parties which led the government for a long time after the protracted struggle against French rule.

In 1992, after the overwhelming win of the ISF in the general election, the military in the country rejected that victory and arrested leaders of the ISF. The government with its new leader, Mohamed Boudiaf, announced a state of national emergency in the country, and they used methods of repression and economic reforms to address the public. The ban of the IFS led to riots accompanied by the collapse of the economy which resulted in the rise of Islamist insurgency in the country. Such incidents marked the start of violent campaign between the government, represented by the army, and the Islamist movement. Violence and guerrilla war began in 1992 and lasted till 2002. In Algerian history this decade is called Algeria's traumatic *décennie noir*, "the Black Decade". Paul A Silverstein states:

> Since 1992, civil war has directly affected the everyday lives of Algerians world-wide. Taking the form of massacres, assassinations, car bombings, and plane hijackings, violent attacks have occurred in remote villages, crowded city streets, desolate highways, and overseas capitals often without warning and generally without declared motive.[72]

After 1992, Algeria's isolation started and the international press left the country. Cycles of killing and targeted massacres continued with the declaration of the end of the war in 2002. Such brutality and bloody memories have been strongly addressed as a personal and collective memory in the writings of Algerian Writers, whether they used Arabic or French. The struggle to claim one identity for Algeria between 1960 and 2000 manifested itself in the writings of Algerian writers. Assia Djebar's and Ahlam Mosteghanemi's texts offer a deep perspective on linguistic conflict, and how language can work as a resistant tool rather than a dividing factor.

On the Lebanese Civil War

[72] Paul A Silverstine, "An Excess of Truth: Violence, Conspiracy Theorizing and the Algerian Civil War," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no.4 (2002):645.

Division is the most important factor that could lead any society to the verge of war. In light of this, Lebanon is a country that is not as easy to define as other countries in the surrounding region. In other words, Lebanon as a country is a contested concept.[73] Lina Khatib argues that it is not enough to define Lebanon as a geographical land. And it is hard to define what Lebanon is because its people have different religious loyalties and different political affiliations. Those different loyalties have pushed the Lebanese people to division, and the political leadership in the country is fragmented and lacks any control over different constituencies in Lebanon. Kamal Saliba also explains how difficult it is for the Lebanese people to agree on one identity because "in Europe where nationalist thinking was already a firmly established tradition […] It was not the case with the Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire, where national consciousness, to the extent that it existed, was blurred and confounded by traditional loyalties of other kinds which were often in conflict with one another."[74] This complicated and deep-rooted sense of different loyalties that the Lebanese people have is attributed to different reasons.

The most important reason is that Lebanese people belong to different religious sects (almost 18 sects) but are officially divided between Islam and Christianity. Accordingly, religion played and still plays an important role in the political life of Lebanon. Those different sects form the basis of the Lebanese political system that is known as the confessionalism system. Khatib explains that "Confessionalism is built on the relative power that each sect had in Lebanon prior to the national Pact; thus, the post of the President is reserved for Maronites, Prime Minister for Sunnis, and House Speaker for Shiites."[75]

This kind of political system normally is conducted to ensure the stabilization of society and the incorporation of different elements in it. However, this was not the case in Lebanese society. By contrast, this system re-enforces division, as Khatib argues: and "confessionalism has become a warning rather than a model."[76] Khatib also observes that Lebanese people had loyalties for their sects rather than their national identity. Based on that, each sect in Lebanon mistrusted the other sects even if they belonged to the same

---

[73] Lina Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema: Imaging the Civil War and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris& Co Ltd, 2008), 3.

[74] Kamal Saliba, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005), 200.

[75] Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema ,* 5.

[76] Khatib, 5.

religion. Indeed, during the civil war, the conflict was not only between different sects, but also emerged between different militias within the same sects. For example, Shiites were fighting each other (Amal versus Hizbullah), and Maronites were fighting each other (Lebanese Forces versus Aoun supporters)[77] and these groups were also fighting against each other. These political rivalries between sects and religions in Lebanon are not only related to the late civil war of 1975-1990, but those are deep-rooted in history, such as the well-known conflict between Druze and Christians in 1860.[78]

Another significant factor is the economic background of the Lebanese which resulted in oblique class division. People whether Muslims or Christians who belong to the upper classes adopted certain values in life which were different from those in the lower classes. Lebanon before the civil war and around 1960 was a place that attracted the rich and the famous from different Arab countries and it was even called the "Switzerland of the Orient". This attraction toward Lebanon has enlarged the gap between the upper classes and lower classes. Even though Beirut at that time was a cosmopolitan modern city, underneath this opulent lifestyle that was adopted by the upper class, poverty, and annihilation were the destiny of those who lacked the advantages in society. Those factors caused an escalation of division in the political milieu which induced the civil war in 1975.

Those internal reasons were mainly behind the division between different sects and religions in Lebanon. However, foreign intervention also played a crucial role in this war. Different Arab countries such as Saudi-Arabia (which held Al Taiif agreement[79] that declared the end of the civil war), Syria (which sent its troops to control the fighting in the streets of Lebanon and then occupied the country from 1976-2005), France, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Iran all were large influencers on the diverse sects and contributed to the Lebanese civil war, not to mention the important dimension that the Arab-Israeli conflict added to this war. Those reasons escalated the sectarian division in the Lebanese society, igniting the conflict in Lebanon and resulted in guerrilla fights in the streets of that small country.

---

[77] Amal and Hizbullah are Shiite political parties and militias that participated in the civil war and still are participating in ruling Lebanon till now. Lebanese Forces and Aoun party are Maronite political parties and militia who also participated in the Civil war and are still ruling Lebanon now.

[78] Sandra Mackey, *Lebanon: A House Divided* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 17.

[79] Al Taiif agreement was held in 1990 and declared the end of the civil war in Lebanon with the participation of all political and religious militias that engaged in the war under the command of all foreign powers.

The year 1975 marked the start of bloody fighting, mass killings, and segregation lines that divided Beirut. The war ended in 1990, after fifteen years of streets fights and horrors. With the effort of the international community and the Arab League, this war ended but left behind a deep scar of polarization in Lebanese society. During the civil war, division stressed and enacted the loss of Identity and the inability for reconciliation. In the chaos of this war, each sect and political party aimed to reinforce their masculine ideas and positions in Lebanese society. Diana Purkiss explains that "the Civil war divided the nation in many ways and it also divided different ideals of masculinity from each other."[80] Female identity in this war was marginalized and forced to support the division in the Lebanese society. Purkiss observes that "it is a part of all masculinities to deny this plurality of ideals, to wish to appear single, whole, unitary and well armoured."[81] Hanan Al-Shaykh and Ghada Al-Samman, in contrast, probe the reality of the war by presenting a collective perspective which shows the suffering of the marginalized during the war.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into two main parts conveying the Algerian Civil War and the Lebanese Civil War. Each part is divided into two main chapters. Each chapter is dedicated to one woman writer, and will deal with one independent aspect of criticism, and analysis. This organization of the thesis helps to demonstrate its original contribution by studying each author's literary techniques for responding to civil war individually, and in comparison with the others. The first part compares Djebar's and Mosteghanemi's responses to the civil war in Algeria in Chapters One and Two by highlighting their interaction with the linguistic conflict that divided people through their strategic choices of language in certain literary genres such as short stories, autobiography and novel. It also analyses the different narrative techniques that both writers use. The second part compares uses of the literary genre of the novel to articulate multiple perspectives on the Lebanese Civil War, through Al-Shaykh's multiple first-person narrators in Chapter Three, and Al-Samman's unamend female narrators and insert stories in Chapter Four.

[80] Diana Purkiss, *Literature, Gender, and Politics During the English Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), np.
[81] Purkiss, introduction, np.

By focusing on Assia Djebar's autobiography *Algerian White* (1995) and the collection of short stories *The Blood Tongues Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* (1997), Chapter One traces Djebar's two different literary genres in these two texts and presents a political perspective for deploying autobiography and short story forms that are told only from women characters' points of view. Djebar tried to write the history of French colonialism and the civil war through those characters and their voices. She shifted the focus to the perspectives of her women characters to defy the patriarchal narrative of the war in Algeria. This chapter proposes a new understanding of Djebar's choice of deploying two different literary genres that work as profound political statements to show resistance. It, therefore, argues that Djebar's narratives work as a tool of resistance that inscribes her voice on the body of war narratives that are written by women in the Arab World. By insisting on focusing only on women's experiences in war, Djebar then allows their voices to document and record the horror of the war.

The short story collection contains several stories that are each told from the perspective of a different woman character. Each character shares her story within the story of French colonialism and the civil war. Djebar finally reaches for a collection of different women's voices. The use of the short story is evidence of understanding the political and social changes that Algeria went through. The autobiography *Algerian White*, in comparison, shows Djebar's voice and highlights the collective suffering rather than an individualistic point of view. By this, Djebar departs from an individual portrayal of the war and presents collective suffering and resistance while deploying those two genres. While studying the political importance of using certain literary genres to highlight women's voices and experiences in the war, this chapter will also show Djebar's purposeful and political choice of the French language, the language of French colonialism, as a method of resisting patriarchy in Algeria represented by French colonialism and the official government. I argue that with the strategic choice of language that Djebar makes, she challenges the instability caused by the linguistic conflict in Algeria and emphasizes the reconciliation of all components of Algerian society.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi's choice of language will be studied in comparison to Djebar's in Chapter Two, 'The Male Narrative Voice and Defeated Masculinity in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*.' It will show how Mosteghanemi uses the male

narrative voice to present her perspective on the Algerian civil war. In this vein, I argue that Mosteghanemi does not imitate a male tradition of writing nor does she affirm oppression in her text. By contrast, she deploys the male narrative voice ironically as a political statement to defy the power structure in society. I argue that through adopting the male narrative voice ironically as a political strategy in the novel, Mosteghanemi shows a fractured masculinity in Algeria and the Arab World. I argue further that irony makes the male narrative voice an unreliable narrator in which Mosteghanemi defies the dominant image of patriarchy. I also will show that Mosteghanemi manages to manipulate the patriarchal perspective that speaks on behalf of the political history in Algeria by adopting a male narrative voice ironically. Mosteghanemi draws a different route to women's voices through her absent/present female character, Ahlam/Hayat and fractured masculinity. This narrative style challenges the ignored role of Arab women writers in engaging with the political and social context of history. My study of the Arabic novel genre in Algeria, and connecting it with the issue of the language in post-colonial Algeria, will demonstrate Mosteghanemi's ability to reflect the historical and political environment in her literary text. In comparison to Djebar's choice of the French language, the focus will be on the Arabic language which from Mosteghanemi's point of view is responsible for the future of Algeria. In comparing Djebar's to Mosteghanemi's approach towards language, I argue that both have adopted different stylistic voices and language, but they deploy them to the similar end of representing the history of the civil war.

Chapter Three, 'The Use of Multiple First-Person Narrators in Hanan Al-Shaykh's Lebanese Civil War Novel *The Story of Zahra* and the Orientalising of Women's Voices in Translation', will show how Al-Shaykh faces a different patriarchy represented by the Western ideology that seems to ignore the social context of the Arab World and enforces one stereotypical image about women in this region. The chapter will focus on how the presentation of the multiple first-person narrators in *Hikayat Zahra* defies the enforcement of an ideologically motivated translation in *The Story of Zahra.* Al-Shaykh has produced a text that studies the civil war in Lebanon with its social and political aspects by focusing on all characters' perspectives. However, the translation goes in the direction of producing a novel that shows a stereotypical, voiceless image of women in the Arab World and reduces them to objects by focusing on sexual relationships. Al-Shaykh, in the Arabic version, shows

that the sexual relationship in the life of Zahra, Majed, and Hashem is a way of defying the tradition of family and society in the Arab World. The translation of the text deforms Al-Shaykh's multiple first-person narrators by overlooking women in the Arab World and approving an orientalist stereotypical image of women. It presents Zahra as an oppressed and voiceless character, and the male characters, such as Hashem, as predators.

Chapter Four, 'The Unnamed Female Narrator's Nightmares: Absurdism and Fantasy in Ghada Al-Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* will head into the realm of the absurdity of the war and the form of fantasy in portraying the war. Al-Samman uses absurdism and fantasy to approach the war in a novel in which an unnamed female narrator presents the collective agony and pain of the Lebanese people through episodes that she calls nightmares. Those nightmares also contain parables and short stories that are symbolically connected to the main plot of the novel. This metafictional framework presents a collective experience of the war. Absurdism as a theoretical approach seems, for Al-Samman, the only logic of the war. Although the text is not absurdist, Al-Samman through her unnamed narrator manages to conjure elements of absurdism in her episodes to echo the hopelessness of the war. Al-Samman also creates a literary form of fantasy that does not have a utopian edge but is a very painful fantasy that represents the horror of the war. I argue that fantasy in *Beirut Nightmares* works a socio-political tool that criticizes the reality of the war in this novel. Fantasy surpasses reality by presenting different characters such as Death, the fortune teller, the sheep broadcaster, and other frightening and fantastical characters. Al-Samman embodies this collective trauma by recreating reality through absurdism and fantasy to emphasize that reality can sometimes be more painful. In contrast to Absurdism and fantasy, Al-Samman emphasizes the role of Arab intellectuals and writers to defy oppression and violence and to promote the freedom of speech.

Chapter One

The War of Languages and Plurality of Identities in Assia Djebar*'s Algerian White* and *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories*

During the civil war in Algeria 1990-2000, Algerian society had to face different challenges and contradictions that have been attributed to the history of French colonialism. Algeria has not only witnessed a horrific physical war, but the political war of identities and languages also contributed greatly to the civil conflict in Algeria. Assia Djebar was born in French Algeria in 1936 and died in Paris, France, in 2015.[82] She was an Algerian writer, feminist, journalist, and filmmaker, whose main language was French. However, Djebar did not support French colonialism and this tension influenced her two prose narratives, *Le Blanc de L'Algerie* (*Algerian White*, 1995), and *Oran, Langue Morte* (*The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories*, 1997). The lived experiences of the conflict in Algeria and the memories of the history of colonialism drove Djebar to question the national Algerian identity imposed on Algerians during colonialism and the period of the civil war. In her two prose narratives, she tries to represent unseen and unheard women's voices through women narrators in the collection of short stories *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* and her own voice in the autobiography *Algerian White*.

[82] Her original name is Fatima-Zohra Imalhayene.

In her two prose narratives, Djebar preserves moments of history that uphold the trauma and redefines them from women's perspective allowing women's voices and experiences to take part in this history. She highlights women's remarkable experiences in war through women characters' narrative voices. Unlike the historical discourse of Algeria, women's voices after the War of Independence were lost according to Stefanie Van de Peer. She observes that "women […] fought a vital part in the war of Independence, but afterward, lost their agency, which was put back in the hands of victorious men."[83] The heroic discourse of the war dropped women and their voices from the historical account of the struggle against the colonial power in Algeria. In this matter, Mildred Mortimer also notes that in Algeria "the dynamics of gender tend to keep women from speaking publicly about private matters including personal loss and trauma, forcing them to be silent about their war experiences. Silence, sometimes a form of protection, at other times a form of resistance and far too often a result of intimidation, contributes of course to obscuring history."[84] Therefore, the hegemonic structure of patriarchal power in Algerian society marginalizes women's voices. Moreover, women's voices have been neglected on purpose in the masculine patriarchal discourse of the war. Those women had to face two colonizers: French colonizers and patriarchy. Djebar in her two prose narratives, through choosing mainly women characters to share their experiences of war and loss, allows women's voices to have their space within the historical discourse of Algeria.

In the space of allowing women's voices to have their own narrative, the conflicts over identities in Algeria are reflected through the war of languages and the politicizing of language in Djebar's two prose narratives. In these two texts, Djebar shows that the individual becomes political because of the ability to make a linguistic choice. Therefore, in this chapter, I will study the political implications behind the choice of language and her narrative forms such as short story and autobiography. I will show how Djebar presents through her two prose narratives a celebration of the pluralistic collective identity that the hegemonic powers in Algeria tried to eradicate during the period of colonialism and the civil war. Therefore, her choice of those narrative forms works as a political statement to show a

[83] Stefanie Van De Peer, "Assia Djebar: *Algerian Images*-son in Experimental Documentaries," in *Negotiating Dissidence: The Pioneering Women of Arab Documentary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 112.

[84] Mildred Mortimer, *Women Fight Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War* (London, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 3.

resistant position against oppressive powers in Algeria. The position of Djebar as bi-linguistic and bi-cultural and her choice of writing in the language of the colonial power, the French language, limited her readership to those who have access to this language in her country Algeria, and in the Arab World. This adds layers of complications to her position as a woman writer. Her choice of female narrators in the collection of the short story and herself in the autobiography addresses the position of Algerian, Arab Muslim women and allows those women's voices to inscribe their places in the war narrative and the history of Algeria. However, Djebar arguably fails to address the wider readership in the Arab World.

Djebar uses the French language in *Oran, Langue Morte* published in 1997 which was translated as *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry*: *Algerian Stories* in 2006, a book which she claims was directly inspired by the events of 1990 in Algeria. This collection of short stories was written in Paris and Venice in the summer of 1996. Djebar says in a short interview that nearly all the details related to this collection are true, and she wrote them immediately after hearing them orally in the streets or during chance meetings. [85] This book directly criticizes the contemporary Algerian social and political climate. Sections of life in no ordinary times "are micro-scoped and images of pursuit, of escape of death, and of hope"[86] are transported into words. In this collection of short stories, Djebar tries to portray a catastrophe that turned into an everyday occurrence in Algerian history. She tries to explore the complexities of the role of Arab and Algerian women by presenting different women characters. Those women narrate the history of Algeria through their perspectives and Djebar combines all these perspectives to produce a book that shows the complexities of those women's lives representing by that the Algerian Woman.

Although Djebar's choice of French as the language in which she wrote resulted in limiting her readership, the form of the short story in *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry* makes the cultural analysis of the civil war accessible to wider readerships. In her review of the collection, Eliane Hoft-March asserts that it is not only the poetic tone and the drama of the book that can make it stand out but also "the book's pedagogical usefulness. Shorter, less dense, less allusive [...] the collection can still convey […] some sense of a complex

[85] Daniel Simon, trans. "A Brief Conversation with Assia Djebar," *World Literature Today* 80, no.4 (2006):15.

[86] Assia Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood Does not Run Dry: Algerian Stories*, trans. Tegan Raleigh (London, Seven Stories Press, 2010), 209.

culture and its practitioners caught in a dangerous political situation."[87] Therefore, in contrast to long complex density such as the novel, the short story is easier to engage with because concentration on the content is not lost due to the length of the text. This book as a whole is a representation of fragmented pieces of memories about the war and contemplating loss. Each story is a non-linear narrative, and is a recalling of a memory of loved ones. The arrangement of the stories is divided into two parts which are "Algeria between Desire and Death" and "Between France and Algeria". The ghost of death and executions of several characters dominate the stories. In those stories, Djebar plays the role of the preserver of those memories through the women characters.

Djebar's collection of short stories raises the question of identity and belonging to Algeria (past and present). Jane Hiddleston argues that "[Djebar] uses *Oran Langue Morte* to interrogate further the effects of a repeated, cyclical violence on the relation between place, identity and historical continuity."[88] However, my approach to this collection of short stories by Djebar will examine the impact of politicizing the language to create a collective identity in Algeria. Loban Ben Salem, on the other hand, observes that "a writer who chooses to write in a language other than the mother-language is inevitably a victim of displacement."[89] Ben Salem places Djebar as a writer who struggles to belong to her country when she studied Djebar's two autobiographical works *Fantasia* (1985) and *So Vast The Prison* (1999). In contrast, my textual analysis of this collection will demonstrate how the political choice of language reveals the impact it has on the Algerian identity and shows the place that women's voices represent in the narrative of the war. Djebar's collection of short stories strongly presents dichotomies of French /Arabic, Algerian past /Algerian present, and French colonizers/post-independence with Islamist resurgence which in its turn shows that Djebar's choice of language represents a political resistance.

Djebar's second text studied in this chapter, the autobiography *Le Blanc de l'Algerie,* was first published in 1995 and then translated into English as *Algerian White* in 2003. This autobiography is a tribute to her three intellectual friends and the loss of several Algerian male and female intellectuals, who spoke different languages: French, Arabic and Berber.

---

[87] Eliane Hoft-March, "*Oran Langue Morte* by Assia Djebar," *The French Review* 72, no. 5 (1999):936.
[88] Jane Hiddleston, *Out Of Algeria* (Liverpool University Press, 2011), 137.
[89] Lobna Ben Salem, "Fugitive Without Knowing it: Language, Displacement and Identity in Assia Djebar's Autobiographic Narratives," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 6, no.4 (2015):20.

Djebar wrote this autobiography after she received the news of the death of her close friend Abdelkader Alloula. The death of Alloula traumatized Djebar and brought back the memory of all the figures that were lost in the violence of the civil war and also the Independence war. The anxiety that impacted Djebar is reflected in her narrative form which is sometimes incoherent and unintelligible. Narration of the memories reflects a deep disconnection with the chaotic present, and that in its turn reflects Djebar's trauma from the violence suffered by her compatriots, who were brutally assassinated in the events of the civil war; along with Alloula, a dramatist, Mahfoud Boucieb, a psychiatrist, and M'Hamed Boukhobza, a sociology professor.

Hiddleston has studied Djebar's *Algerian White* and observes that Djebar rejects the Arabic language in Algeria because it is associated with the Islamists. Hiddleston claims that: "Exploiting the flexibility of the literary form is a gesture of resistance to the polemical rhetoric of the government and the Islamists."[90] Hiddleston claims that Djebar uses the text to "[seek] singular rituals and idioms, offered as an alternative to those sanctioned either by the Islamists' discourse or by the official Arabization policy."[91] Hiddleston also argues that Djebar opposes Arabic because it represents a part of the Algerian culture and that people in Algeria only suffer because of one single oppressive factor. However, I would argue that Djebar as a narrator in this autobiography seeks to show that all Algerians have suffered equally because of the events. Here Hiddleston has highlighted one single angle of the conflict and forgotten the original context which was fighting oppression and the political misuse of languages, whether Arabic or French. Djebar in Hiddleston's critical study seems to be an exclusive writer, whereas the title of the autobiography contradicts this picture of Djebar's writings. *Algerian White*, the title of the autobiography, is a reference to the equality and inclusivity of all Algerians with different tongues and one collective Algerian identity. According to Djebar, all Algerians are equal in front of death and they are all wearing the colour of mourning which is white.

As I will show ,in this autobiography, Djebar seeks to resist the political ideology that colonialism, the government in Algeria, and the Islamists share: the ideology of one

---

[90] Jane Hiddleston, "Political Violence and Singular Testimony: Assia Djebar's *Algerian White*," *Law and Literature* 17, no. 1(2005):9.
[91] Hiddleston, "Political Violence," 10.

exclusive national identity and one tongue that rejects bilingualism and diversification. Djebar narrates the trauma of loss and searches for a language that mourns all the loss, and also she resists the political rhetoric of French colonialism, the government, and the Islamists which represses the plurality of languages and identities. Hiddleston explains that "*Le'Blanc de l'Algerie* in its celebration of linguistic plurality on the one hand and in its understanding of the difficulties of creating a singular narrative form of mourning on the other, invokes a language of resistance to resurgent forms of linguistic oppression."[92] However, the celebration of linguistic plurality, and the emphasis on Djebar's contempt of the oppressive political rhetoric that eliminates other voices in the Algerian society, results in an intermingling of her 'I' with the collective self and the voice of Algerians. Djebar, in this autobiography and in contrast to *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry*, is the narrator and the space to analyse the battle of languages in this text is still open to many interpretations. Other critics such as Alison Rice, study Djebar's autobiographies like *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade,* as forms of confession and testimonies but "those by Djebar […] [do] not hold to static concepts of truth, sincerity and authenticity."[93] In contrast, my approach to the autobiography *Algerian White* is not conceptualized only in terms of testimony but is studied in the concept of politicizing the language to reveal the trauma of the self that is reflected in the trauma of history.

Moreover, deploying an autobiographical narrative form in *Algerian White* is simply a resistant narration and Ezade Seyhan adds that it is "a mode of writing that translates unimaginable trauma into a powerful narrative."[94] However, Seyhan does not necessarily agree that Djebar in this autobiography attempts to 'recover women's voices', because death and violence dominate Algeria equally. According to Seyhan, all Algerians have tasted loss and horror (which is right), without any regard to their gender identity. Moreover, Seyhan explains that the emphasis on one singular narrative voice, represented by the voice of Djebar herself in this text, will not serve the aim which is highlighting the violence that Algerians went through. However, Djebar's narrative voice in her autobiography reveals

[92] Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria,* 126.
[93] Alison Rice, *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria* (University of Virgin Press, 2012), 30.
[94] Azade Seyhan, "Enduring Grief: Autobiography as Poetry of Witness in the Work of Assia Djebar and Nazim Hikmat,"*Comparative Literature Studies* 40, no.2 (2003):161.

important aspects about the history of Algeria. It is simply the perspective of a writer that starts from the self and ends where all Algerians share the violence and the loss.

The Political Importance of the Genre of Short Story and Autobiography

In *Algerian White* and T*he Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories,* Djebar uses two different genres to write about the civil war. These two texts were written after the period in which Djebar stopped writing because of the imposition of the Arabic language in Algeria. The experiences of women during the war turned into political statements in which Djebar uses her women characters and herself as the narrators. The focus on showing the history of violence in Algeria from women's perspectives equals defying the masculine narrative discourse of victory. This masculine discourse engages only with victory and ignores the trauma that accompanies it. Djebar plays the role of the preserver of the memories of loss and violence through using her women narrators. The narration about the war from a woman's point of view stands as a clear challenge to the masculine narrative of the war.

Djebar uses women characters in the short story genre in *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry* to rewrite history from the perspective of an Algerian who wants to preserve the memories of death and violence to move on to a future Algeria. Shoshana Felman suggests that when a narrator talks about accountability about a catastrophe, he/she retells history and bears witness to painful memories. This narrator turns out to be a preserver of those memories and protects them from oblivion. Felman even says that "the essence of testimonies is historical and that its function is to record events and reports the facts of historical occurrence."[95] In that case, the narrator is compelled to conceptualize testimonies of memories in a historical chronology. Consequently, the narrator would customize his/her work into a historical archive. In the case of Djebar, she uses her women characters in different stories to articulate their ability to play a part in recording history. Olivia, Nawal, Isma, Fatima, Annie, Felicie, and Atyka all share in telling the history of Algeria through their stories. Djebar's attempt to write about the history of Algeria through her women characters is a clear refusal of the neglect of the stories of those ordinary women, as she says in the afterword of the collection:

[95] Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 19.

> I dream for them, I remember myself in them […] Sometimes I tell myself "you grasp them from afar, write them by placing yourself somewhere that is closest to their bodies —their hearts!"[...] What good is to write them down […] in order to survive? After all, whatever approach is used to write their shuddering, the blood of the tongue—their own blood—does not run dry, no matter what tongue it is, nor what rhythm, nor what words are finally chosen.[96]

Djebar writes the stories of those women to show the violence from their perspectives. All her women characters endured death, and their stories mirrored Algerian history. She sees in all her women characters a mirror of herself and every other Algerian woman. The continuous cycle of blood and death gathers those women and even makes their stories that have death and blood seem countless. The title of the collection of the stories symbolizes this cycle of death and killings. The metaphor in the title that refers to blood that is dripping from the tongue as words and stories that come from those characters is profound in understanding the collective suffering that Algerians endured. Words are transforming into drips of blood because of the endless cycle of killing and death, and the stories of Djebar's women characters and the Algerian women are endless, resemble the cycle of killings and death. Those stories that narrate the violence and the killings become endless with no hope. In the story entitled 'Burning' the main female character Isma says:

> News of death: a friend or a woman I had esteemed or admired, or an old professor I'd fallen out of touch with had been assassinated. Or the death of someone I didn't know — a student, a unionist, or someone who'd been a resistance fighter in the recent war. A death that had dropped in someplace I'd passed through the day before, at a market I go to every day.[97]

Isma describes the bloody normal circumstances of Algerian people, and that death becomes their ordinary situation. Isma, in this story, is just like all Algerians exposed to death and its news on a daily occasion. Djebar in this story tries to emphasize this awkward reality which the metaphor in the title of the collection represents. Just as the stories of death are endless and drops of Algerians' blood never stop, the words that are coming out of mouths to describe those stories resemble those drops of blood.

---

[96] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood*, 212.
[97] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood,*45.

Moreover, the importance of using the short story genre to gather the fragmented and different stories of Algerian women stands as witnesses to the violent history. Djebar's women characters deploy various strategies to encounter death and loss in Algerian history. Writing is one of the strategies that Djebar's characters use to defy the violence in Algeria. Writing for the characters becomes the medium in which they choose to fight oppression and violence and convey their outspoken position regarding Algeria.

For example, the previous story that is entitled 'Burning' is about an ordinary woman character, Isma. In this story, readers know that Isma was killed in the cycle of assassination that happened in the civil war and the story ends with Isma's assassination news. However, readers still hear her voice through her writings to her dead friend Nawal. Isma was not able to believe that her friend Nawal was dead, so she kept writing to her and asking for her advice on her relationship with her husband Ali and her secret Somali friend Omar. Indeed, Djebar tries to create this bridge between the world of the dead with the world of living by having this relationship between a living narrator, Isma, and a dead addressee, Nawal. This complex relationship between the violence of the past represented by Nawal and the violence of the present represented by Isma is asserted by bringing the dead back to life through writing. Although the violence dominates the scene in Oran, Djebar celebrates the memory of those who died Isma, Nawal, and Isma's writings to her dead friend Nawal. Isma says:

> I tell you Nawal, I write to you, suddenly wanting to cross over this frontier that hovers in the Algiers sky and truly divides us maybe connect us. [...] come as close as I can so we can talk, exchange our confidence: mine filled with desire, yours with altruism. [...] Nawal I am sailing toward you, I am writing for you, but I return.[98]

Indeed, as much as Djebar tries to capture all the violence in Algerian past and present, this violence from Isma's point of view is lost and that is why she keeps writing to her dead friend and talking to her. In this story, the narrator becomes the writer and the genre becomes her political statement.

[98] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood,* 67.

In addition, Djebar uses the short story genre as evidence of understanding the political and social changes that Algerian society went through. The use of different women characters is important to present this historical trauma from multiple perspectives of women narrators. The break from a long narrative into a short narrative represented by a short story genre makes this narrative an easy form to reach for Djebar's audience because one single perspective is not enough to probe the violence in Algeria. Different women characters who lived the experience of the war during the French colonialism and the civil war share their fear and loss and present multiple prospects about the violence, whether it is a physical violence or an emotional one.

In contrast to presenting different women characters and different narrators in her collection of short stories, Djebar in *Algerian White* presents the civil war from her view point. She chooses to narrate about the death and the violence in Algeria using her voice. The use of the autobiographical genre empowers Djebar's voice. However, her narrative voice in her autobiography seems to be impacted by anxiety, incoherent, and, at times unintelligible. The narration of the memories in this autobiography reflects a deep disconnection with the chaotic present, and that reflects Djebar's trauma from the violence in her country. One of the techniques that is used to exemplify the disorder of memories by narration is intermingled time sequences. Lobna Ben Salem notes that "in *Algerian White* time sequences float and intermingle, memories go back to one year or thirty, barely any logic is provided."[99] Djebar moves her reader between the prison of Barbarousse in 1956 (a very notorious prison that the French used to execute male and female combatants), the eve of Independence, the death of Albert Camus, the tale of Abdelkahder Aljazaerie, the murder of Mouloud Feraoun and M'hamed Boukhobza— all these memories subvert coherence and unity in narration. This disorder in her narration reflects political turmoil; thus, her narration helps to mirror this situation. Djebar says:

> I wanted in this account to respond to an immediate demand of memory: the death of close friends [...] to return to a few flashes of an old friendship, but also to describe, in each case the day of the assassination and that of a funeral- […] Then the desire was instilled in me to unroll a procession: that of the writers of Algeria […][100]

[99] Lobna Ben Salem, "Taming Trauma in the Land of the Million Martyrs: Reading Assia Djebar's Algerian White," *Postcolonial Text* 9, no.2 (2014):4.
[100] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 13.

Djebar focuses on the importance of writing the memories of her friends who have been murdered during the civil war. Algeria loses the power of pen and writing to death. Djebar as a writer stands strong in the face of death and tries to put on paper the memory of those writers and intellectuals through her voice. In her story 'Burning', Isma is writing to her dead friend, but Djebar in *Algerian White* writes down the memories of the funeral of her dead friends to remind people of this historical trauma. The writing stands as the opposite of the incoherence that violence brings to Algeria. If the memories seem un-unified in narration, writing those memories challenges this incoherence. If Algeria is suffering from the loss of many intellectuals and writers then Djebar through writing challenges this trauma. Laura Marcus in *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (2018) acknowledges that autobiography as a genre "sets out to represent the complexities of human life experience and memory."[101] Therefore, autobiography helps Djebar to portray the nature of the violence committed by the French colonialism, the extremist groups, and the state of Algeria. For example, Djebar writes about the current events of the civil war in Algeria through narrating the loss of her own friend M'Hamed, and compares those horrific events to those that happened during the French occupation:

> Return, M'Hamed[…] both of us students in Paris still, and you from your high plateau […]the bombs bursting, the victims of both sides, children in their arms, falling and a few young women who had been raped, […] You could evoke this bloody lyricism in a few concise words.[102]

Djebar tries to imagine the words that could describe the violence that happened in the civil war if they were said by the poet M'Hamed. Djebar is not only narrating her own loss of friends, but she is also channelling the voices of her friends and using these personal stories to draw comparison between the past and the present. Autobiography works for Djebar as a vehicle to portray the nature of violence that is commited in the civil war. Atrocities against children and women were committed by both sides in the civil war. Djebar says that: "Blood brings blood in its wake. We're rediscovering that logic."[103] She explains in her words that this is the logic of civil wars. After narrating about the death of her friend M'Hamed, Djebar

[101] Laura Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.
[102] Djebar, *Algerian White,*34.
[103] Djebar,33.

moves her readers back to the year 1957 to expose the violence that was committed by the French during the War of Independence as will be shown later in the chapter.

Moreover, Djebar in the opening page of *Algerian White*, as I have mentioned earlier, sets out her perspective on writing this autobiography as a political correspondence to the trauma of the Algerian nation. Marcus explains the motives of writing autobiographies when she says: "Numerous writers of autobiography, from across centuries, have offered their own understanding of the motives for autobiography, its possible forms and its intended readerships […] Some writers of autobiography will suggest that they are on a quest for self-understanding, while others will stress the wish to communicate their experiences to others."[104] In *Algerian White* Djebar stresses the importance of writing to eternalize the death experiences in Algeria. Writing this autobiography represents for her a political literary position that she exchanges with her readerships to uncover this historical period in Algeria which turns Algeria into a place that celebrates only processions of death. Djebar says:

> I wanted, in this account, to respond to an immediate demand of memory: the death of close friends […] I do not wish to polemicize ; nor do I want to practice the exercise of literary lament […] I re-establish an account of the days —with sometimes innocent signs, presages—the days leading up to death. And yet *Algerian White* is not an account of death on the march of Algeria. Gradually in this course of this procession, intercut with flashbacks to the war of yesterday, an irresistible search for a liturgy emerges, materializing through the pen over a little more than thirty years [...] For me sustained as I am by the search of scrupulously faithful account, I have been brought to note that new rituals were coming into being: the writer once dead, his text not yet reopened, it is round his buried body that several different Algerias are being sketched out. [105]

Djebar explains that she only attempts to write the stories of her dead friends and she is not in search of practising a literary form or experiment. She only tries to re-establish the memory of the days of the death. Djebar also in this autobiography is not claiming the position of authenticity because she is in search of a faithful account for her dead friends and Algerians like her readers. Therefore, Djebar's *Algerian White* is an autobiography that reflects the death processions that conquered Algeria and subsequently, it is an

[104] Marcus, *Autobiography,* 4-5.
[105] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 13-14.

autobiography that is not an account of Djebar and her character as much as it is an autobiography that reflects the historical trauma of Algeria through Djebar's writing the memories of her dead friends.

In *Algerian White* Djebar bears witness to Algeria's mourning and displaying the colour white because of the death of Algerians. She is writing the history of Algeria through writing the memory of her dead friends. Marcus explains that: "Exceptional or extreme historical circumstances, such as war, are fertile ground for the writing of the literature of testimony and witness."[106] Djebar writes the history of Algeria and bears witness to the violence without claiming authenticity; she tries to narrate about several intellectuals and thinkers who were killed during violence in the colonial history and the civil war. According to Marcus "the concept of testimony" in writing autobiography "brings out the relation between legal disposition and autobiography, while also pointing to a broader notion of 'bearing witness' and even of an obligation to do so."[107] Djebar includes in *Algerian White* different and multiple historical narrations and dates that belong to the history of the violence in Algeria. She says:

> The year' 57. That terrible year was marked by the death of two heroes, two antithetical deaths, one phosphorescent,[108] the other murky. […] From this point onwards torture is institutionalized in the French military machine. In '57 alone, the list lengthens: the disappearance of Maurice Audin, a Marxist academic from the faculty of Algeris, 'the suicide' of Ali Boumendjel, a young Algerian lawyer thrown from a window in the course of his interrogation, and so many other less widely known.[…] It is also in '57 that Henry Alleg was to be interrogated. His book *La Question* (The Questioning), published in '58 which gives a precise description of his own lengthy trials along with the testimony of Ser VAN –Schreiber. Pierre-Henry Simon and several others, would help place the question of torture at the centre of public debate in France.[109]

In this paragraph, Djebar mentions the dates on which several prolific figures in the Algeria society died, and it accompanies a historical event that was a part of the resistance in Algeria. Djebar, like Henry Alleg, includes testimony about the French occupation. The narration about the death of several figures in Algeria shifts the perspective to question the broader historical context in which Djebar plays the role of the narrator and witness.

---

[106] Marcus, 25-6.
[107] Marcus, 24.
[108] During the War of Independence, the French used napalm bombs.
[109] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 115-6-7.

Djebar also uses autobiography to resist the patriarchal order of society and to empower her voice as she plays the role of the narrator in her autobiography. Linda Anderson says that "autobiography enacts an active appropriation of identity laying claim to both a life and a text-even if it provides the means of opening up both the self and writing to questions of difference."[110]Anderson even explains that "autobiographical writings by women writers could represent a new system in which women writers could construct their identity away from the repression practised by male/masculine discourse."[111] According to Anderson, autobiographical writings by women writers have not been studied extensively until the late 1980s and women's autobiographies were ignored from the critical account of autobiographical canon because of "the sexual difference that imposed on autobiography as a genre."[112] As an example, Anderson explains that when "Alice James wrote her diary in 1892, Alice on purpose wished to publish her dairies after her death because she knew that writing autobiography is an act of self-assertion."[113] The emphasis on writing the "self" brought a new challenge to women writers, and Anderson notes that: "The power [for the woman writer] to define herself freely is at odds with her sense of power as a dangerously erupting (disrupting?) energy; power is not only what she can gain through writing but also what must be expelled in order to protect her weak (feminine) body."[114] For Djebar, writing an autobiography represents a challenge to the hegemonic power in Algerian society. It portrays a direct criticism of the masculine narration of the war represented by colonialism and the government in Algeria. This contrasts with Hiddleston's argument that Djebar challenges only one singular power and one singular language. Autobiography seems to challenge different power factors in Algeria and that are represented in Djebar's writings about the colonial past and the civil war. This also places women's voices in the direction of history when Djebar writes about oppression and shifts the perspective onto her role as a woman writer.

Djebar entered a dangerous enterprise when she wrote her autobiography *Algerian White,* although writing an autobiography by women writers in the Arab World enhances

---

[110] Linda Anderson, *Women Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Future* (Great Britain: TJ Press Padstow Ltd, 1997), 3.
[111] Anderson, *Women Autobiography in the Twentieth Century*, 4.
[112] Anderson, 2.
[113] Anderson, 15.
[114] Anderson, 16.

women writers' voices. Autobiography is considered as a reflection of the inner thoughts and the domination of identity. Unlike Western societies which emphasize the public sphere and the discussions of private and dangerous matters such as desires, Arabic tradition is in favour of silence when it comes to private issues especially when it is related to women. Thus, the act of writing and fiction is a transgression in Arabic and Algerian cultures. When it comes to autobiography, which is an act of exposure of an Arab female writer, an act of denying the hegemony of the 'we', and an act of emphasizing the self that reflects the 'we', this transgression develops into a dangerous genre that a woman writer is not allowed to approach. As Lobna ben Salem says that: "Djebar risks unveiling herself (voice and body) and therefore alienating herself from the conservative society."[115] Therefore, the danger lies here in revealing the self and in reflecting the collective self and identity, which empowers Djebar's voice in this text. Djebar uses autobiography to reveal the voicelessness of Algerian women and to challenge the national masculine identity represented by the national project of patriarchal society in Algeria.

The genres of the two prose narratives of *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry* and *Algerian White* work as a political statement that Djebar shows in her writings. The short story and the autobiography, which are narrated by female characters, reveal Djebar's political commitment to showing the history of Algeria from the perspective of women. The collection of the short story and the autobiography were written in French which adds multiple complications and controversy to the position of Djebar as a woman writer.

Politicizing the Language: Historical Context

"Je ne demande rien: seulement qu' ils nous hantent encore, qu'ils habitant. Mais dans quelle langue?"

—Assia Djebar, *Le Blanc de l'Algerie* (2003)

"I ask nothing: only they continue to haunt us,that they live within us. But in which language?"

—Assia Djebar, *Algerian White* (2003)

[115] Lobna Ben Salem, 22.

As a bi-lingual woman writer, Djebar's collection of short stories and autobiography reveal the critical battle of languages that happened in Algeria after Independence and during the civil war. Bilingualism forces the Algerian political and social atmosphere into several complexities. Historically and before the French occupation, Algeria showed a cultural intermingling of different ethnic groups that was reflected in the languages that were spoken by the Algerians. This cultural intermingling, according to Richard Serrano, "thrived under centuries of nominal Turkish suzerainty."[116] Serrano explains:

> French colonial observers were both surprised and attracted by the colorful mixture of peoples and cultures in towns […] The historian David Prochaska, in his account of the French colonization of Annba counts […] Moors [...]Turks […] Kouloiglis […] Arabs themselves, Berbers, and Jews.[117]

These various ethnic groups used different languages in Algeria before the French occupation and it reflected a continuous political diversity. Latin, Arabic, and Turkish are the successive marks of the different conquests that Algeria has been subjected to throughout the centuries. In this historical context, languages were used as political tools to reflect the diversification of the Algerian identities.

In contrast, French colonialism used the French language as a tool to eradicate the Algerian identity and to create a nation that resembled the French nation. The presence of French occupation and the imposition of the French language pushed vernacular and oral languages that were spoken in Algeria, such as Arabic and Berber, to the margins. Foudil Cheriguen observes "that languages and oral languages in Algeria seem to hinder the state's perspective to such a point that their bare mention in official texts would be the equivalent of a critique of the […] regime […] It is as if the nation as one (la nation une) demanded languages as one (la langue une), without any other competition."[118] This exemplifies the treatment of the French colonizers to the subjects of Algerian identity, and it also shows the attempt of the French colonizers to make Algeria French.

---

[116] Richard Serrano, *Against the Postcolonial: Francophone Writers at the End of French Empire* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 69.
[117] Serrano, 69.
[118] Foudil Cheriguen, "Politiques Lingustiques en Algerie," *MOTS* no.52, 64.

During the colonial period 1830-1962 the French colonizers tried to fight specifically the Arabic language, and in the first decade of that period in Algeria between 1830 and 1844, "the communal lands that were funding the teaching of Arabic language and were also paying for the upkeep of schools, were confiscated by the colonial authority."[119]As a result, the French colonial government imposed the French language at all levels of society and "relegated Arabic to the status of a foreign language denying at the same time Algeria's national culture."[120] The French language was the only language that was taught in schools and it was used for trade, political and business communication. In *The Empire Writes Back*: *Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (2002), Bill Ashcroft explains that "The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities." [121]Many Algerians refused this imposition of the French language; they refused to send their children to French schools and emphasized their oral dialect, whether it was Arabic or Berber. French language imposition was an important tool to erase the cultural identity of the Algerians and to impose European acculturation in colonized Algeria.

In post-colonial Algeria and after Independence, the stress on defining the Arabic language as the main language of the state was profound in fighting the oppressive colonizers. Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin argue that "Language becomes the medium through which hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and the medium which conception of truth, order, and reality become established."[122] For the Algerian state the voice of the colonial power represented by the French language power symbolises the domination and the authority of French colonialism. The policy of Arabization in 1962 was initiated by the state in Algeria, announcing that Arabic was the official language in the country and that it should be taught in schools and universities instead of the language of the French colonizers. French language was allegorically perceived by the government in Algeria after Independence and the Islamist resurgence as signifying the colonial past and it is compared

[119] Samia Dokali, "Language Policy Implications on the Economy: Arabisation Policy and Economic Development in Algeria," *Journal of Economics* 114.no, 1 (2013):74.
[120] Dokali, 77.
[121] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Practice and Theory in Post-Colonial Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.
[122] Ashcroft , Griffith, and Tiffin , *The Empire Writes Back*, 7.

to a dark area in Algerian History. This conflict between French and Arabic represents the conflict in Algeria between the colonized and the colonizers.

Djebar's career reflects this dilemma of politicizing the language in Algeria. When the Arabic language was imposed by the state, different writers and thinkers who adopted the French language as a medium of expression, like Djebar, showed various reactions to this politicization. According to Sophie Croisy, the Algerian writer Malek Hadad (1927-1978) stopped writing completely because he had only mastered French, and he was not able to "reconcile its use after the independence".[123] He considers writing in French as equal to an act of betrayal. Rachid Boujedra also stopped writing in French, but other writers such as Helen Cixous, Mohamed Dib and Yacin have continued to use French as a tool of liberation.[124] However, Djebar's career was impacted differently. After the policy of Arabization, Djebar's career witnessed a period of silence with regard to her writings. This silence resulted in a different platform which was 'film-making', that Djebar used to voice her position regarding the war and its atrocities.

Djebar's anxiety over language points to a much larger national malaise and places her works within the postcolonial agenda. One cannot take Djebar's writings and career out of the political-historical line of Algeria. The conflict of languages again centred the events in Algeria during the civil war and after the policy of Arabization and it even played a central role in the formation of the Algerian state after the independence. According to Soraya Tlatli, the conflict was not only between the government and the Islamist group in Algeria; it was also a conflict of languages and identities. In terms of Arabic versus French, the use of the French language was perceived by the Islamists as "the very symbol of treason: a proof of complicity with the colonial time." [125] Therefore, the question of languages in this area was much related to violence, blood, and trauma. For much of postcolonial language politics around the world, "the clash has chiefly been between a colonial language and (a) local, oral Language(s)."[126] This war of languages was clear in Djebar's career and literary works and

[123] Sophie Croisy, "Algerian History, Algerian Literature and Critical Theories: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Linguistic Trauma and Identity Reformation in Postcolonial Algeria," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 10.no, 1(2008): 87.
[124] Croisy, 87.
[125] Soraya Tlatli, "Language as Medium and as a Fiction in Assia Djebar's Work," in *A Companion To World Literature*, edited by K.Seigneuries (California: John Wiley& Sons Ltd, 2019), 3.
[126] Ben Salem, "Fugitive Without Knowing It," 20.

her attitude to the French language or Arabic language was much affected by the hegemonic political power in Algeria. Indeed, Abdelkebir Khatibi explains that in a post-colonial political context, Assia Djebar "elaborates her own tortuous relationship to oral and written languages in an endless movement: a never-ending dance of desire and rejection." [127] The same complexities that are found in postcolonial Algeria because of the language imposition on the political atmosphere are found in Djebar's works and career.

French as the Language that Challenges the Two Colonizers

Djebar's relationship to the French language is very complicated. Djebar's introduction to the French education system in Algeria was a significant reason for her decision to write in French. She was the first Algerian woman to be admitted into École Normale` Superieure de Sévres in 1955. Indeed, French was a tool to fight the colonizers in their language. Her career reflects the colonial history of Europe in general and France in particular. Djebar uses French to engage with the colonial history in her country which could be exemplified as a means of resistance. According to Nicholas Harrison in 'Assia Djebar: Fiction as a way of thinking', this theme of scrutinizing Europe's colonial history and Eurocentrism was clear in Djebar's speech at the Académie Francaise in June 2006. Harrison explains that Djebar's attitude in calling for another history and another version of stories that engage with the brutality of Europe's colonial past is a challenge to Eurocentrism that excludes others, their voices, and their cultural heritage. He says: "Djebar describes as 'une Barbarie au Coeur meme de l'Europe'. […] Barbarie means barbarity or barbarism as well as barbary in the heart of Europe, and it brings into play the history of conflict between Europeans and North Africans and the persistent European denial of Europe's own record of brutality."[128] Therefore, Djebar uses French not only as a medium of expression but also as a language that depicts the brutality of the colonial history. In *Algerian White*, Djebar writes in 'The Spector of post-Independence':

> This was January 22nd, 1956 in Algiers. On February 6th, the new president of the French Council, the socialist Guy Moller arrives in turn. He doesn't dare face the outburst of rage on the part of the European *Ultra* demonstrators and appointing Lactose governor general of the colony, gives him as policy guidelines: "One priority:

[127] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghrebe Pluriel*, trans. Lobna Ben Salem (Paris: Donel , 1983),56.
[128] Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, ed., *Postcolonialism Across the Disciplines: Postcolonial Thought in the French Speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 66.

> win the war! The French recruits are two hundred thousand in number; Guy Moller intends to bring them up to five hundred thousand.[129]

In this paragraph, Djebar somehow documents historical facts about French colonialism; she speaks out loudly about the project of colonialism in breaking the resistance of the Algerians and the determination to colonise Algeria. Djebar writes: "In May the annihilation of a whole reserve unit in the gorges of Palestro has enormous repercussions. The *ultras* as the prisoners condemned to death to be executed […] Zabana and Ferradj have their heads cut off in the name of French law. Prisoners of war status will not be granted to the Nationalists."[130] Djebar writes in French about the brutality of French colonialism. Resistance in the dictionary of colonialism is faced back with collective punishment and death.

Djebar's position in using the French language raises some paradoxes. She used French in her writings before independence to defy the French colonial narration and to speak for the colonized. Christopher L Miller notes: "Must we interrupt the use of European languages as a sign of unending dependence and alienation? Is it possible for Africans to appropriate these languages, lend them an African inflection in literature and thereby escape the cycle of dependence?" [131] Hiddleston clarifies this point as:

> The disintegration of any possible subject position neutralises the confrontations of colonialism, effacing the stark rigidity of colonial manichesim and its paralysing effects. Similarly, the replacement of the subject position with on-going self-singularisation makes it difficult to conceive of political agency. The invention of a specific position and in some cases a belief in national determination is often a powerful and necessary tool for resisting colonial and neo-colonial imposition. [132]

The colonized nation should defy the imposed position as an inferior subject. Colonialism ends when the colonized subjects create a political place to resist cultural oppression and the falsification of identity. Djebar sees in the French language a distinctive practice that refutes the narration of the hegemonic power of French colonialism. In *Algerian White* Djebar writes:

---

[129] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 110.
[130] Djebar, 110.
[131]Christopher L Miller, *Nationalist and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 50.
[132] Hiddleston, *Out Of Algeria,* 17.

> It is Abane [a well-known leader in Algeria during the war of independence] who will conceive and finalize the eight–day general strike of January '57: when the Algerian question will appear on the agenda of the United Nations, when the world will see that the Algeria of the cities, as well as the townships and the villages is united in the struggle for independence.[133]

Algerians sought political resistance and diplomatic routes to demand for independence but that was responded to French powers with even more violent encounters. Djebar says: "They will commit daily acts of violence and torture, carry out regular pruning of the population of Algiers […] Thousands of dead, thousands tortured."[134]

Djebar's approach to the French language during the War of Independence and afterward suggests a resistant position in defying colonial power and patriarchy in her society. She just refused to consider language as an oppressive tool in a male-dominated field, just as she refused patriarchal authority, whether it is represented by the French colonial power, the Algerian state, or Islamists' resurgence. Feminist scholars, such as Deborah Cameron, see the field of languages as a major domain to express concerns about the voice of women in their societies and their silencing. Cameron considers that language is defined by male supremacy. She argues about silencing women, in language and patriarchal societies and identifies language as a field of oppression for women just like societies. She even asserts that language should be analysed with a very sophisticated approach away from theoretical reforming of the position of language in a culture. This means, as Cameron notes: "to uncover the sexism in any language, to expose the falseness of women's place in this language and refuse to tolerate its continued use, providing where necessary a set of neutral and thus inoffensive, alternatives."[135] She also argues that: "Feminists are convinced that language […] profoundly affects women's ability to understand and change their situation."[136] In parallel, if women are oppressed and silenced in their society and because language constructs reality, then women also are oppressed in patriarchal language. Cameron explains that when women try to talk about their experiences in a male-controlled language, they fall into the trap of being silenced or alienated. Therefore, women writers, such as Djebar, who belong to colonized societies, suffer from the imposition of the colonial

[133] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 113.
[134] Djebar, 113.
[135] Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1985), 91.
[136] Cameron, 92.

hegemonic culture that tries to erase the identities of the colonized people. Any colonized individual/woman writer should resist the limitations that colonial powers/patriarchal society impose on them.

Djebar's assertion of using the French language does not only defy the colonizers by using their language to fight back against their oppression, but she also conceptualizes her linguistic form that resists the two colonizers. Indeed, she tries to challenge the identity that was imposed on the Algerians during the years of colonization by the French colonizers and the dominant narrative in Algeria after independence which imposed on Algerians one single identity that excludes other languages and identities. Djebar compares the violence that was committed by the French and the violence that was committed during the civil war. She says:

> Why this digression into the killing fields of '56 and '57? Why to flee the years '93 and '94, an Algerian cracking with the hollow sound of fracture? Because today, it might once more be possible to hold one's breath, restrain a moment the hammering subterranean step of reaping death, death reaping with its scythe, and begin to imagine, to invent possible solutions? Because there is no one to stand up as did the Camus of '56 in such a stirring way, there is no one today able to pronounce once more in the midst of the struggle those words of impotence not quite powerless, those words of suffering that one last time continues to live in hope […] between these two extremes, from where the clash of arms is born, from where the daggers are drawn, there opens into infinity a field which the innocent fall—far too many ordinary people and a certain number of intellectuals.[137]

In this paragraph, Djebar draws a comparison between the two extremes, the oppression of colonialism and the oppression of the state in Algeria. The use of the phrase 'flee the years' suggests immense movements as if the time flies from the War of Independence into the civil war. The same cycle of violence and death that invaded Algeria during 1957, is invading Algeria again in 1994. However, the hope to find an exit from the oppression in the civil war seems impossible because, according to Djebar, there is no one to stand up and criticize the atrocities made by the state because Algerians are fractured.

Djebar used the French language during the unsettled atmosphere in post-independence Algeria with the official state narrative of stressing one Algerian identity that

[137] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 114-115.

speaks one language, the Arabic language. According to Djebar, "North Africa has been a home to many different ethnic religious and linguistic groups and has never been mono-cultural or monolingual."[138] Algeria for Djebar, has never had one unified identity, and Algerians throughout history celebrated different identities and different tongues. As a result, Djebar's position toward languages reflected these political and historical realities taking into consideration that her feminist perspective empowers her to present her works as a statement that differentiates between the nationalist movements and women's liberation movements.

Indeed, Djebar's political consciousness, her themes, her defence of her voice in society, and her narratives are tied to a "reimagined relation to the French language."[139] According to Harrison, Djebar insists on using the French language, although the use of French after independence in Algeria was like a betrayal of the values of the nationalist project in the country. However, Harrison ignores the position of Algeria as a country colonized by France and that the French language is a legacy of the colonial history in Algeria. Harrison also did not consider in this context that "The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defy itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse that fully adapted to the colonized place."[140] Djebar considers French as a tool of resistance to defend her Algerian identity.

In her collection of short stories, Djebar clarifies this point by using the name Algeria-France in the second part of the book. In her afterword, she says: "In these Nouvelles, what did I look for between two places between Algeria and France […] [was] nothing other than the desire to reach this "absolute reader"."[141] The reader, whom Djebar addresses in her text, is the reader who can celebrate the diversification of Algerian history and engage with the plural identity in Algeria. However, there is no absolute reader. Her relationship with the Algerian audience proves this. French language for Djebar is a means to depart from the tradition of the Algerian society toward empowering her voice in society and her narratives, and that somehow creates a distance between herself and her audience in Algeria. Although the French language is a privilege in Djebar's position and a subversive act that challenges

[138] Forsdick and Murphy, *Postcolonial Thought,* 66.
[139] Forsdick and Murphy, 69.
[140] Ashcroft ,Griffith, and Tiffin,37.
[141] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood*, 215.

the hegemonic discourse in Algeria, at the same time, it creates a space for possible misunderstanding between herself and her audience in Algeria.

Djebar tries to bridge the two cultures in one language by presenting her background and her Arabic-Islamic culture. However, the fact that they are written in French creates an obstacle for the colonized nation to accept the documentation of the war in the language of the colonizers. In the collection, *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry,* the short story entitled 'The Woman in Pieces', Djebar deploys a very important trope from a work of classical Arabic literature, *The Thousand and One Nights*. In this story Djebar uses her main woman character, Aytka, who works as a professor of French, to retell a story that Shahrazad told about a woman who lived during the Abbasyid period. The body of this woman was cut into pieces and was found by al-Caliph Haroun el-Rashid and his minister Djaffar. Ironically, at the end of the story, Aytka is killed by armed men, and her head is mutilated and placed in front of her students, just like the woman in pieces. In the final scene, after she is killed, Aytka's head keeps talking and words keep coming out of her mouth. Hiddleston observes that Djebar deliberately confuses scenes between the palace of al-Caliph and Aytka's class. Students and readers are meant to believe that they are not only witnessing the death of Aytka but also, they are witnessing the events in al-Caliph's palace. It is not only infusing the past events with the present, suggesting that the violence of the past is repeated in Djebar's reaction toward writing in a different language such as French. It is also the infusion between the two cultures and the emphasis on the loss and oblivion for both cultures when violence is introduced. Aytka says: "I am going to be a French professor. But you see, with truly bilingual students, French will let me come and go, not just in multiple languages but in all ways."[142] The bridging between French and Arabic is not only achieved by Aytka's retelling the tale of the woman in pieces but also through means of presenting the texts. Djebar juxtaposes not only two cultures, two languages, and two women characters that portray the past and the present but also juxtaposes the two texts.

Djebar uses two different fonts. Each font functions to tell one of the two stories. For example: when she narrates the story of Aytka she uses the italic font as in '*Aytka's second session'* and the regular font to tell the story of 'The Woman in Pieces'. By using this technique, Djebar can draw a separate line between the two languages. However, in the

[142] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood,* 100.

final scene, Djebar, through infusing the two scenes together for the characters and the reader, can portray that bridge.

Notwithstanding that, Djebar's decision to write in a language other than her mother tongue is very complex. This decision made her a victim of displacement and maybe labelled her as a writer who writes on the margin of French and Arabic. This displacement resulted in an intersectionality between these two languages which made her a writer with a hybrid identity and hybrid linguistic ability. According to Ben Salem, Djebar's recourse to French locates her in a linguistic exile. She is neither able to present a French identity that speaks French nor an Arab/Berber-Algerian identity that speaks Arabic or Berber. This linguistic exile leads Djebar to integrate her Arabic/Berber culture with her French tongue and present a new hybrid identity. Indeed, "the linguistic hybridity is the only possible venue for Djebar when it comes to escaping the alienation inherent in her expression in the enemy's language."[143] As a result, this approach to her mother tongue and French language resulted in a problematic position in presenting language and identity to her audience.

In contrast to Ben Salem who sees Djebar's appeal to the French language as an area of producing hybrid identity, and Harrison who explains Djebar's perspective of choosing French as a means of expression to bridge the two cultures she belongs to, Anne Donadey believes that although Djebar uses French, she certainly never forgets other spoken languages in Algeria which are Arabic and Berber.[144] The conflict between French and Arabic, according to Donadey, is a portrayal of colonial history in Djebar's work. Therefore, it is not an attempt to bridge between two cultures but a means of fighting oppression practiced by colonialism and the government in Algeria. It is also a reference to the plural identity of the Algerians. Djebar tries to address Algerians with different tongues and languages and creates a literary archive that gathers the suffering of Algerians with no regard to their linguistic and political choices.

Djebar's decision to write in the colonizer's language was the product of the French education system that was imposed on Algeria. Indeed, her access to French education gives

[143] Ben Salem,"Fugitive without Knowing it," 20.

[144] Anne Donadey, "In Memoriam: Assia Djebar," *Modern Language Association of America* 131, no.1 (2016): 149.

her uniqueness in approaching women's issues and gives her the mobility to cross the boundaries of her society. In other words, writing in French has given her the power to produce images of Algerian women whether they are educated or illiterate. In this sense, Djebar was fully aware of her distinctive position in her society and that she was a spokeswoman of other women in her society. Indeed, her search for women's voices in her society must be linked to her realization of the implications of her position as a bilingual writer. Mildred Mortimer acknowledges that the process of Western acculturation represented by the French educational system gives Djebar access to the public sphere such as literary domains, but at the same time "excludes her from most if not all aspects of traditional women's world"[145] in Algeria. Consequently, French for Djebar was a means to depart from the tradition of the Algerian society toward empowering her voice in society and her narratives, and that creates somehow a distance between herself and her audience in Algeria. Readers cannot ignore that although the French language was a privilege in Djebar's position and a subversive act that challenges the hegemonic discourse in Algeria, at the same time, it establishes spaces for possible misunderstanding between herself and her audience in Algeria.

This misunderstanding led to a divorce between Djebar and her audience. Djebar's decision to stop writing during the period of silence in her career was not only related to the political imposition of the Arabic language after independence. Djebar realized that despite the fact she writes for Algerian women and revolutionizes their roles in her text, her voice did not reach the wider audience because she was simply addressing a specific class in Algeria. One might ask: who is her readership? Her readership is only those who can write and speak French in Algeria; however, the rest of the Algerians did not use French as an official language because of its relation to the colonial past. Therefore, Djebar's decision to write in French to highlight women's identity in Algeria after Independence, then this is certainly one of the reasons that her voice was not heard in her society. The integration between the self and the other through narrative failed, and several thoughts and themes were lost in this gap. Although she was a celebrated figure in the French literary atmosphere and publishing houses in Paris welcomed her, in Algeria and the Arab World the case was different.

[145] Mortimer, 102.

Images as an Alternative Route

Although my interest in this chapter is to focus on the politicizing of the language, it is equally important to mention this period in Djebar's career as it had a strong impact on her writing career after rejecting to write for ten years. Before Independence, the French language for Djebar was the vehicle that empowered her voice in the public sphere and the patriarchal society. However, the case was different after Independence because of the demand for postcolonial identity integrated with languages, redefining language as an emblem of cultural authenticity. Ben Salem explains that "No one can deny that the construction of Algerian identity after independence faces different challenges."[146] Therefore, Djebar's decision to write in French after Independence and her quest for a plural Algerian identity that is not open to categorization creates a gap between her and her audience.

The policy of Arabization in the new state of Algeria imposed on writers, as I mentioned above, to endure a new strategy in presenting themselves to adopt the new Algerian identity. Djebar was among writers who refused this state of language imposition and she stopped writing for a period of ten years. In *Algerian White,* Djebar reflects on those years while recalling the death of her friend Malek Hadad in the hospital. She writes:

> Sometimes writers die before they die. Yes sometimes they die an inner death: sometimes it takes them (in any country where there are publishers, readers, critics and literary prizes), takes them like an illness. Turn away and be silent. Look no more in the booksellers' windows and be silent. Turn away from a table with inkpot and typewriters, avoid a friend coming towards you on the pavement (he'll say for sure: "So what about your next book?" […] Do not write, let the emptiness spread out, weigh it in your hands […] No longer write. Be silent? Speak to be silent. In Algiers, as everywhere, why do writers die before they die?[147]

Djebar is reflecting on the literary death of her friend Malek Haddad who stopped writing after the policy of Arabization. Djebar describes this emotional state of writers whose pens and tongues sometimes betray them. The imposition of the Arabic language, according to Djebar, constrains writers and limits their audience. In Algeria when oppression is faced by oppression, intellectuals and writers die in a literary fashion before they die physically, in Djebar's perspective.

---

[146] Ben Salem, 6.
[147] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 133.

The policy of Arabization pushed Djebar to enter a new phase in her career. She found an alternative form to communicate with her audience, namely, producing and directing films such as *La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoun* (1978) and *La Zerda, Ou les chants de l'oubli* (1982).[148] Djebar was convinced that producing documentaries would help the process of emancipating Algeria after the disappointment of independence. By producing those two films, Djebar tried to reach a wider audience in Algeria and in particular women. If writing in French is received with the most unwelcoming attitude within the Algerian audience then documentaries proved to deliver Djebar's messages to her Algerian audiences. According to Stefanie Van De Peer, Djebar herself admitted that this silence in her career was mostly due to uncertainty about writings about Algerians in French, the language of the colonizers. Therefore, instead of words and language, Djebar used images to elaborate words, ideas, and thoughts. It is not "abandoning language as much as finding a new way to emphasise her point of view about the position of women in the Algerian history."[149] Some critics such as Emily Dalgarno refer to this period in Djebar's career as the 'mutism' years.[150] Using the term 'mutism' to describe Djebar's working in producing and writing films and documentaries in those ten years is controversial, because 'mutism' as a term can be interpreted as an act of submitting to the hegemonic political powers in Algeria at the time. Mutism may convey the meaning of failure, resentment, and the inability to face society because it is an imposed state on individuals due to hegemonic powers. Djebar, in contrast to the state of mutism, found herself a new unauthorized tool which was film-making, one that did not compromise her with the process of patriarchal control represented by the imposition of the Arabic language in society in post-war Algeria. Djebar considered producing film as an alternative form that refutes and resists an imposed state. Language imposition in Algeria drove Djebar to speak in a different method which is the image. Therefore, this period cannot be described as a "mutism" because Djebar decided to stop writing and resist in a different form. This strategic choice represented by producing films reflects resistance and condemnation of the politicized enforcement of the Arabic language in Algeria.

[148] My focus in this chapter is only on the literary texts.
[149] Van De Peer, 118.
[150] Emily Dalgarno, *Virginia Woolf and the Migrations of language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 160.

Djebar's new alternative form which was represented by producing films and documentaries has been studied by Amr Kamal in 'Undoing Odysseus'. Although Kamal argues for the recognition of filmmaking in Djebar's career and the impact it had on her subsequent narrative style, Kamal fails to consider the reasons that pushed Djebar to overcome the limitations of writing in French after the policy of Arabization. He only focuses on Djebar's attempt to produce images that speak for the Algerians. He considers that: "Cinema led Djebar to an important point in her career when she turned her attention into ethnography and oral narratives to address Algerian women's place."[151] Kamal does not mention that Djebar has challenged the hegemonic powers that imposed a certain language on writers and has used images as an alternative to words to subvert the act of oppression practised by the nationalist government in Algeria. This alternative form was transformed into a strong voice that negotiated power in society. After this period of ten years, Djebar resumed writing, and during the 1990s her literary works became more politically engaged.

Re-appropriating Arabic and Berber in Djebar's French Text

According to Djebar, during the civil war the French language was again the vehicle to fight oppression imposed on the Algerian plural identity. French was considered the tool for liberation in post-colonial Algeria, despite the criticism that French brought imperialism and neo-colonialism to Algeria. This language helped Djebar to redefine a plural Algerian nationalist identity. However, Djebar did not refuse Arabic or Berber as languages but she refused to write under certain oppressive circumstances. Indeed, there is a deep relation between Djebar and other Algerian spoken dialects and languages (Arabic and Berber) and those spoken languages occupy a unique position in her written expression.

Djebar's response to the French language after the War of Independence, specifically through the years in which she stopped writing, developed her relationship toward other spoken languages in Algeria. The re-appropriation of other spoken languages such as Arabic and Berber in Algeria signifies important cultural and social factors to vocalize Djebar's position in her text. According to Dalgarno, Djebar in the period of 'mutism years' listened to the non-French voices of women in Algeria. Those voices witnessed the Algerian history and re-told the events of the past in Arabic and Berber. Although French liberated Djebar

[151]Amr Kamal, "Undoing Odysseus's Pact: Marginal Faces and Voices in the Narratives of Assia Djebar and Agnes Varda," *Romanic Review* 106, no.1-4 (2015):55.

from the female enclosure in her Algerian society, this exclusion led her to establish a strong bond with spoken Arabic and Berber. Those spoken languages represent for her the cultural heritage, the oral tales of the old grandmothers and mothers, and sentimental memories that defy the colonial past. Arabic exemplifies the maternal voice for Djebar and Berber signifies a lost Algerian heritage that is only recorded in the oral tales of old grandmothers. Therefore, in the two texts by Djebar studied in this chapter, there are, underneath the French language, circulations of references to other spoken languages in Algeria.

Djebar could only balance this sense of belonging to those three languages by keeping the presence of Arabic and Berber within the French language. According to Taltali this is a reduction of the plurality of languages into one single written form. She asserts that through the untranslatability of languages (Arabic and Berber) into one language (French) Djebar managed to achieve a written form of French that is used as a medium and not as a tool. She says:

> The presence of a "Kernel of the foreign" might very well define Assia Djebar's use of French language; throughout her works she succeeds in presenting French signifiers as estranged from the French language itself, by constantly maintaining the phantom presence of voices, dialects, cries […] However, one can also argue that for Djebar there is a need for the untranslatable to remain untranslatable.[152]

During the civil war, Djebar needed that spirit to conjure Arabic and Berber in the French language. It is the collective experience of trauma and a reminder to Algerians of their solidarity and their plural identity. This strong presence of Arabic and Berber in her texts explains the Kernel of the foreign. This mixture of languages constructs her voice as a voice that resists the violence and celebrates plurality in Algeria, the plurality that was targeted in Algeria by all sides of conflicts during the civil war. Moreover, different examples that appear in her texts exemplify that it is not only difficult and sometimes impossible to translate certain words into another language but also to explain that in this untranslatable word, lies the plurality. For example, in *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry* and in the short story entitled 'Oran, Dead Language', Djebar kept certain words in Arabic but written in the Latin alphabet, such as "*taleb,"*[153] which means a male student, "*Khalti"* [154] means my

[152] Taltali, 5.
[153] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood,* 16.

maternal aunt and "*āamti*"[155] which means my paternal aunt. In English, aunt refers to both the paternal and the maternal aunt; however, in Arabic, there are two different words to refer to an aunt. These simple examples clarify that sometimes the targeted meaning is difficult to grasp in one language. The same applies to the identity of Algerians. It is difficult, from Djebar's point of view, to reduce the plurality of their identity and tongues into one single identity and tongue.

However, the presence of Arabic in *Algerian White* takes a different form. It is not her characters that use Arabic words; on the contrary, it is Djebar herself who constantly reminds her readers of this language when she says: "I really would like you to comment on that, you, my friends: I rediscover a nostalgia for that mother tongue in which I do not write, a language flashing before me like a fugitive in a dress studded with diamonds of poetry."[156] This description of language defines it as a valuable diamond that cannot be seen. Languages for Djebar are valuable like poetry and diamonds but she cannot fully control them.

Djebar's treatment of Arabic and Berber in her text gives her voice strength and distinctiveness. In *Algerian White,* Djebar mourns the memory of different important figures in Algeria, as mentioned earlier. Those figures represent the plural tongues that Algeria has. In this idea itself, Djebar fights the oppression that was imposed on society during the civil war. In *Algerian White,* Djebar insisted that during the most miserable moments that Algerians went through, Algerians needed solidarity to overcome the trauma of death. At the funeral of her friend Mahfoud, Djebar narrates about the spontaneous songs that are chanted in Arabic, Berber, and French. She says:

> So we sang, cried out, protested. Above all, we sang a kind of improvised concert […] Not like the old fashioned weepers! "I remember that one of us started with the national anthem *Men Djeballina* 'from the peaks of our mountain', other chants follow in Arabic, the occasional one in Berber blended with cries in French, slogans for democracy, calls to Mahfoud, words of love.[157]

Djebar expresses moments of sadness through remembering the National Algerian Anthem which is in Arabic. This identity that is expressed in her text is revealed along

---

[154] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood,* 24.
[155] Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood,* 24.
[156] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 29.
[157] Djebar , *Algerian White,* 72.

with the use of Berber and French. Djebar's two texts have been a welcoming environment to many languages that celebrate different identities and in her two texts. She has used her female narrative voice which was hospitable to all these various languages as a political voice that rejects any dominant language, any dominant identity, and any dominant political power.

Conclusion

In *Algerian White* Djebar writes: "They are killing anyone […] Kill the just, because the unjust are behind closed doors, find shelter […] Target the one who speaks, who says "I", who expresses an opinion, who thinks he is defending democracy. Kill the one who is on the path: the path of many languages, many lifestyles, the one who stays on the fringe."[158] Dictatorial authorities in Algeria represented by French colonialism, post-war Algerian state or Islamist resurgence, have brought a new war to the Algerian nation, which is the war of languages, to serve their political ends. Djebar's attitude toward this instability shows a distinctive reconciliation with all components of Algerian society. This reconciliation was achieved through celebrating all languages in Algeria with an emphasis on the plurality of identities. The genres of the short story and autobiography in *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry* and *Algerian White* respectively work as a political statement that shows a refusal of the enforcement of linguistic singularity and highlights the violence of the war through women's voices. Those voices are portrayed as resistant voices that reject any limitation. French language liberated Djebar and gave her the mobility to highlight women's liberation, but at the same time, it enforced a new kind of limitation that Djebar was aware of. To avoid this limitation, she deployed a new form of linguistic techniques to remind her readers of her connection with her mother tongue and her mother culture. This attempt, however, did not make the connection with her audience in Algeria and the Arab World easier. Her feminist project in highlighting women's experiences in wartime and criticising the abuse of the women's emancipation project was adversely affected by this failure to connect with a potentially wider readership. Therefore, as much as we can describe the narrative voice used by Djebar as a challenging and resistant voice, in reality the course of politics and

[158] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 200.

history tried to mute this voice. But in *Algerian White*, she answered the attempt to mute her through the words of Kenza, the daughter of a journalist, Tahar Djaout who was killed because he writes. Kenza says, “I want to write.”[159]

[159] Djebar, *Algerian White,* 193.

Chapter Two

The Male Narrative Voice and Defeated Masculinity in

Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*

In the previous chapter, I focused on Assia Djebar's critical process of engaging with female narrative voices in her texts. This strategy helps to reclaim the collective experiences of women in shaping the history of Algeria and highlights women's voices as makers of culture in her country. In Djebar's case, the affirmation of the presence of female narrative voices in the Algerian public spaces is depicted as regaining a lost power and a lost narrative that was confiscated by masculine rhetoric. I also argued that Djebar establishes a long chain of female voices and each voice retells Algerian history from their perspective. Djebar mainly opted for the French language to inscribe women's voices in Algerian history. In this chapter, my focus will be on presenting an analytical study of *Memory in the Flesh*[160] (*Zakirat el Jassad*, 1993) by the Algerian writer Ahlam Mosteghanemi, who is an author from a younger generation. Mosteghanemi was born in 1953, and she was a contemporary to Independence; therefore, she lived the ambition of that period represented by the end of colonisation and its cultural heritage. Mosteghanemi, in contrast to Djebar, used the Arabic

[160] This novel is part of a trilogy, *Memory in the Flesh, Chaos of Senses* (1997), and *Bed Hopper* (2003). It was first published by the American University Press in Cairo in 2003. However, a new translated edition titled *The Bridges of Constantine* was published by Bloomsbury in 2013. In this chapter, I mainly depended on the original Arabic novel and used *Memory in the Flesh* as the translation.

language to emphasize women's voices in the history of Algeria through a male narrative voice. Her novel *Memory in the Flesh* is considered the first Arabic Algerian novel written by a woman after Independence in Algeria.

Mosteghanemi depicts the structure of Algerian society in her novel by adopting a male narrative voice represented by the protagonist Khaled bin Toubal, who lost his arm in the War of Independence. The female narrative voice that is represented by the antagonist Ahlam/Hayat is strategically absent to give space to the male narrative voice. Mosteghanemi's novel is inspired by the War of Independence and the civil war in Algeria, and it is narrated entirely through Khaled's narration. The novel is a flashback to different incidents that happened to Khaled, a former fighter and now a celebrated painter. The novel starts when Khaled decides to leave his city of exile Paris and returns to his homeland Algeria and his city Constantine after the assassination of his brother Hassan in the civil war. Khaled is traumatized by the loss of his brother and disappointed by the corruption that led Algeria to the civil war. Readers know that Khaled participated in the War of Independence and he fought against French colonialism under the command of Si Tahir who is the father of Ahlam/Hayat. Khaled was appointed by Si Tahir to register Ahlam/Hayat after her birth. Coincidence leads him to meet Ahlam/Hayat after 25 years in Paris. After returning to Constantine, Khaled starts to write about his brief relationship with Ahlam/Hayat in a retrospective narrative. Readers only hear about this relationship from Khaled's perspective. He imagines that Ahlam/Hayat leaves him because of his Palestinian friend Ziad, but eventually, she marries the Algerian Minister of Culture. This is an arranged marriage between members of the allegedly corrupted national elites in Algeria. Those elites abuse their authority and take part in the corruption in Algeria, in contrast to Khaled who previously refused to share in confiscating people's voices when he was appointed the main chair of one of the publishing houses in Algeria. This retrospective narrative is dominated by long monologues, old memories, and flashbacks that are juxtaposed with present events in the novel which are also narrated through Khaled.

Indeed, the use of the male narrative voice puts the writer under scrutiny. After the publication of *Memory in the Flesh*, Mosteghanemi spent three years in court to prove that she was the author of this novel. She authored this novel, and yet had to prove legally that she did. Different critics such as Ellen McLarney and Aida Bamia have levelled a similar

charge at the style of the novel, claiming that she silenced her own voice as a writer by hiding behind a male narrator. Anastasia Valassopoulos, on the other hand, argues that the work of Mosteghanemi is not studied in depth and all "criticism appears to fall back on narrowly feminist or conservative literary expectations."[161] She observes that the novel has been only contextualized in a term of a love affair between the protagonist Khaled and the young daughter of his old friend Ahlam/Hayat. Valassopoulos also reads the novel to examine gender relations in a post-colonial context and to look at the portrayal of male and female characters in Mosteghanemi's text. In the same way, other interpretations have focused on the sexuality and objectification of women in the book by examining how Khaled imagines Ahlam/Hayat.[162] By contrast, Meriem Bougherira observes that the male narrative voice is adopted by the author as a strategy and a "direct restor(y)ing of the postcolonial literary imagi/nation."[163] My analysis adds to those scholarly interpretations by arguing for the adoption of the male narrative voice ironically in the book.

The narration in Mosteghanemi's novel reflects the complexities of Algeria during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Therefore, in the first part of this chapter, I will argue that Mosteghanemi is not a stereotypical woman writer who adopts a male narrative voice in her text to confirm the perspective of her society. In contrast to the assumptions of many previous critics, my approach will show that Mosteghanemi makes ironic use of the male narrative voice as a political strategy to represent a weak, fractured masculinity to enable readers to glimpse an independent female presence that stands in its shadow. The domination of the first-person narration in the novel makes us question the reliability of this narrator and, therefore, Mosteghanemi shows an ironic use of the male narrative voice. Ahlam/Hayat does not represent the submissive female that belongs to Khaled's imagination and that provides sustenance for the power of patriarchy in Algeria. In contrast, the position of Ahlam/Hayat in the novel reveals the fractured masculinity in Algeria. Nevertheless, this deployment of the male narrative voice affects Mosteghanemi's position

[161] Anastasia Valassopoulos, *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 112.

[162] Nuha Ahmad Baaqeel, "Decolonizing Languages: Towards a New Feminist Politics of Translation in the Work of Arab Women Writers, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Nawal al-Sadawim and Assia Djebar," *International Journal of Comparative Literature* 7, no.3 (2019), 39.

[163] Meriem Bougherira, "Restor(y)ing the Post-colonial Algerian Na(rra)tion in the Fiction of Ahlam Mosteghanemi" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2020), 41.

as a woman writer and places her in a risky position that might reinforce a misogynistic attitude towards women.

In the second part of the chapter, I will place my argument in the context of the history of the Arabic novel to show that Mosteghanemi has challenged the tradition that predominated in this genre. In this, Mosteghanemi was able to be apart from writers and intellectuals who drew the map of Algeria after Independence despite her use of the male narrative voice and the criticism that she received for it. I will also examine the significant impact that Mosteghanemi's novel has in relating Algeria to the Arab world and empowering Arab national identity in Algeria. I will not only study the role that the novel plays as being the first Arabic novel in Algeria, but also Mosteghanemi's position as an Algerian woman writer on the map of Arab writers. The linguistic form of *Memory in the Flesh* cannot be studied apart from the presence of the Arabic novel in Algeria, and the linguistic drama that happened in Algeria is reflected in this novel. In this novel Arabic is assumed to hold the responsibility for the future of Algeria. Mosteghanemi, as a woman writer who was from the first generation to be educated in Arabic after Independence, demonstrates that Arabic was a political choice and a resistance tool to decolonize Algeria.

The Male Narrative Voice: A Revolutionary Ironical Device

When women authors deploy a male narrative voice, they are easily accused of internalizing and enforcing patriarchal ideology in their writings and subsequently in their societies. Even when a woman writer decides to deviate from the phallocentric culture of writing, she will often be stereotyped within the same culture. Moreover, her capacity to depart from those traditions is considered evidence of her submission to this culture. Rina Kim and Claire Westall both observe that the "depiction of male voices by female authors" has a connection with "specific psychological, social, historical and political context."[164] Mosteghanemi, however, presents an emancipatory view of women's position in her society by using a male narrator, Khaled Bin Toubal, in *Memory in the Flesh*. Mosteghanemi invites her readers to question women's position in her society while ironically using the male narrative voice. As I will show, the male narrative voice in Mosteghanemi's text liberates her

[164] Rina Kim and Claire Westall *Cross-Gendered Literary Voices: Appropriating, Resisting, Embracing* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 2.

from patriarchal culture and empowers her feminist project. This is in opposition to what most critics have claimed about Mosteghanemi's deployment of the male narrative voice.

While Scott Simpkins argues that success is measured by criteria that favour a male writer when deploying a female narrative voice in his writing, the reverse is not the case for a woman writer. The adoption of a male narrative voice in texts that are written by women writers represents a submission to the masculine culture and that could place the writer under scrutiny for her choices according, to Simpkins. He also argues that this scrutiny "involves the gender of the narrator in relation to the author and the strategies of gender for the narrator."[165] Simpkins attributes this practice to several reasons, such as conforming to the phallocentric or "male-oriented ideology."[166] Simpkins also adds that such technique is exclusive to the patriarchal voice because there is no narratological structure that a woman writer could construct. Therefore, the only possible way for a woman writer is to write behind the value of the dominant structure of writing. Equally, Simpkins concludes that the deployment of the male narrative voice is a technique to protect the female writer from criticism. This problematic position of the gender identity of any writer raises an important question about how significant the gender of the writer is related to the use of the narrative voice in his/her writings.

It is in this regard that Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh* has been approached by McLarney, and Bamia. These critics argue that the adoption of the male narrative voice in this novel has locked and hidden Mosteghanemi's voice in her text. Such analysis has effectively deprived Mosteghanemi from claiming her voice in her text. McLarney explains that the use of the male narrative voice in Mosteghanemi's text "is an imitation and emulation of the masculine authorial perspective."[167] McLarney also argues that Mosteghanemi remains on "the edges of the narrative, a silent and perhaps silenced participant."[168] She adds that the female voice works as a shadow of the masculine voice and never has the chance to be at the centre of the events. She says that "Mustaghanami [sic] links this mode of representation to veils, as it disguises her authorial identity and

[165] Scott Simpkins, "They Do Men in Different Voices: Narrative Cross Dressing in Sand and Shelley," *Style* 26, no.3 (1992): 400.
[166] Simpkins, 400.
[167] Ellen McLarney, "Unlocking the female in Ahlam Mustaghanami," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33, no. 1 (2002): 24.
[168] McLarney, 25.

simultaneously situates her within the parameters of a particular literary and social tradition."[169] McLarney also observes that Mosteghanemi adopts the masculine voice to imitate the patriarchal tradition of writing and to function from a masculine authorial position to reach her audience. She also explains that Mosteghanemi does not represent the female characters in her text as subversive or revolutionary characters. With this approach, McLarney thinks that Mosteghanemi withholds women's experiences, and thereby Mosteghanemi complies with the male tradition of writing. Although it is within the masculine context of writing that Mosteghanemi presents her narration through the male narrative voice, I argue that this technique is not a reproduction of the male tradition of writing but a strategic deviation from this culture. It is a radical appropriation of the male narrative voice by Mosteghanemi that challenges the convention of society. Expanding on the dilemma facing a woman writer, Cixous explains that: "If she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine."[170] She observes that if women try to defy the boundaries of society in their writings, they will be silenced and marginalized. Therefore, women writers are encouraged to confine themselves to the male's structure of writings. However, in Mosteghanemi's text, the adoption of a male narrative voice is a challenge to society and a refusal to this marginalization. At the same time, this technique puts her in a risky position in which she might be seen to reinforce a stereotypical image of women writers. What proves this point is the criticism that Mosteghanemi's deployment of the male narrative voice attracts.

Mosteghanemi does not use the male narrative voice represented by Khaled to confirm the phallocentric tradition or to imitate the patriarchal tradition to claim an authorial voice in her text. In contrast, I show how she mainly uses the male first-person narrator ironically to invite her reader to examine patriarchal society through the words of Khaled. The marginalization of her female character's voice supports my argument, which finds that Mosteghanemi is subverting the patriarchal system through the patriarchal voice represented by Khaled. Mosteghanemi through her first-person narrator represented by Khaled invites her readers to examine the position of this narrator. By questioning the

[169] McLarney, 25.
[170] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa,"420.

reliability of her first-person male narrator, she also opens the door to criticize the power structure in society.

Wayne C. Booth was the first to introduce the term of 'unreliable narrator' in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: "I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for an act in accordance with the norms of the work […] *Unreliable* when he does not."[171] Booth depends on defining the unreliable narrator according to the norms of the author who is "the core of norms and choices."[172] Moreover, Shlomith Remmon-Kenan explains that "the main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement."[173] Khaled is an old man sitting in his room in Constantine who used to be a fighter in the War of Independence then became an exiled painter in Paris. After receiving the news of the assassination of his brother Hassan during the civil war, he gathers his memories that later will turn into *Memory in the Flesh.* Khaled says:

> I gather up the papers scattered in front of me making room for the coffee—as if I am making space for you. Some are old rough scribbles, others are blank sheets that have been around for days […] Words are all that is needed to go from silence to speech […] Eventually, I will find the right phrases. It is my right now to choose the way in which my tale is told. […] Here is the pen then at once a tool of vibes and jibes. Here is a tool that does not know how to lie, how to veil the truth, and is unable to gloss over a gaping wound.[174]

Khaled the writer conjures the past and the present to write about the future. Mosteghanemi chooses a narrator whose words will expose and make readers question the position of this narrator. The use of phrases such as 'rough old scribbles' and 'blank sheets' symbolizes the position of the narrator that Mosteghanemi deploys in the novel. Most importantly, Khaled tells his readers that he is telling the tale from his perspective when he says, "It is my right now to choose the way in which my tale is told," and that is profound evidence to test his reliability. However, Mosteghanemi confuses her readers by saying

---

[171] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1991), 158-159.
[172] Booth, 74.
[173] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 103.
[174] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, trans. Baria Ahmar Sreih and Peter Clark (London: Arabia Books, 2008), 2-3.

through Khaled that the pen can write the truth and can touch upon a painful memory. Khaled goes on to say: "There is nothing more difficult than to start writing at an age when others have finished saying everything."[175] Again Mosteghanemi chooses to challenge her audience when she reminds them that Khaled might have nothing to say anymore. Ahlam/Hayat does not have a word. We see her through Khaled's words and we know that this novel is addressed to her: "I am writing to you from a city that bears your picture." [176] Despite the fact the novel is written to Ahlam/Hayat and although she is the centre of the novel, her voice is almost hidden; she is an absent/present character. Khaled says: "I was in front of your picture confused and bewildered, as if I was looking at you…..I stooped and gazed at your eyes. I sought in them a memory of my first defeat at your hands."[177] In this, Mosteghanemi manages to present her two protagonists: Khaled who has the whole space in the novel as defeated, and Ahlam/ Hayat whose voice is in the shadows and strong despite her absence. On the surface level, it seems that Mosteghanemi is confirming the patriarchal tradition of writing by choosing a male narrative voice and enforcing a stereotypical image of a patriarchal relationship between her two protagonists, but this is not the case as we will see.

Mosteghanemi presents the relationship when Khaled and Hayat/Ahlam first meet through Khaled's words. Hayat/Ahlam does not share in this narrative. Khaled says:

> So we had met.
>
> Those who say that only mountains do not meet are wrong. And those who build bridges between them so they can shake hands without leaning over or surrendering their pride do not understand anything about the laws of the nature. Mountains only meet during major earthquakes but they do not shake hands then. [...]
>
> So we had met.
>
> And the unexpected earthquake took a place, because one of us was a volcano and I was the victim.[178]

[175] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 12.
[176] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 3.
[177] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 7.
[178] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 61.

Khaled describes the meeting between himself and Hayat/Ahlam as an unexpected and extraordinary event. Both of them, according to Khaled, have a huge history and roots like mountains. Mountains usually do not meet, but in the case of Khaled and Hayat/Ahlam, they do. However, Hayat/Ahlam is described by Khaled as a powerful volcano whereas he is the victim. Mosteghanemi's choice of the word 'victim' to describe Khaled in his words makes readers analyse with more depth the nature of this voice. Khaled manipulates readers to see from his perspective and to adopt his point of view.

Mosteghanemi uses the male narrative voice ironically to undermine the patriarchal structure of society, and her feminist agency in her text questions the prevailing order in society. To illuminate this, it would be helpful to use Lydia Rainford's work. Rainford argues that feminist emancipation in the written structure has called for anticipation of a new independent identity for 'woman' and that this idea would conform to "essentializing principles" that consider women as inferior in society. She also thinks that there is no such feminist agency that could emerge from obscurity but the important point is that this feminist agency should develop itself from negotiation with patriarchy. Mosteghanemi starts her task by deploying a male narrative voice. Rainford confirms:

> The binding of patriarchal terms is both historically and politically necessary. Feminism is indebted to the structure it criticizes. It is a kind of parasite sharing constitutive elements or having a common goal. This means that any effort to formulate a feminist agency will have to emerge at least in part from these structures, rather than from some virgin territory. [179]

In other words, Rainford explains that forms of oppression within the phallocentric order or the hegemonic masculine culture need to be addressed in these structures. She observes that any liberation needs to "emerge [...] from these structures rather than from some virgin territory."[180] Rainford finds that irony could be used as a form of feminist discourse to undermine the patriarchal structure in society. Irony comes as a strategic form for any feminist discourse to establish truth and knowledge about the identity of women. Let me here borrow Rainford's definition of Irony; she says:

---

[179] Lydia Rainford, *She Changes by Intrigue: Irony, Femininity and* Feminism (Brill, 2005), 3.
[180] Rainford, 3.

> Irony has long been thought of as a strategic means of questioning or countering established truth and ideas. Its philosophical roots in Socratic dialogue reveal it as a rhetorical mode which enables the emergence of knowledge-importantly, self-knowledge without actively positioning this knowledge or claiming authority for it. As such irony operates from within the structure it interrogates, repeating the beliefs of the structure in such a way as to negate their value thus implying that the real truth is another thing altogether.[181]

However, the definition of irony that I am using in my argument is not about the rhetorical function of irony, it is about the aesthetic function that considers irony as a "device that says one thing and means another and analysing the relative positions of its perpetrator victim and audience."[182] On the other hand, some analysts of irony consider the function of this device as an attempt to "damage the fundamental structures and categories of narrative and understanding."[183] These definitions of irony help to understand the use of the male narrative voice in Mosteghanemi's text. Booth in *Rhetoric of Irony* acknowledges how difficult it is to define irony because irony has "troublesome ambiguity" and "irony has come to stand for so many things that we are in danger of losing it as a useful term altogether."[184] In Mosteghanemi's novel, readers need to rule out all "non-verbal ironies and all cosmic ironies and ironies of fate and ironies of event."[185] Irony creates a space of creativity for Mosteghanemi to subvert the system of understanding without the need to challenge this system overtly. It is used politically as a strategy to have a dialogue with society. The position of Khaled as a first-person narrator whose account might be unreliable supports this equation of irony in the narrative technique.

The ironic use of the male narrative voice with the unreliable position that this narrator holds in the novel also helps Mosteghanemi to reveal the positions of genders in society. Mosteghanemi keeps the female narrative voice in the shadow of the male narrative voice and by that order she highlights the marginality of the female voices in society. Rainford explains:

> In challenging a hierarchy where "woman" always comes second habitually, figured as an adjunct to the ideal of masculine subjectivity the ironic woman does not simply

[181] Rainford, 3.
[182] Rainford, 5.
[183] Rainford, 5.
[184] Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2.
[185] Booth, 2.

> seek a subjectivity of her own to replace the masculine ideal. Instead she uses her secondariness as a form of negative freedom repeating it back to the patriarchal structure in order to undermine the authority of sexed subjectivity itself. Irony creates a way to unravel the prevailing truth of truth of gender positions without being obliged to step outside these positions.[186]

In this framework, Mosteghanemi negotiates with patriarchal structure while using irony as a strategy to criticize the structure of this society and to subvert its order. The use of the male narrative voice not only imposes questions on readers about the strategic use of this voice but also raises doubts about the masculinity that Mosteghanemi portrays in her novel. Mosteghanemi ironically uses the male narrative voice to undermine the structure of society and puts masculinity at the centre of the novel to direct readers to examine the society from a masculine perspective. Revealing knowledge about the structure of society is the definition of irony as it is used in Rainford's book. However, irony in Mosteghanemi's text is used as a political attitude, not as a rhetorical trope. Therefore, if society only accepts from men their political and social analysis and criticism then Mosteghanemi uses Khaled, a veteran, to talk with society and criticize it. Khaled says: "All the roads in this Ancient Arab city lead to defiance […] I cannot remember who it was who said 'A man spends his first years learning how to speak and the Arab regimes teach him silence for the rest of his life."[187] Mosteghanemi comments on the actual present of the Arab World and claims that there is no hope and that oppression will always silence people but she refuses to be silenced. In another incident, Mosteghanemi shows how principles have changed. Khaled says after he was surprised by his French girlfriend Katharine's attitude at the art gallery:

> I also discovered that during the twenty-five years I had lived with one arm, the only place where I could forget about my handicap was in exhibition galleries, where eyes would focus on my work rather than my missing arm. It was probably also the same during the first years of independence when soldiers still enjoyed some respect and the war handicapped had some prestige among ordinary folk. They inspired admiration rather than pity. Nobody expected to offer any explanations or to tell his story. We carry our memory in the flesh and that required no explanation. Today, a quarter of a century later, 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. [188]

---

[186] Rainford, 4.
[187] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 13-15.
[188] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 43.

Through Khaled, Mosteghanemi compares sadly and ironically between two times. One time during Independence, freedom fighters were proud of their disabled bodies that told the world around them that Independence happened because of these missing parts. Those missing parts, although absent, have the memory of Independence. At other times, Khaled, like so many other fighters, has to feel the shame of losing a part of his body even though this missing part is the reason why there are Algerians in power in Algeria. It is this social structure that privileges certain bodies and marginalizes certain disabled bodies as a part of the power structure. Khaled and others have paid a high price for Independence but that did not save them disappointment later on. Mosteghanemi manages by using Khaled to analyse an issue of high corruption that is related to the history of Independence. Khaled says:

> It is an awkward contradiction, to live in a country that recognizes your talents but rejects your injuries, to belong to a country that respects your injuries but refuses the person. Which do you choose when the wounds and the man are one? You are the broken memory and this broken body is nothing but a display. I have never asked myself these questions before. It was easier to run away from them and bury myself in work.[189]

Ironically, Algeria accepts sacrifices from its people but never accepts who they are. By contrast in France, they accept the talent you have but reject the injuries that you have. The male narrative voice seems to be a strategy that challenges society and at the same time reveals the weakness that Algeria tried to conceal. The political becomes the personal and Khaled reflects this ambivalence and conveys it to the reader.

Fragments of Masculinity and Defeated Algeria

Mosteghanemi represents masculinity defeated and fractured through her first-person narrator. Khaled's monologues, symbolically, reveal the truth about the fractured masculinity that he portrays through his long and incoherent monologues. Mosteghanemi, thus, displays a different dimension of masculinity in Algerian and Arab society. She unveils a weak masculinity that suffers undeniably. Judith Butler questions the categories of identity that are enforced on individuals according to their societies' structure. Gender

[189] Mosteghanemi, 44.

appropriation in societies, according to Butler, is a "compulsory system" [190] that discriminates against individuals and enforces a certain set of behaviours on the two categories, masculine and feminine. Butler then defines gender as "a kind of imitation for which there is no original."[191] In the Arab world, generally, gender is not presumed but rather is produced through a system that enforces domination on individuals. Masculinity in the Arab World is typically related to strength and coherence. On this specific point, Mohja Kahf and Nadine Sinno look at the constructions of masculinity in the Middle East around the early of twentieth century and state:

> Secular or religious, the old school patriarchs of modern Southwest Asian and North African literary depiction have Antar-like virility,[192] bravery, and generosity: are obeyed by loyal wives and children; and are expected to defend the honor of women kin, demonstrate both forcefulness and forbearance, and model anti-colonial nationalist stances.[193]

The embodiment of masculinity seemed to be represented in one unified model which is related to what Khaf and Sinno argue in the last quotation. Masculinity represents for a traditional patriarch the centre of strength and force or what Khaf and Sinno call "the straightforwardly controlling patriarch"[194] which dominates the aspect of masculinity that society in the Arab World approves of. However, Mosteghanemi through Khaled presents a different kind of masculinity which is weak and broken. Indeed, she exhibits a different model of masculinity by challenging "unravelling social and national paradigms" [195] of masculinities. Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* argues that gender is not a coherent concept because "Gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural intersections which invariably are produced and maintained."[196] With a closer look, one also could criticize this context of the Arab World as it had failed to define what gender is and how the system also practises oppression against

---

[190] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory* Reader, ed. Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 371.
[191] Butler, 371.
[192] Antar is a pre-Islamic poet who was well known for his powerful body and brave actions.
[193] Mohja Kahf and Nadine Sinno, ed., *Construction of Masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa: Literature, Film and National Discourse* (American University in Cairo Press, 2021), 16.
[194] Khaf and Sinno, 17.
[195] Khaf and Sinno, 75.
[196] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 1999), 4.

fixed gendered identity and limits identity politics. In the Arab World, masculinity and femininity are defined according to the rule of patriarchy, as I mentioned earlier, and masculinity is not typically represented as fragile and scattered.

However, Mosteghanemi defines masculinity and masculine identity in this novel in a way that contrasts with the norms of patriarchal society and shows controversially that masculinity can be sometimes unsteady and frail. In her study about masculinity in the Arab World during the period of independence from colonialism, Hoda Elsadda says: "Anticolonial nationalisms eventually construct their own brand of hegemonic masculinity […] constituting 'counterparts to the Western hegemonic masculinity' […] National hegemonic masculinities, as cultural constructs subject to historical and political contingency, are inevitably sites of contestation and negotiation."[197] In contrast to this construction, Mosteghanemi shows through Khaled a shadow of masculinity that suffers because of the war and the corruption in his country. She portrays a different face of masculinity that projects the crisis of the Arab World. The use of the first-person narrator and the unreliable position of this narrator add to present masculinity as such. The narrative style which depends on fragments of speech and long, non-cohesive monologues, supports this presentation of masculinity. Khaled says:

> How come this confusion? How is it that white surface of these transformed pages is from the huge blank canvasses still leaning against a studio wall that once was mine? Why do letters of alphabet run away just in the way colors used to desert me before, turning my world into a black-and-white television program? I see an old tape of my memory in the way television shows old silent movies.[198]

Khaled's fragmentations and vulnerability are reflected through the deployment of specific words. 'Huge blank' mirrors the weakness of Khaled's world. The letters of the alphabet are personified and run away from his fist. Even the colours of his words are only white and black. These words portray Khaled's state of feeling weak and thus reflect the state of masculinity that Mosteghanemi displays in her novel.

Mosteghanemi skilfully draws attention to the crisis of masculinity in the Arab World and shows another face of masculinity that does not necessarily comply with traditional

---

[197] Hoda Elsadda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel* (Syracuse University Press and Edinburgh University Press, 2012), xxxi.
[198] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 2.

masculinity which is equal in strength. By this, she manages to represent masculinity as fragile and weak. Masculinity in the Arab World, compared to the West, for example, suffers for different reasons that are related to historical and political complexities. The social comparison between Western society and the Arab World is a bit difficult in this matter. Masculinity in the West might suffer because "men are nowadays being forced to behave differently as men"[199] according to Shohini Chaudhuri, whereas, masculinity in the Arab World experiences agony because of oppression and political trauma that drive masculinity to be presented in a fractured image. In this matter, Mosteghanemi presents Khaled as a veteran who lost his arm as a price for Independence and eventually, he becomes disappointed by political corruption in Algeria. The crisis of masculinity in *M*emory *in the Flesh* is a reflection of the conflict in Algeria, and trauma and violence help to unleash this crisis. After he hears about his brother's death, Khaled says:

> "Oh my lady, if only you knew how big my dreams were. How massive the destructiveness that the televisions channels competed to transmit and show today! […] Are there degrees of martyrdom? What if the nation is both the killer and the martyr at the same time? And how many Arab cities have entered history with massacres, with secret cemeteries still bolted and barred? [200]

Khaled while using the words dreams and destructiveness summarizes the crisis that individuals in Algeria and the Arab World are facing. The political and historical turmoil that this region witnessed affected the social reality of all individuals. However, Mosteghanemi displays this historical trauma from the perspective of her male character to shift the focus into questioning the structure of power in society. Kaja Silverman explains that the "affirmation of classical masculinity is the maintenance of our governing reality." [201] Although Mosteghanemi seems to keep the dominant order in patriarchal Arab society by the adoption of the male narrative voice, instead she shifts this order by displaying masculinity fragile and vulnerable.

The title of *Memory in the* Flesh also indicates the suffering of masculinity because it displays on Khaled's flesh loss and disappointment, symbolizing by that the masculine subjects of Algeria. The focus on the male narrative voice and the concentration on Khaled's

---

[199] Shohini Chaudhuri, "Masculinity in Crisis," in *Feminist Film Theorists* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 2006), 105.
[200] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 254-257.
[201] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 16.

perspective are not simply staging masculinity in the novel or following the tradition of male writings as some critics accuse Mosteghanemi. For example, Baaqeel claims that the text does not reflect its context and thus Arab women writers such as Mosteghanemi and Djebar depend on their writings to articulate "a historically specific performative disposition."[202] Therefore, those writers are only able to produce an imitation of male's writings in narration. However, the focus on the narrative voice in this novel comes as a strategy to defy stereotypical gender identity rather than a simple narrative artistic technique that imitates the dominant male tradition. Masculinity is centred in this novel as represented by the first-person narrator 'Khaled'. Nevertheless, masculinity is also depicted as fragmented and defeated and is tested for its reliability. This narrative technique allows Mosteghanemi to expose the way that masculinity dominates society. In different moments in the novel, Khaled shows and stages his moments of despair. He says:

> Mother! What led me to her that day, the day of your wedding? Did I go just for her sake, or did I go to bury beside her another woman whom I saw as my mother? By her marble grave that was as simple as she had been, that was as cold as her destiny and as cobweb-covered as my soul, my feet felt nailed to the ground and my tears were frozen from long suppressed disappointment […] The marble stone before which I stood was kinder to me than you were. […] Whenever I had called on her I had tried to conceal my amputated arm […] How many words did I need at that time to explain all that had happened to me after her death? I did not cry when I stood in front of her after all that time. I wept unceasingly afterwards. But I simply pass my hands over the marble […] then I put my hand to recite *fatihaat* the tomb, but some strange surreal feeling passed through my body and I lowered my hand. It seemed as if my hand was asking for mercy instead of offering it.[203]

While Hayat/Ahlam is getting ready for her marriage, Khaled decides to visit the tomb of his late mother. This symbolic approach to a woman, who means the homeland for Khaled, is put in comparison with leaving another woman who also means Algeria for Khaled. Khaled is burdened with past disappointments. The use of words such as "tears", "cobweb-covered", and "nailed to the ground" is an extension of the psychologically defeated state that Khaled

[202] Baaqeel, 41.
[203] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 214-15.

endures. The connection between an amputated hand that Khaled lost in the War of Independence and his mother and his lover Hayat/Ahlam is also significant. It means that masculinity is not only suffering unceasingly on a psychological level because of the current war. The scars of the past, represented physically by the amputated arm, remind readers that masculinity in Algeria is weak and fractured. Although Mosteghanemi presents this novel from the perspective of the male protagonist, this defeated masculinity represented by Khaled equals the hegemonic masculine narrative of war. Mosteghanemi invites her readers to interrogate the narrative of this masculinity because it is incomplete, scattered and fragmented, just like Khaled. Khaled's amputated arm symbolizes this weak masculinity. The nation suffers because of wars and Khaled's body displays this suffering through this disability. Khaled says: "I am the handicapped one who lost his arm in forgotten battles."[204] Khaled suffers psychologically and his masculine identity is on display and in contrast to the dominant masculine identity. His disability reflects this trauma on both physical and psychological levels. In his exile in Paris he feels humiliation:

> This is not our time –the postwar period. It is the time for elegant suits, smart cars, and big bellies. I am therefore often ashamed of this arm that accompanies me to the metro, to the restaurant, to the café[…] You feel distressed when you take the metro and grab the strap with your one hand. Then you read on a few seats "Reserved for the war handicapped and pregnant women."[205]

Khaled, despite all his sacrifices to his country, feels that even his body betrays him and that this image is not his true image. This image destabilizes his masculinity and therefore, his disability and his masculinity are connected together and they both suffer because of Algeria. Khaled says: "Like the bridges of Constantine, suspended between two cliffs and two roads, I became weary.[…] Do not look for me on the bridges. They never once carried me. I carried them."[206] Khaled and Constantine are one. His wound is the wound of the city, and just like Constantine he is tired and disappointed. Khaled's disability adds to this image to connect the defeated masculinity that he displays with Algeria.

Furthermore, Mosteghanemi, by highlighting the crisis of masculinity in Algeria and the Arab World, permits the subjectivity and individuality of women and their voices to be presented differently.

---

[204]Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,*62.
[205] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 44.
[206] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 246.

A Different Route to Women's Voices

In the texts examined in the previous chapter, Djebar highlights women's voices, whereas Mosteghanemi approaches women's voices in Algeria and the Arab World differently. As already noted, the use of the male narrative voice in Mosteghanemi's text has paved the way for substantial criticism. The deployment of the male narrative voice in her novel has placed her within the tradition of men's writings, according to some critics. However, this literary technique turns out to be a revolutionary one and reveals how fractured masculinity is in contrast to what McLarney and Bamia have argued. They conclude that this deployment is only a place for Mosteghanemi to hide behind. Bamia also claims that because of this technique *Memory in the Flesh* cannot be categorized as a feminist text. However, Mosteghanemi, while using the male narrative voice ironically, shows how masculinity in the Arab World suffered and this displays another perspective to look at women's voices in the text. Mosteghanemi contests the structure of patriarchal society by displaying weak masculinity. Through the domination of the first person narrator represented by Khaled and through his views about Ahlam/Hayat, Mosteghanemi draws attention to the way that masculinity dominates society. However, she subverts this equation by giving her first-person narrator an unreliable character to shed light on how views about women could be damaging to them.

Mosteghanemi marginalizes the female voice and does not concentrate on female experiences in her text to offer her readers an insightful criticism of the faults of patriarchal society. She also invites her readers to reimagine the form of the female voice in her text by using the male narrative voice and displaying the crisis of masculinity in Algeria and the Arab World clearly in the novel. By using the male narrative voice mainly Mosteghanemi allows her readers to look critically at women's voices in her text. *Memory in the Flesh* is a novel that is told through Khaled. However, there is another hero who is the almost absent voice of Ahlam/Hayat.

The presence of the main female character in the novel is only heard through Khaled's words. Their relationship is only told through Khaled's perspective as he imposes his side of the story. Ahlam/Hayat's voice is only heard through Khaled's recalled conversations. Readers never have the chance to judge Hayat/Ahlam's real experience and it is left to the

readers' imagination to excavate her voice through this mode of resistance that Mosteghanemi alludes to, while she marginalizes Ahlam/Hayat. Khaled's desire and imagination stand against the present/absent Hayat/Ahlam's voice. It is not, as McLarney says, that Mosteghanemi's adoption of the male narrative voice erases her voice. In contrast, the use of the male narrative voice ironically inscribes Mosteghanemi's voice strongly in Algerian and Arabic literature. However, the focus on one perspective and one narrative voice that delineates other narrative voices in the text produces a critical reaction to masculinity in Algerian and Arab society. Khaled says:

> And you were my next project, you were my forthcoming features, my city of the future. I wanted you to be the most beautiful, the most fascinating. I wanted you to have another face, not mine exactly, another heart but not the same as mine.[207]

Khaled projects all his emotion and feelings on Ahlam/Hayat; he sees in her his future and his final destination as much as he sees hope in Algeria. Khaled even formulates Ahlam/Hayat in his imagination as the most beautiful and fascinating. 'I wanted you' Khaled writes to Ahlam/Hayat as if Ahlam/Hayat has no voice. Surprisingly, readers never have the chance to see this relationship from Ahlam/Hayat's perspective. What makes the position even more complex is the projection of Constantine on Ahlam/Hayat so that they become one unified ideal dream for Khaled. When Khaled first meets Ahlam/Hayat he describes his emotions as "Constantine exploded like a fountain inside me."[208] Khaled imagines that Ahlam/Hayat and Constantine are his pure dream. He says:

> I was turning you in the fever of my insanity into a city […] In my heart I decided to make you my fine city, full of pride, ancient and beautiful […] I condemned you to be my Constantine and sentenced myself to insanity. [209]

However, the personification of Constantine as Ahlam/Hayat and the representation of this city through his portraits fail to talk to Ahlam/Hayat. Khaled says:

---

[207] Mosteghanemi , *Memory in the Flesh,*102.
[208] Mosteghanemi, 53.
[209] Mosteghanemi*,* 77.

> Here is *Nostalgia*, my very first painting and next to it the date-Tunis, 1957, my signature written for the first time at the bottom of a painting. It was the same signature I had put under your name and date of birth in the autumn of 1957 when I was registering you at the town hall.
>
> Which one of you is my baby and which one is my love? The question never crossed my mind that day when I watched you standing in front of the painting for the first time. A painting the same age as yourself, except that officially you are a few days older.[210]

Nostalgia and Ahlam/Hayat represent one entity for Khaled. *Nostalgia*, which is a painting about Constantine, and Ahlam/Hayat, who is the daughter of Constantine, meet after twenty-five years in Paris. Khaled even asserts to Ahlam/Hayat that the painting is her twin. In the novel, Ahlam/Hayat refuses to be presented through *Hanin* (Nostalgia). This refusal from Ahlam/Hayat demonstrates the fact that Khaled through *Nostalgia* is unable to communicate with Ahlam/Hayat and that Ahlam/Hayat is a different character from what Khaled is drawing. This paves the way for the reader to think critically about the passive silence that this female character is portrayed with. Mosteghanemi reveals the rejection of male dominance through Ahlam/Hayat's refusal to be presented through the bridges of Constantine. This refusal shows how women are typically portrayed as silenced but, in Mosteghanemi's text, Ahlam/Hayat is different and has a strong voice represented by refusing the imagination of Khaled and the dominance of masculinity.

Even the name of Ahlam /Hayat proves this portrayal of women in Mosteghanemi's text. Ahlam, which means 'dreams', was a name chosen by her father, and Hayat, which means 'life', is the name that her mother called her. This symbolism in her name carries different interpretations. One is that this woman is the dream of Khaled and masculinity and that she represents life for the masculine subjectivity in Algeria and the Arab World. Mosteghanemi tries through this symbolism to construct an image of her female character that is far from being oppressed or silenced. In this framing, Mosteghanemi tries to explore another approach and a different route to present her voice. When Mosteghanemi presents Ahlam/Hayat as a writer, it is Ahlam/Hayat who defends her gift. It is as if readers hear

[210] Mosteghanemi, 38.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi, the author's voice, challenging the norms of the stereotypical image of women and unveiling the strength of her position. Writing about one of his meetings with her, Khaled says:

> I was not a prophet at that moment. Nor were you a Greek goddess. We were just two ordinary statues with defaced limbs, trying to put it together with words […] 'The fact that father left me a big name,' you went on, 'doesn't mean a thing to me, because I've inherited misery with the weight of that name […] I interrupted, trying to make light of your complaints. 'He did not expect that kind of future for you either. You went beyond his dreams and inherited all his ambitions and principles. He was a man who used to see education and knowledge as a kind of religion. He adored the Arabic language. His dream was to see Algeria freed from the superstition and worn-out traditions that had oppressed and destroyed his generation. You don't realize the exceptional luck you have today, in a country that gives you the chance to be an educated woman who can study work and even write. 'I might owe my culture and education to Algeria,' you replied with some irony, 'But becoming a writer is another issue. It is not a gift from anybody.[211]

Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat are represented as true individuals, Khaled is not a prophet and Ahlam/Hayat is not a goddess or a statue. They suffer from life equally but in different ways. Khaled implies to readers that Ahlam/Hayat is privileged because Si Tahir is her father. Nonetheless, she refutes this and also refuses this masculine domination again although she is the daughter of a well-known leader. Ahlam /Hayat is privileged to be an Algerian woman according to Khaled and Algeria gives her the opportunity to be an educated woman. On the other hand, Ahlam/ Hayat sees in writing a gift that she adds to Algeria. Readers are now reading three writers: Mosteghanemi, who writes *Memory in the Flesh*, Khaled who writes to Ahlam/Hayat and Algeria, and Ahlam/Hayat who is a writer but her writings are, just like her voice, not at the centre of the novel. This representation of Ahlam/Hayat, as a writer without offering any of her writings to read and a main character without a chance to see the events from her perspective, invites readers to question these manipulations from Mosteghanemi's side. Mosteghanemi answers these manipulations when Ahlam/Hayat says to Khaled: "I believe critics should find a way of settling this matter once and for all. They

[211] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 66-7.

should either admit that a woman's imagination goes beyond that of a man, or decide to put us all on trial!"[212]

To this day, it is easier for critics to read the representation of women in the Arab World as voiceless and oppressed. However, Mosteghanemi explores and puts to test a new mode of representation that contests the traditional approach of criticizing society. She does this by deploying the male narrative voice ironically and marginalizing the voice of her female character. In the text, Mosteghanemi keeps the structure of the patriarchal society but at the same time, she challenges it. My reading of the text and placing of it in its post-colonial context in Algeria, as I will do next, seeks to demonstrate that Mosteghanemi presents her voice strongly, and what helps this presentation are the use of the Arabic novel genre in Algeria and the choice of the Arabic language.

The Arabic Novel as a Tool of Liberation

The recognition of the genre of the Arabic novel in Algeria did not happen until the period of independence. This is related to the complexities of national identity in Algeria. Shaden M .Tageldin argues that the presence of the Arabic novel in countries of North Africa such as Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco is due to their colonial history and their encounter with modern European Imperialism. She explains that the first adoption of this genre was attributed to the movement of translation that was done during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. The process of this cultural and literary connection transferred and modified literary genres in North African countries and the Arab World in general. She states:

> As early as 1834, Rifa' a' Rafi al-Tahta'wi' who travelled to France in 1826 with an Egyptian delegation sent to study the secrets that underpinned Europe's expanding Empire, launched a translation movement that would import European thoughts and textual models into Arab Africa and in doing so radically transformed modern Arabic Literature.[213]

It was the translation which brought new themes to Arabic literature and modernized it. Similarly, Sabry Hafez has attributed the emergence of the novel genre in the late

[212] Mosteghanemi, 82.
[213] Shaden M.Tageldin, "The African Novel in Arabic," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel,* ed. Irele,F Abiola (Cambridge University Press, 2009),86.

nineteenth century to Western influence. Hafez mentions that al-Tahtawi's translation of Francois de Salignace de la Mothe-Fenelon's *Les Aventures de TEIEmaque*, which was published in Beirut in 1867, marks a new genre that leads "modernity to a changing Arabic-language readership."[214] However, writers in this period did not only consider the cultural contact with Western influence but also invented a new literary hybridized form that combines different genres in Classical Arabic literature such as *musamara* (entertainment) and *maqama* (rhymed prose frame-tale)[215] with the new imported European novel. Writers such as Ali Mubarak, author of *Alam al-Din* (1882), and Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, author of *Hadith Isa ibn Hisham* 1898-1902 (1927), prepared for the emergence of the first Arabic novel in North Africa, especially in Egypt. According to Tageldin,[216] the first recognized Arabic novel, *Zaynab*, was written by Muhammad Husayn Haykal in 1913 in Egypt.

Mosteghanemi's was influenced by the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfuz[217] (1911-2006), winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988; therefore, it is not surprising that she considers modern standard Arabic and nationalism as important elements in the Arabic novel. Muhsin al-Musawi in his study of post-colonial Arabic narrative acknowledges that "the novel in Arabic has gained enormously from Mahfuz's contribution to its urban growth and from his representational narrative." [218] According to al-Musawi, Mahfuz also introduced new norms and patterns to the Arabic novel that brought innovation to this genre. He uses national reality as a significant subject for the novel in the Arab-speaking world. This important approach was considered a radical attitude and resulted from the colonial history that the Arab world suffered. Besides focusing on nationalism in the context of struggle against the colonialism, the concentration on using modern standard Arabic in the Arabic novel plays a huge role in Mahfuz's contribution to this genre. The claim that modern standard Arabic is the only suitable language for the Arabic novel affected many literary circles in the Arab world. The situation in Algeria was very different due to its particular colonial history and the enforcement of French culture. Mosteghanemi

[214] Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqui, 1993), 110.
[215] Tageldin,"The African Novel in Arabic," 87.
[216] It is not only Tageldin who acknowledges this fact.
[217] It is not my interest in this chapter to discuss the prolific writer Mahfuz, but it is important to mention brief points about his contribution to the Arabic novel. The radical influence that Mahfuz achieved in the development of the genre of the Arabic novel impacted writers and novelists after the 1960s.
[218] Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi, *The Post-colonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 22.

challenged this colonial heritage when she adopted the Arabic novel genre in post-colonial Algeria where the official government promoted the policy of Arabization.

After the policy of Arabization in post-colonial Algeria, the rate of literacy among Algerians rose and women gained more mobilization in the public sphere. Writers again brought the topic of Algerian national identity in their writings. The use of the French language to express themes of nationalism and the struggle against French colonialism occupied a huge space in the writings of Algerian writers. However, the process of liberation did not resonate with the use of the colonial language. Writers such as Mohamed Dib, Kateb Yasin, Rashid Boudjedra, Nabile Fares, and more recently Assia Djebar, as Winifred Woodhull mentions, all have "reflections on the interrelation of gender culture and politics."[219] These writers also are "entwined with the reworking of literary forms."[220] Their contributions to Algerian literature constitute radical points in the history of this literature despite their use of French language. Woodhull explains:

> On the one hand, they [the aforementioned writers] give voices to experiences that for a variety of reasons are repressed or silenced in Algerian society. And on the other, they deterritorialize the language of colonialism and [neo-colonialism].[221]

Yet to speak on behalf of the marginalized tongues in Algeria by using the colonial language was a contradiction to the principle of independence. Al-Musawi argues that the encounter with the West and the hegemonic discourse that the colonial power practised in the colonized countries in the Arab world enforced duplication in the techniques of narration which relegated national consciousness to the margins. Literature that was stamped as nationalist was related to the Arabic culture and named the literature of the minority in Algeria. Therefore, as al-Musawi argues, as much as the colonizers consider the culture of the colonized and their language as a place to dominate, writings about nationalism were considered a mark of the marginalized in society. He says: "The sense of anxiety, suspicion, and politicization of issues distinguishes national literature and stamps it with modes and scars of minority writing."[222] In the context of the Algerian experience, although Algerian writers such as Dib, Fares, and Boudjedra engaged with writing against the colonizers, they

[219] Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonizing and Literatures* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 50.
[220] Woodhull, 50.
[221] Woodhull, 50.
[222] Al-Musawi, 164.

failed to construct the nation after independence, and also failed to define a new border for literary activity that resisted the authoritarian powers because of the linguistic factor. Therefore, introducing the Arabic novel into Algerian literary traditions helped to reconstruct Algerian national identity and enforced the fact of "intertextuality with the Arabic literary tradition,"[223] and that the Algerian Arabic novel belongs not only to Algerians but to the wider Arab readership.

The re-emergence of the genre of the Arabic novel in Algeria followed the policy of Arabization and highlighted the marginalization of Algerians who were educated in Arabic. It also indicated the transformation of the Arabic language from a marginalized language into the language of the nation. Even though Algerian literature that was written in French before Independence engaged with the political order in Algeria, literature that was written in Arabic was not mature enough to confront the political and social conditions in Algeria before Independence.

Mosteghanemi wrote in her doctoral thesis in sociology at the Sorbonne, entitled *Algerie: Femmes & Écritures* (Algeria: Woman and Writing), about the image of Algerian women in Algerian literature.[224] She found that Arabic literature in Algeria before 1970 was only conforming to conservatism and was not challenging the order of the Algerian society. Within the national context, Francophone literature in Algeria served this purpose. Therefore, "in Mustaghanami's estimation, it was not until the 1970s with the advent of writers such as Abd al-Hamid bin Haduqa and Tahir Wattar that Arabic literature began to contest the conformity and conservatism of the previous generation's Arabic language writing."[225] It is an indication that the genre of Arabic novel in Algeria was not mature and was not able to engage with demands of the political and social climate in Algeria before Independence.

Mosteghanemi argues in her dissertation that the French language and French literature that was written by Algerian writers as early as 1920 did not bring to light women's emancipation in Algeria. In contrast, it was the Algerian Arabic-language male

[223] Elizabeth M. Holt, "In a Language that Was Not His Own: On Ahlam Mustaghanami's *Dhakirat al-Jasad* and its French Translation *Memoires de la Chair," Journal of Arabic Literature* no. 39(2008): 123.
[224] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, "*Algerie: femme et Ecritures*, Algeria: Woman and Writing," trans. Shaden M Tageldin (PhD diss., Paris : L'Hartmattan, 1985).
[225] Holt, 126.

writers who introduced the issue of women's liberation into Algerian literature. She says that "French language literature in Algeria was not interested in the problem of women but used her rather to exotic ends."[226] According to Mosteghanemi, it was not until 1947 that the first Francophone Algerian female writer, Djamila Bebech, engaged with women's liberation in Algeria. It is significant to note that during the War of Independence in Algeria, Arabic literature had no visible appearance because of the marginalization of the Arabic language by the colonizers. As a result, French language literature in Algeria was the only form of literature that engaged with the resistance. Thus, it became the role of Francophone literature to highlight women's voices in Algeria, and Djebar's writings could be used as examples.[227]

Mosteghanemi had a recognizable impact on the Algerian literary circle as a woman writer because she transgressed linguistic codes. This is not only on the level of performing this genre of 'the Arabic novel' in a complex period in the history of Algeria and the Arab World but also her role in challenging the literature that was written in French and expressing Algerian women's voices. Arabic Algerian Literature replaced French Algerian literature in introducing themes of resistance and women's emancipation not only to the Algerian readership but also to the Arab readership more widely.

On the other hand, Mosteghanemi in her dissertation criticizes the two extremes that were presented by Algerian women writers such as the Francophone writer Fadila M'Rabet and the Arabophone writer Zhor Wanisi in their literature. According to Mosteghanemi, those two writers present examples of connecting language with literature and society. While Wanisi defends the traditions of Algerian society in her writings, M'Rabet criticizes this society and alludes to French culture. In this comparison that Mosteghanemi draws, she concludes that it has always been this case, Arabic is related to the conservatism of society and French is related to radicalism. Therefore, the Arabic novel in Algeria before Independence and during the revolution was marginalized because it lacked the spirit of change that dominated the Algerian society then. In this context, Mosteghanemi's novel presents a reformation and reformulation of the radicalism and conservatism in Algerian society. *Memory in the Flesh* manages to liberate the Arabic novel from the path of

[226] Mosteghanemi, "*Algerie: femme et Ecritures* , Algeria,"288.
[227] See Chapter One.

glorifying the tradition of society and from the colonial heritage that assumes all Algerian men are evil.[228] The character Khaled bin Toubal signifies masculinity defeated by the tumult of the war as represented in the novel by fragments, partiality, and scattered long monologues. This narration of fragile masculinity liberates women from the hegemonic discourse of power, and also liberates Mosteghanemi, the writer, from the dominant tradition of writing.

The use of the male narrative voice in an Arabic novel in Algeria liberates Mosteghanemi. It also presents her to her readers as a professional negotiator with society, at a time when the war of languages was still identifying writers and sometimes excluding them from their readership. At a time of heated debate about nationalism in the Arab world, Mosteghanemi as an Algerian woman produces a novel that ironically questions the structure of power in society. Moreover, a highly political consciousness that relates Algerian history with the history of the Arab World dominates the novel and adds to the distinctiveness of *Memory in the Flesh*.

In a particular look at this issue, Mosteghanemi shows a different perspective that opposes Joseph Zeidan's argument in his book *Arab Women Novelists*. Zeidan claims that women writers in the Arab World adopt the technique of conformity with men's tradition in writing. In his study to map the contribution of the pioneering generation[229] of women writers to Arabic literature, Zeidan finds that "Female contribution to Arabic literature varied with time and has been assessed differently over time."[230] However, this contribution confirms men's traditions and women writers had to adjust their writings according to "literary norms and standards established by men."[231] Women writers' contribution started as early as the pre-Islamic time in the calendar of the Arab world and it was in "the form of

[228] In her well-known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, Spivak in her critique of the imperialist political economy outlined a sentence that summarizes a history of colonial repression of both subjugated men and women in colonized countries: 'White men are saving brown women from brown men,' a reference to the abolition of the widow suttee in India by British colonialism. Spivak argues that this form of 'protecting the women', which is a remark to the newly born society after colonialism, is also a reference to "the survival of the colonially established 'good' society after decolonization". In relation to her appropriation of masculine subjects, Mosteghanemi insists that men and women suffer equally.

[229] Joseph Zeidan means women writers from pre-Islamic times and afterwards in the Arab World.

[230] Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelist: The formative Years and Beyond* (State University of New York Press, 1995), 42.

[231] Zeidan, 42.

poetry."[232] Zeidan also argues that women writers' contribution, though it is shy and limited, occupies an important place in Arabic literature. However, in the early twentieth century and with the advent of education, women writers in the Arab world developed their literary forms, and their "Literature took on a new and rich dimension."[233] This accompanied the emergence of the genre of the novel in the Arab world. However, this contribution suffered from social impediments which Zeidan explains as the intellectual restrictions imposed on women writers. These restrictions were rigid and they enforced challenges on women writers. The struggle to deviate from men's conventions in writing was almost impossible and women had to accept men's traditions in writing, such as not to bring awareness of inequality between the two sexes in society. Their only solution was to follow the aesthetics of literary fields created and dominated by male writers as Zeidan mentions. This was called the *imitative phase* in which women writers had only to follow the available models of literature, which was male novels. This was the case before most of the Arab countries gained their independence. After liberation from colonialism in the 1950s and the 1960s, Arab women writers focused on personal views and employed their writings to fight patriarchy. This approach led to the neglect of the national issues in the Arab World. The dissatisfaction with the culture whose norms are set by men resulted in a project of self-fulfilment in writing rather than engaging with the political national consciousness and social commitment in the Arab world.[234] As an example, Assia Djebar at the beginning of her career focused on self-centred and individualistic writings, thereby ignoring the upheavals that her country Algeria was going through before and during the War of Independence. The important and functional role that politics plays in reforming Arabic literature and culture after independence raises the question about the voice of women writers in supporting the national identity rather than only focusing on personal identity. However, Zeidan also argues that this alienation from the national causes produced by Arab women writers was imposed on them because of the position of women in the Arab world itself. An important reason for this is censorship, which was practised more rigidly on women writers compared to male writers.

[232] Poetry was the only form of literature at that time.
[233] Zeidan, 74.
[234] As examples: the Lebanese writer Layla Ba'labbaki in *I Live (*1958), and the Syrian Writer Colette al-Khuri in *Days with Him* (1959), among others.

Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, in contrast to the argument that Zeidan has presented, engages with both the political and the individual. It shows weak masculinity by narrating agonizing social and political circumstances. It does not only show an engagement with the political upheavals in Algeria, but also it shows a total commitment to Arab causes such as the Palestinian conflict. Mosteghanemi's novel shows a developed political consciousness that adds a new dimension to literature produced by women writers and defies the assumed lack of originality in those productions. The combination of the suffering of Algerians during the War of Independence and the corruption that led to the civil war with the suffering of the Arab world is done on purpose to place Algeria on the map of the Arab world symbolically after the history of French colonialism and to regain its Arab nationalism that was once lost.

Following the revolution in Algeria, corrupted powers and the abusers of revolution turned Algeria and the values of the revolution into a burden that was only carried by those who defended Algeria. Khaled, who fought in the War of Independence, refused to participate with those who abused the revolution. He dissociated himself from those who enjoyed the advantages of being former fighters. This happens when he chooses to be exiled in Paris rather than working to confiscate and silence people's voices. Hence, readers hear Mosteghanemi's voice through Khaled's monologue in which he laments his old friend Si Mustafa:

> He was a man with high combat ethics, a man of decency, and I used greatly to respect and admire him, then his stock declined in my view as it rose in the views of others. In more than one way, and in more than one currency. He was like all the others who went before, running after fat positions, having taken his turn in an assiduous sharing of the good things of life.[235]

Mosteghanemi shares with Khaled the frustration with the homeland and the ambition for a better future in Algeria. Khaled holds the scars of the war through his amputated arm and symbolically holds the disappointment generated by those who abuse his homeland. Khaled's disability and his amputated arm are not only a physical display of loss, this mark on his body also mirrors his inner destruction. Khaled remembers two different incidents in which he was a prisoner, once by the French power and once by Algerian authorities which

[235] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 49.

failed the country. Mosteghanemi combines those bitter Algerian memories with the bitter history of the Arab world. The comments on those defeats mark a deviation from the stereotyped writings of women which somehow ignored the political consciousness of the nation, according to Zeidan. Khaled says:

> In addition to June 1967,[236] the month brought other painful memories. The most recent was of June 1971 when I was in prison, being interrogated and tortured [...] the first painful June, I was in the al-Kudya[237]prison […] Which June was the more oppressive? Which experience was the most painful? I had avoided raising these questions: the answer had made me pack my bags and leave for 'home,' a home that became a big prison […] A quarter of a century earlier would I, a keen, a proud young man cherishing wild dreams have expected to see day when an Algerian would strip someone like me […] throw me into a cell in the name of revolution? The very revolution that had already stripped me of my arm![238]

The Algerian Revolution, War of Independence, the struggle against French colonialism, and eventually the civil war are all parts of the memory of any Algerian writer of this generation. The engagement with those political histories shows an enormous commitment to national identity and the causes of the nation. However, Mosteghanemi transgresses the borders of her country to embrace the case of the Arab World, just as she transgresses into the masculinity of the language and the masculine tradition of writing. Therefore, she implies the opposite of the accusation directed toward women writers. This demonstrates that *Memory in the Flesh* with its political consciousness is not a "reflection of the modes of representation" that "[dominates] the field of contemporary Algerian literature" or the Arabic literature that is "dominated by male writers,"[239] as McLarney argues. On the contrary, it shows a total deviation from the aesthetics of literary fields dominated by men in the Arab World and it shows a reflection of Arabic political consciousness.

The character of Ziad, a Palestinian poet, a friend of Khaled, a writer, a fighter against the Israeli occupation, and a revolutionary against the corrupt Arab regimes, is a

[236] 1967 is an important date in the Arab history in which the Arab troops were defeated by Israel.
[237] Al-kudya is a notorious prison where the Algerians were tortured by the French colonial power.
[238] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 159-60.
[239] McLarney, "Unlocking the female in Ahlam Mustaghanami," 25.

manifestation of Mosteghanemi's transcending the artificial boundaries that are imposed on a woman writer. Khaled says:

> Nothing has really changed since then. None of the Arab regimes that Ziad had reckoned would fall had actually fallen since we had met. Not one political earthquake had occurred to change the map of the nation. Only Lebanon had become the home of earthquakes and quicksand […] Discussion always ended on Palestine, the conflict among the various factions, the battle fought in Lebanon among their partisans […] Ziad's discussions always ended as usual by cursing those regimes that purchased their glory with Palestinian blood.[240]

Khaled and Ziad, just like Mosteghanemi, are individuals in a geographical area that is destined to witness some of the most horrific wars in modern history. Khaled describes: "Everything was designed for pain. There we were sharing our pride, a round of loaf of Arab bread along with our wounds."[241] The embracing of different important political major incidents in the Arab World has presented Mosteghanemi to her readership as a committed aspirational political writer who advocates the collective experiences of Algerians and Arabs over her individualistic writings.

Aida A. Bamia in "*Dhakirat al-Jasad* (*The Body's Memory*): A New Outlook on Old Themes"[242] argues that Mosteghanemi intentionally deploys a male narrator to hide her voice from her audience and to create a distance to evaluate the political and the social situation in her country Algeria in the post-colonial period from a masculine perspective. With this approach, Bamia might have ignored the impact that Mosteghanemi creates in this novel and her attempt to create an agency for women in her text. Therefore, Bamia's argument contextualizes Mosteghanemi's novel within the paradigm of men's traditions in writing. Such an approach deprives this novel of the exceptional characteristic of being the first Arabic Algerian novel that was written by a woman in Algeria. Likewise during the

[240] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 129.
[241] Mostehanemi, 140.
[242] Aida A Bamia, "*Dhakirat al-Jasad (The Body's Memory)*: A New Outlook on Old Themes," *Research in African Literature* 28, no.3 (1997):39.

publication of her novel in 1985, Mosteghanemi faced an enormous attack. McLarney writes:

> Ahlam Mustaghanami has recently faced the worst ignominy that can befall a woman writer: the accusation that a man actually wrote her first novel *Dhakirat al-Jasad* (Memory of the Body, 1993). An article in *Al-Quds al-Arabi* describes her sense of disappointment and betrayal at the allegation that Iraqi writer and poet Sadi Yusuf was the novel's true author.[243]

This accusation made to Mosteghanemi shows Bamia's questioning the ability of Arab women writers to confront their audience and establish a dialogue with their societies freely without the need to be judged or framed in a certain image. Writing would be something to hide behind, not a means to achieve immense progress for Arab women writers to raise their voices if they have to hide behind a male narrator or use a male narrative voice. In contrast, I have argued that irony as a political strategy in the novel comes to serve this point and shows the ability of Mosteghanemi to place her voice actively on the map of Arab women writers.

A Vindication of the Arabic language: Mosteghanemi versus Djebar

Although Mosteghanemi and Djebar share the same political goal with their writings, they have different strategic choice of language. While Djebar focused heavily on the use of the French language in a complex colonial and post-colonial period in the history of Algeria, Mosteghanemi inscribes the Algerian nation outside the French language domination. Djebar considered the French language as the only language that could express women's freedom and offered her the space that supposedly "patriarchal" Arabic could not give.[244] Djebar also saw the act of Arabization as an act of silencing Francophone[245] writers by patriarchal oppressive forces in Algeria after Independence represented by the FIS and the FLN fronts.[246] French for Djebar represented the secular force and space that could free Algerian women. If French was once the wounding language that exiled Algerians who speak "Tamazight and Arabic from equal citizenship with their Franco-French counterparts in the

[243] McLarney, "Unlocking the Female," 24.
[244] Tageldin, "Which Qalam is for Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation and Language in Dejbar's *L'amour La Fantasia* and Mosteghanemi's *Dhakirat Al-Jasad,*" *Comparative Literature Studies* 4, no.3 (2009):470.
[245] Francophone is a term that I do not agree with because it is an evidence of the colonial heritage in the most liberated domain which is writing. However, I have to use this term to refer to writers who write in French.

linguistic nation of Francophone, Arabic for Djebar is now the colonial executioner and French the wounded tongue."[247] French for Djebar is the tool to excavate hidden female voices in Algeria because she did not use any other language to express her opinions regarding Algerian Women.

The linguistic drama that enforced itself on writers in Algeria after Independence crystallized in the Arabization of Algeria, and transformed into evidence to support the Algerian national identity. In contrast to Djebar, who claims to speak of other women to emphasize women's voices in her literary forms by using French, Mosteghanemi chooses Arabic and her path engages with women's voices within the context of Arabization. Djebar has the same attitude towards French as Mosteghanemi has towards Arabic. This very strongly held position on the choice of the available languages derives from the complex political situation and the politicisation of language whereby communities under occupation are prohibited from using their own language and have the language of the colonizers imposed on them.

Mosteghanemi was from the first generation who were educated in Arabic in Algeria after the Act of Arabization. Historically, French colonialism practised an oppressive linguistic enforcement on Algerians, thereby depriving the teaching of indigenous languages in Algeria. That resulted in a high illiteracy rate because Algerians who refused to send their children to French schools were deprived of education. Elizabeth. M. Holt acknowledges that in the fifties and early sixties, "Algerian writers and intellectuals who were educated in Arabic had been students of religious schools [...] or had received university diplomas outside Algeria in Tunis, Cairo, Damascus or Baghdad."[248] However, the case for Algerian women was even more difficult. They suffered from a lack of access to education more than their male counterparts. The lack of education during the colonial time impacted the presence of women in public life. After Independence, more women were able to gain education and that was reflected in the Algerian literary milieu. Erin Towhig expresses that: "Post-independence Arabization policy targeted the education system, publishing, media and government, domains from which women were often excluded."[249] Therefore,

[247] Tageldin, "Which Qalam is for Algeria,"471.
[248] Holt, 126.
[249] Erin Towhig, "Gender, Genre and Literary Firsts: The Case of Zhor Wanisi and Ahlam Mosteghanemi," *Journal of the Middle East Women's Studies* 15, no.3 (2019):295.

educating the nation was not only considered as a decolonizing tool and a desirable goal for Algeria but also helped to empower women's voices in Algeria. In the same perspective, Mosteghanemi recognizes the significant role of language in reforming the Algerian nation after Independence:

> Mustaghanimi dared to uphold the "innocence" of modern standard Arabic in Algeria and thus its legitimacy (if not primacy) as a language of Algerian Literary expression. Moreover, she did so at a time when other Algerian writers not only questioned the capacity of that language to reflect Algerian social reality and to speak to diverse Algerian publics, but also charged the spirit of Arabization with waging war on Algeria's *francophonie*.[250]

Mosteghanemi's novel offers a stage for the linguistic drama that occupied Algeria. Just like Djebar who was attacked for using French, Mosteghanemi was attacked from different fronts in Algeria for pursuing the Arabic language. After receiving the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz Medal For literature in 1998 at the American University in Cairo, Mosteghanemi in her acceptance speech focused on Arabophone writers in Algeria who were targeted by the Francophone writers. She also thanked those who offered moral support to Algerian writers writing in Arabic "who confront unarmed the onslaughts of Francophonie and its diverse temptation."[251] In her speech, Mosteghanemi honoured her colleagues who chose to write in Arabic at a time when adopting one language in a linguistically diverse country is considered as a betrayal to one's companions in the nation.

The accusations that targeted writers who wrote in Arabic from the Francophone writers were, firstly, to question the ability of the Arabic language to express the consciousness of Algerians, and, secondly, to question the political affiliations of those writers and intellectuals. After the brutal confrontation between the FIS and FLN in 1990 and the continuous assassinations of intellectuals and writers who opposed the oppressive state in Algeria, Francophone writers accused the Arabic language and insisted on the inclusivity of the French language. However, as Tageldin explains, Mosteghanemi on this occasion defended the innocence of the Arabic language and mourned those who had been killed because of their linguistic choices. The same oppressive institutions in Algeria that

---

[250] Tageldin, 468.

[251] Ahlam Mosteghanemi, "To Colleagues of the Pen," *Al-Ahram Weekly On-Line* no. 409 (December, 1998) , NP.

abused Francophone writers, abused the Arabophone writers for the same reason which was to express Algerian identity. Indeed Mosteghanemi in her novel asserts the idea of linguistic oppression exercised by the colonial powers when Khaled returns to his school after being persecuted by the French during the War of Independence:

> I went back to Constantine Secondary school. I had missed one year but found the same syllabus, the same philosophy and the same French literature waiting for me. […] That was the privilege of those who had been marked by some as traitors simply because they choose French culture and French secondary school in a city where nobody could ignore the power of the Arabic language or the impact it had in the hearts and memories of the people.[252]

In this paragraph, the repetition of the word "the same" indicates the oppressive lack of choice or opportunity for expression in a language other than the French language. Mosteghanemi defends the choices of Algerians and also refers to the practice of French colonialism of excluding and deleting the Arabic language from public presence in Algeria. The Arabic language has an impact on the hearts of the Algerians and it is related to their memory and history. The challenge that Mosteghanemi adopts in projecting the Arabic language in her novel contests also the accusation of the Francophone writers in addressing political aspirations and social ambitions in Algeria. Indeed, Arabic is transformed to be not only a language to communicate, but a hero in the novel. The Arabic language holds the responsibility to defend the nation after Independence. Holt explains that "Writing in Arabic marks a break with French colonialism."[253] Mosteghanemi uses multiple references to Arabic literary classics in the novel to relate Algeria to the Arab World and to reflect on the Algerian past and its Arabic tongue. Khaled says:

> Shared dreams began there. History dwelt in its streets and was alone. […] My feeling of being Arab walked with me from one neighbourhood to another, and then suddenly I was filled with a mysterious feeling of prejudice. You could not belong to that city without adhering to its Arab character. The beard and words of Bin Badis

[252] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 17.
[253] Holt, 129.

> still rules this city even after his death. […] the only unofficial anthem that we all have learned.
>
> *The People of Algeria are Muslims*
>
> *And belong to Arabism*
>
> *Whoever says they have moved away from that*
>
> *Or have died from that –He lies*
>
> […] 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 […] The words had a great power to bring us together.[254]

Khaled connects the history of Constantine/Algeria with its Arabic context. The streets are still a witness to the history that was before French colonialism. The Arabic Identity is like a companion walking alongside him. Khaled explores in some detail what it means to him with all the complexities and contradictory impulses. Khaled uses the words of an old poem by Bin Badis (one of the beys who ruled Algeria).This shows that no matter how hard the colonial powers tried to dismantle the language and the culture, history is visible and connects people with their roots. On the other hand, Khaled uses words such as 'mysterious feeling of prejudice' to reflect on the linguistic drama that affected Algerians and to highlight this deep-rooted complex conflict.

Moreover, the language of the novel is highly poetic and borrows from different Arab poets' poems to reflect on the Algerian situation. When Hayat/Ahlam visits Khaled in his flat in Paris, he invites her to talk in a place called *al-Shorfa* (the balcony). Their talk is about *al-matar* (the rain). The intimacy that Khaled and Hayat/Ahlam feel is translated through the word *matar*. They exchange looks and what adds magic to the scene is Hayat/Ahlam's words in Arabic. "Your voice in Arabic came to me like music played by a solo player"[255] Khaled says. Then, she remembers two lines of poetry by a well-known Arabic poet Badr Shaker al-Sayyab:

"*You are the two palm trees at the hour of dawn,*

[254] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 207-8.
[255] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 105.

Or two verandas to which the moon has taken a detour".[256]

The English translation in this scene, specifically in translating the word *al-Shorfa* first into balcony and second into verandas, plays a very negative role in showing Mosteghanemi's linguistic ability. Khaled and Hayat /Ahlam are enjoying *al-matar* in *al-Shorfa*, and in *al-Shorfa,* Khaled memorizes for Hayat/Ahlam *The Song of al-matar*. Mosteghanemi plays with words to produce a new image of the Algerian nation and inserts poetic idioms into her language to challenge those who accuse the Arabic language of incompetence to speak on behalf of the Algerians.

Mosteghanemi pays tribute to the Algerian writer Malek Haddad by adopting the Arabic language and describes him as the martyr of the Arabic language. In her introduction to the novel, she dedicates it: "To the memory of Malek Haddad, son of Constantine, who swore after the independence of Algeria not to write in a language that was not his. The blank pages assassinated him".[257] Mosteghanemi is not only paying tribute to Haddad, she is also honouring her father Muhammad al-Sharif Mosteghanemi who was a French teacher and compelled to use the tongue of the colonizers. He was not able to write and read in Arabic and felt the sorrow of the colonial cultural burden. The linguistic disappointment that the generation of Independence held is portrayed in Mosteghanemi's protagonist Khaled:

> Immediately after independence, I avoided any political post I was offered when everyone else was running breathlessly after them. My only dream was a post in the shadows that would let me make some changes creating waves. When I was appointed head of the press and publications in Algeria, I felt born for that post because I'd spent the years of my time in Tunis studying the Arabic language deeply. I tried to get over my complex of being an Algerian with French as my first language. Within two years I was bilingual.[258]

Mosteghanemi inscribes in Arabic the sorrow of these men and fights the legacies of French colonialism. In Arabic, Mosteghanemi sees the liberation of Algeria. Arabic meant for the

[256] Mosteghanemi*, Memory in the Flesh,* 105.
[257] Mosteghanemi's dedication in *Memory in the Flesh,* n.p.
[258]Mosteghanemi, 96-7.

generation of Independence a way of resisting the cultural heritage of colonialism. The journey that Khaled takes from his exile city Paris to return to Algeria to write his novel in Arabic symbolises Mosteghanemi's vision of the future of Algeria and its salvation in Arabic.

Mosteghanemi asserts that Arabic represents the future of Algeria and that the French language strips Algeria from its national identity and the emphasis on writing in Arabic is to define the nationalist dream in Algeria. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1985) explains that the success of any national liberation movement depends on "national print-languages" as "central ideological and political importance."[259] Mosteghanemi believes that the official adaptation to the Arabic language is very important for political change in Algeria. In 2019, Mosteghanemi wrote on her Twitter account regarding the substitution of the French language for English as the second language in Algeria: "A brave historical decision, Kateb Yasine used to say that French was, "a war booty" for Algerians, in fact, it was a booty for France, as its tongue conquered our economy, inner slaves and destinies."[260] In the novel, Mosteghanemi translated this linguistic drama between Arabic and French through Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat's visual and verbal arts painting and writings. In the exhibition in Paris that Khaled hosts for his paintings, Hayat and Khaled exchange the verbal and the visual by placing Arabic and French in contrast. When Hayat/Ahlam moves her eyes across Khaled's painting, she claims that she likes his style and says, "It is not a compliment, but I think if I ever drew, it would be like this. It seems as if both of us look at things with the same feelings."[261] Khaled is emotionally overcome by the word "*al-ithnaine* (both of us)." He asks her immediately, "Do you paint?" She replies "No I write." Then he asks her "What language do you write in," for her to answer him directly, "Arabic". Khaled is very surprised to hear that Hayat/Ahlam writes in Arabic and clarifies further that Hayat/Ahlam is a strong character who exceeds Khaled's imagination. She justifies that she could have written in French but Arabic is the language of her heart. She says: "I can only write in Arabic. We write in the language in which we feel."[262] However, she continues to say that it is only habit to speak in French, and French is reduced to a mechanical and

[259] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 17.
[260] Ahlam Mostegahnemi's tweet was as a response to the political change in Algeria: "A Brave Historical Decision" (@AhlamMosteghanemi, July 30, 2019).
[261] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 56.
[262] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 56.

habitual language and Arabic becomes the language of creativity and emotions. Then Hayat /Ahlam adds that: "The Language in which we talk to ourselves is all that matters, and not the one we use to talk to others."[263] Khaled is more than overwhelmed by Hayat/Ahlam's attitude. Hayat/Ahlam now represents for Khaled the old dream of Algerian nationalism. He says: "My constant convictions and the first dreams I have of my country are embodied in one woman, a woman who happens to be you, the daughter of none other Si Tahir."[264] Then Khaled asks Hayat/ Ahlam if both of them could only use Arabic to talk. As much as resistance matters, language forms a significant side of this resistance. During the War of Independence, Khaled lost an arm and moved to Tunisia to be treated. His doctor advises him to write to overcome his sorrows and his pain. Khaled during that time remembers the prediction of his teacher that he would write in French. Khaled refuses to write in French, thus not fulfilling this vision of the post-colonial future of Algeria. Mosteghanemi's attitude and vision in her novel towards the project of liberation in Algeria after the civil war was recognized by UNESCO. In 2016, UNESCO nominated Mosteghanemi to be Artist for Peace, and the award was directly related to her writings about the war in Algeria.

Conclusion

When *Memory in the Flesh* was published it met with an uneven response from critics, and the writer Mosteghanemi was under attack as much as she was awarded. This text is considered a landmark in Algerian literary circles because it has connected Algeria with its Arab roots and geographical location. The mature political consciousness that it articulates plays a profound role in presenting this Arabic Algerian text to Arab readerships. Arabic as a language is the hero in this novel and it helps the political consciousness that the novel shows to reach a wider public.

More importantly, the deployment of the male narrative voice as an ironic strategy to represent weak masculinity in Algeria contrasts the dominant images of patriarchy. This locates Mosteghanemi in a problematic and risky position. Political and historical reality forces Mosteghanemi to negotiate with society through unconventional narration. Mosteghanemi manipulates the masculine perspective that speaks on behalf of the political history in Algeria and the Arab world in the novel. Further analysis demonstrates that

[263] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 57.
[264] Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh,* 57.

Mosteghanemi's text does not merely reflect and reproduce its context. On the contrary, it challenges this context and brings to attention the degradation of women's status by refusing the stereotypical image of women in the Arab world. Misrepresentation is the first enemy of women in the Arab World. That is why the need to produce a new feminist threshold by writers and intellectuals and foster a new and experimental technique that is particular to the Arab world is more urgent than ever. Therefore, Mosteghanemi criticized patriarchy by deploying a male narrative voice in order to show a different route to women's voices.

Chapter Three

The Use of Multiple First-Person Narrators in Hanan Al-Shaykh's Lebanese Civil War Novel *The Story of Zahra* and the Orientalising of Women's Voices in Translation

In the previous two chapters, which from Part One of the thesis, I focused on the Algerian civil war and how Assia Djebar and Ahlam Mosteghanemi both in their works criticized patriarchy and the hegemonic power in Algeria in their strategic choices of language while using various narrative voices. Their narrative voices resist the constraints that are placed on women writers in Algeria from patriarchy and the hegemonic powers, and both of them present a feminist project which is unique in its content. My focus in part Two will be on the Lebanese Civil War. In this chapter, I will present an analytical study of the novel *The Story of Zahra* (*Hikayat Zahra*, 1980) by Hanan Al-Shaykh.

Since the publication of the *Story of Zahra* a wealth of Arabic and Western literary criticism has been produced about the novel. However, almost none has approached the political use of the multiple first-person narrators in the novel represented by the heroine, Zahra, and the male characters, Hashem and Majed. My reading of the novel will bring to light how the deployment of the multiple first-person narrators in the Arabic version creates a war text that differs considerably from the subsequent English-translated text *The Story of Zahra*. The use of multiple first-person narrators in the Arabic text offers a different

perspective from that of the translated text regarding the socio-political reality and gender relations of Lebanese society. The English-translated text *The Story of Zahra* by Peter Ford only presents and enforces one perspective by highlighting only one voice which is Zahra's and marginalizes other voices, such as her uncle Hashem's voice, by omitting different parts from his section. On the copyright page of the English version, it is clearly stated that "The text of *The Story of Zahra* was rendered into English by Peter Ford with the author's cooperation."[265] Hanan Al-Shaykh, who is known for her rebellious and challenging texts, appears to approve a compromised translation of her novel, and this raises significant questions. However, I try here not to make any claim about Al-Shaykh's decision to approve translating the novel in this particular way; I only confine myself to the textual evidence that is in the novel.[266] I am also depending on the attitudes that she has revealed in different interviews. For example, in a talk held at the British Library in 2019, Al-Shaykh emphasized the role of writers in resisting constraints on their texts exemplified by religious, political, and social censorship and called for experiencing rebellion. This attitude, according to Al-Shaykh, is the way to creativity. Al-Shaykh's early career was shaped by reading challenging and controversial books by Qasim Amin, Zaynab Fawaz, and Labiba Hashem.[267] In this period, Al-Shaykh argues that she did not want to be known as a woman writer who wrote only one part of a story or for her writings to be purely autobiographical. She believes that "women's stories should not be locked inside these walls."[268] These statements by Al-Shaykh contradict the idea that she co-operated in a process of translation that renders her text to fit a presumed Western stereotyping of individuals in the Arab World.

---

[265] Hanan Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra*, trans. Peter Ford (London: Quartet Book Limited, 1986), np.

[266] In an article entitled "Whitewashing Arabic for Global Consumption: Translating Race in the Story of Zahra" *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no.1 (2017), Ghenwa Hayek also justifies her position in her article by depending on the textual evidence of the translated text, however, Hayek focus on the part of the translation that omits race and racial language that appears in the Arabic novel.

[267] I have mentioned these writers earlier in the introduction of the thesis, referring to the fact that their writings have challenged society.

[268] Al-Shaykh, "My Travel through Cultures: Languages and Writing from Abu-Nuwas to Bint Al-Shaykh," Talk presented at the Knowledge Centre, the British Library, London: UK, 7 November 2019, YouTube, 56:27. https://youtu.be/M_etRG1o-k8?si=mhMH__io2JOsrm0j

Critics such as Patricia Zaylah, Hoda Hilal, Lea Yahchouchi,[269] and Michelle Hartman, all argue that the English-translated novel of Al-Shaykh tries to produce a text that could be labelled as a reductively feminist text by highlighting the suffering of the heroine character Zahra at the expense of male characters. According to Michelle Hartman, the "translation" of *Hikayat Zahra* "impacts how scholars and critics reproduce ideas that functionally shape knowledge about women and the Lebanese Civil War."[270] In the case of this novel, the translation might re-establish and reinvigorate the same stereotypical images about women in the Arab World. In this chapter, I will argue that the use of multiple first-person narrators in the Arabic text challenges the English-translated text by presenting different perspectives on local society and politics. The English-translated text, however, produces an orientalised text that drastically changes characters to follow a dogmatized Western ideological approach when looking into women's position in the Arab world. My approach puts into question the hegemonic reproduced system of ideas and assumed ideological knowledge which stereotyped individuals in the Arab World.

Nonetheless, in a her talk at the British Library in 2019,[271] Al-Shaykh mentioned incidents from her childhood and that her exposure to different women who followed religious and secular lives gave her the need "to put a particular voice onto [sic] papers."[272] This voice was the voice of her rebellious self that disagrees with every constraint that is put on the life of individuals in the Arab World. Al-Shaykh also remembers reading a novel by Lebanese writer Layla Balbakki *Ana Ahya* (I live, 1958). This novel made her write a criticism of patriarchal society in the form of reflections at the age of sixteen. This article was published in *Al-Nahar* newspaper under the title of "A Stare in Our Neighbourhood."[273] She said that her infatuation with Balbakki's text was the reason behind the call for freedom of individuals in society in her article and, subsequently, in her writings. She even asserts that Arab society is a both matriarchal and patriarchal society and that all individuals are oppressed by God and man alike. She says that the book represents for her "a cry for

[269] Patricia Zaylah, Hoda Hilal and Lea Yahchouchi "Women Moving Across Cultures: The Representations of Zahra's Character in the Target Version A Case Study of Hanan Al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*," *International Journal of Comparative Literature& Translation Studies* 9, no.4 (2012):1-21.
[270] Michelle Hartman, "Zahra's Uncle, or Where are Men in Women's War Stories? ," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 51(2020):87.
[271] I attended this talk that was held at the British Library on 7th November, 2019,
[272] Al-Shaykh, "My Travel," at 17:20.
[273] Al-Shaykh, "My Travel," at 20:01.

individuality and a cry for justice from the forces of darkness."[274]These statements by Al-Shaykh contradict her approval of a different patriarchy to control her voice and claim authority on her text. Given the differences between the Arabic version of *Hikayat Zahra* and the English version of *The Story of Zahra,* Al-Shaykh seems to have made a compromise to promote her novel to a different audience. That compromise from Al-Shaykh produces a text that does not necessarily call for justice or freedom.

However, Al-Shaykh in her career challenges patriarchy in the Arab World by presenting controversial themes such as sexuality. Her literary voice seems to challenge patriarchy and masculinity in the Arab World, even though she refused to be called a feminist writer. She argues in an interview with Yasmine El-Geressi in *Majall* magazine, that the title of an Arab feminist writer confines her as an author and labels her in a cliché that is used to describe any woman writer who chooses to write about women. Al-Shaykh answers: "Everyone who has a half of a brain would consider themselves as a feminist. It shouldn't be an issue, it should be a must […] I got tired of hearing the Arab Lebanese woman feminist all the time […] You don't say white male writer, so why should we refer to women writers in this way."[275]Al-Shaykh in the same interview asserts an important point which is the double standard for men and women writers when it comes to choosing a topic or the form of language or even the genre. She says that whether it is Mahfouz, Tayeb Saleh, Yahya Haqqi, and Yousef Idris,[276] they have all included women characters in their novels and that "women were important in their fiction."[277] However, they were not categorized in certain frames that limited their readership. Al-Shaykh defies the narrative of labelling women writers with certain titles because she believes that these are also the production of a patriarchal society. Again, these statements by Al-Shaykh contradict the fact that she agreed to a compromised translation of her novel *Hikayat Zahra*, and highlight not only the role of Arabic patriarchy in confiscating voices of women but also the role of the wider patriarchy represented by the orientalised discourse and its intellectual productions in practising the same oppressive attitude. Therefore, the problem of constructing fixed frames and readymade stereotypes for any woman writer in the Arab World is a question to ask when it

[274] Al-Shaykh, "My Travel," at 20:56.
[275] Yasmine El-Geressi, "Hanan Al-Shaykh: I am Tired of Being Referred to as an Arab Feminist Writer," *Majall* (2018), np.
[276] These male writers were significant in the Arab Literary world in the 20th century.
[277] El-Geressi, "Hanan Al-Shaykh," np.

comes to translation. The orientalised stereotype of women in the Arab World is enforced in the English version of *The Story of Zahra.*

However, Al-Shaykh's position regarding feminism in the Arab World does not support Charles R. Larson's claim that she always portrays female characters in her fiction as passive and acted upon rather than active. Larson asks a relevant question regarding the readership of Al-Shaykh's novel, asking for whom was *The Story of Zahra* written? Is it for Al-Shaykh's Lebanese audience or is it for the wider Muslim audience or one outside the Islamic World? Larson argues that Al-Shaykh tries to write about the world she knows in her novel, and Zahra only represents so many women who lived during the civil war in Lebanon. However, Larson claims that the context of Arab society that Al-Shaykh writes within is the reason behind the limited readership. Larson explains that in the world of Al-Shaykh's writing male characters always act as predators, stalking women[278], and women characters are always the victims. *The Story of Zahra* according to Larson exposes the exploitation of certain areas in the Arab World without applying the dogma of Western Feminism but is merely "spontaneous feminism,"[279] as Larson calls it. Although Al-Shaykh rejects the classification of her novel as a feminist text, as I will explain next, her novel is a reflection of revolting against tradition and authority that is practised against both women and men in a war-torn society. In the novel, Al-Shaykh portrays Zahra as a girl who is a product of her culture. Zahra suffers from misogynistic treatment and discrimination from a young age. However, her several relationships with men show how rebellious she is.

When *Hikayat Zahra* was written in 1980, Hanan Al-Shaykh's novel faced an extreme rejection from most of the publishing houses in Beirut. Therefore, Al-Shaykh published the novel at her own expense. The emergence of this text shocked the audience in the Arab world because of its boldness in describing sexual scenes and consequently, the novel was banned in several Arab countries. According to Rana Kabbani, Zahra is a passive character, and her circumstances victimized her. Kabbani says:

> The double life that she [Zahra] leads inflicted upon her by a sexually conservative—if hypocritical—society, condemns her into a schizophrenic emotional existence. She

[278] Charles R. Larson, "The Fiction of Hanan Al-Shaykh: Reluctant Feminist," *World Literature Today* 65, no.1 (Winter, 1991):14.
[279] Larson, "The Fiction of Hanan Al-Shaykh," 17.

> must seem at all costs to be the modest […] masking the other taboo persona of a single woman with sexual needs and experience.[280]

On the other hand, I would add to Kabbani's argument that Al-Shaykh is not only examining how political and social corruption in Lebanon during the civil war impacted Zahra as a female character but also gives the space to her male characters to reflect on this social and political corruption from their perspective. In this regard, the English-translated text deprives the reader of the male protagonists' perspectives on the war, as in the case of Hashem, and only produces a text that is flattened to fit a presumed Western feminist and orientalised ideology.

The main question of this chapter is therefore, how the use of multiple first-person narrators in the novel produces a war text that shows different and opposing political views. My approach also highlights sexuality as an empowering and liberating tool in the novel. This defies the stereotyped image of women that is constructed in the English-translated text by Peter Ford by using political views and sexuality as oppressive factors in the book. While the English text presents sexuality as an oppressive theme, in the Arabic version the use of use of multiple first-person narrators allows readers to understand the novel's rebellious portrayal of sexuality. The first section of the chapter will present the significant political role that the novel's multiple first-person narrators, play in the context of texts that were written during the Lebanese Civil War. This technique will be contrasted with autobiography that almost framed women writers in one literary genre.

As I will argue, the process of the alteration in the English-translated text follows an orientalist perspective that enforces on Arab women's voices certain oppressive frames them. I will contrast the stereotyping of Zahra's image evident in the translated text, with the use of the multiple first-person narrators in the Arabic novel. This will be supported in the second part of the chapter with a study of orientalism and stereotyping in relation to translation to challenge the interpretation emphasized by the translated text through generalizing women's suffering and minimizing the cultural dimensions in the text.

---

[280] Rana Kabbani, "Fatal Passivity: Women in Arabic fiction," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no.1 (1988): 339.

The Story of Zahra is divided into two parts which are “The Scars of Peace” and “The Torrents of War”. The Arab version of the text does not have any titles for any part. However, in the Arabic edition *Hikayat Zahra*, the first part of the novel is divided into five chapters which go also untitled and are only numbered, in contrast to the English edition in which chapters are given titles: “Zahra Remembers”, “Zahra in Africa”, “Uncle”, “Husband and Zahra in Wedlock”. These titles give the reader guidance in reading thereby omitting the ambiguity intended in the Arabic text. The Arabic novel leaves the reader with a space to imagine the narrative voice while the English novel does not create this sense of imagination. Hartman argues that what makes Al-Shaykh’s text innovative is the shift between different narrative voices. The titles in the first part of the English novel work as an instruction tool that dictates readers’ expectations. The second part of the novel in the English-translation follows the same structure as the Arabic one, and it does not have any titles, however it only has a title for the whole part which is “The torrent of the war”.

The novel begins with Zahra’s recollection of her mother’s relationship with another man and her scandalous adventures. In contrast to her mother’s relationship with her lover, Zahra remembers her own relationship with Malek her first lover, a married man and a friend of the family, and the series of abortions that she had to hide her relationship with him. After the first chapter, the narrative voice changes. Hashem her uncle, and Majed, her husband, continue the first-person narration and inform the reader about their relationship with Zahra in Africa. In the Arabic text, the reader knows that Zahra has used Majed and her marriage with him to hide her previous relationship with Malek. At the end of the novel the reader learns that Zahra also has a taboo relationship with a sniper during the war and he kills her because she got pregnant. The novel brings out for discussion how a country like Lebanon which is devastated by war, sectarian division, and a social patriarchal system impacts all individuals in society. This is made clear in the Arabic text and it is reflected in the emphasis on the narrative voice represented by the way the multiple first-person narrative technique is used in the novel.

The Political Need for the Multiple First-Person Narrators in *Hikayat Zahra*

Al-Shaykh’s novel is entitled *Hikayat Zahra*, and in English *The Story of Zahra*, and as demonstrated in the title of the novel, it is the story of a woman called Zahra, but this story

is not only told through Zahra's voice. Al-Shaykh's text offers the reader the experience of involvement with different characters while she uses multiple first-person narrators. The important political role that the multiple first-person narrator plays in the novel stands as a technique that serves war narrative can be seen when it is compared with another genre such as autobiographical writings. Lebanon, as a country that is devastated by war and sectarianism, needs a form of literature that gathers and heals the national sorrows. Angelika Neuwirth claims that autobiography fails to record marginalized voices in the war. According to her argument, Rashid al-Daif, a Lebanese poet who managed to record the catastrophic events of the civil war, has written an autobiography that "with its implied strenuous and far-reaching self-examination […] stands out from the majority of recently published Arab autobiographies."[281] She explains how limited autobiographical writings are in examining political and social structure by asserting that the writing of autobiography within the Lebanese context puts the author and the narrator in one position.[282] It is also an act of approaching horrific events from one single perspective which is the perspective of the author. Therefore, autobiographical writings may not be able to play any social and political role in verbalizing the burden of the war in Lebanon because of the individualistic perspective. Further, readers would follow their religious and political loyalties in a country like Lebanon. Sectarianism might win over the creativity of any fictional or non-fictional work that reflects the war in a country where political and religious division prevails.

Therefore, the social and political realities in Lebanon represented by sectarianism during the civil war might force the need for multiple voices or narrators in the novel. Each character in *The Story of Zahra* narrates from his/her perspective. Shlomith Remmon-Kenan explains that "A character whose actions are the object of narration can himself in turn engage in narrating a story. Within his story, there may, of course, be yet another character who narrates another story and so on in infinite regress such narratives create a stratification of levels."[283] Al-Shaykh presents different narrators to share in telling one major story, *The Story of Zahra* and, each one of them gives a specific angle to this story and its context. Lebanon during the civil war suffered from a brutal sectarian division that

[281] Angelika Neuwirth "Linguistic Temptations and Erotic Unveiling : Rashid al-Daif on Language, love, war and Martyrdom," in *Arabic Literature : Postmodern Perspective*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pfitsch and Barbara Winckler (London and Beirut: Saqi, 2010),111.
[282] Neuwirth, 110.
[283] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan , *Narrative Fiction:* Contemporary *Poetics* (London : Routledge, 2002), 94.

produced a struggle that lasted for fifteen years. The need to confront and rewrite the history of the civil war becomes immense to preserve the collective memory and trauma. In autobiographical writings, the author and the protagonist become one, and events are centred on the author and, this reflects his/her social and political identity. The preoccupation with the self in autobiographical writings produces a more centred story that often shows an inability to reflect the collective social and political circumstances. This can be contrasted with the use of the multiple first-person narrators in which every character presents her/his perspective on the story. That could deliver to the reader a more complex understanding of the events. In the case of Lebanon, the identity of the writer and her/his political and religious affiliation might stop the literary work from communicating with the audience or readers in the country. Laura Marcus explains that "autobiographical writing is seen to act as a window onto concepts of self, identity subjectivity and into the way in which these are themselves determined by time and circumstance." [284] However, "the question of truth and falsehood" [285] according to Marcus is significant when approaching autobiographical writings. If autobiography is defined as a literary genre that works as a constructed reality, then this reality is told from the author's perspective. However, the need to present a plurality of perspectives on the war to build a collective memory of the civil war in Lebanon might fail in autobiography because it depends on one singular perspective. Therefore, Al-Shaykh by deploying multiple voices in the novel is capable of attracting readers from different political and religious backgrounds. The use of the first-person narrator becomes an empowering technique that creates in Al-Shaykh's novel a space to analyse the individual's inner world and his/her perspective on the story without the need to put herself, her religious, and political associations under scrutiny.

Before the war begins in Lebanon, Hashem, Zahra's uncle, explains through his extended monologues the state of corruption of the political leadership in Lebanon in his long chapter in the Arabic text. This analysis of the factors that pushed the country toward the civil war gives Hashem an intellectual and highly engaged political dimension. Hashem joins the Syrian National Party dreaming of achieving the aspiration of youths in Lebanon in

[284] Laura Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.
[285] Marcus, 5.

overcoming poverty. He participates in a coup d'état in Lebanon but it fails, and that is the reason for his exile in Africa:

> It was my cousin Hassan who introduced me to the party. At one time he headed the student group at the American University in Beirut. He would talk and talk and I would listen and not understand a word. He spoke of Greater Syria of the Fertile Crescent. With all my eighteen years, I debated issues. 'Why should we care about other countries? Why don't we just worry about our own country and eradicates its hunger and poverty? He would answer that if all believed in Greater Syria and the Fertile Crescent, then our country's problems would be solved automatically. One of the first principles which I grasped was non-sectarianism. It attracted me like a magnet; I followed its course like an arrow. I was probably able to understand and justify any contradictions except religious differences.[286]

Hashem just like many youths in Lebanon believes in social justice. His views on the policies of the government of Lebanon, such as the demands to take action against poverty and hunger, shows how committed he is to the causes of the Lebanese. The first-person narrative allows Al-Shaykh to present an individual perspective about the war that could represent a collective perspective, in particular, when he says that he does not understand the religious differences in his country. However, the rest of the paragraph which goes to explain Hashem's lack of understanding of sectarianism is omitted in the English text. In the Arabic text, Hashem theorizes in depth why he was attracted to join the Syrian National Party and the aspirations that this party represents for him and other youths in Lebanon. However, Hashem does not comprehend the root problem of sectarianism in the Lebanese society.

Sectarianism is looked at from another character's perspective. After Zahra returns from Africa, the war erupts in Lebanon. Although the war in Lebanon has a sectarian root, individuals in Lebanese society in the novel all have their amount of fear and horror and show their refusal to this sectarianism. In the second part of the book Zahra reflects on the war:

[286] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra*, 40.

> I began to follow the news of the war reading nervously but eagerly between the lines in the newspapers, searching for the truth. Then I would overflow with despair and disbelief. All those figures which listed the numbers killed, could they be possible? Were there truly these kidnappings? Did they actually check your identity card and then, on the basis of your religion either kill you or set you free? Were the young people who fought in the war receiving orders from their leaders, and were they wearing combat clothes? Was it true that the Rivoli Cinema had been burnt down? Was it true about the fire in the Souk Sursok? And the one in Souk Al-Tawile? How could you tell if someone is really sniper? Had George the hair-dresser our neighbour turned against me? Had I turned against him? I could not believe my ears when I heard my mother say: 'God curse these Christians!' My father turned on her and reproached her 'You are so ignorant woman! You will always be ignorant .This war between nations, not between Christians and Moslem, woman!'.[287]

Through the use of the multiple first-person narrators and the inclusion of different voices in the paragraph, Zahra, her father, and her mother all comment on the war, which helps in addressing the collective pain of the Lebanese nation. Zahra mentions different Souks such as Sursok and Al-Tawiel and both markets were destroyed by the war. These two markets were originally named after a Christian Orthodox family and a Muslim family respectively. In the same paragraph, Zahra mentions their Christian neighbour 'George' and is questioning the fact whether the Lebanese nation is divided by the war and Muslims are against Christians. The reference to the identity card that has one's religious sect on it makes the use of the multiple first-person narratives a political necessity foe examining the war from different perspectives and reflecting the collective pain and agonies through different personal angles.

Verena Klemm also argues that the first-person narrator in the novel's genre becomes a revolutionary narrative device to overcome the failure of autobiographical writings that were popular for many decades in the Arab world. She explains that "the deconstruction of hegemonic political and social values often entails the use of the first-person narrator in Arab literature"[288] because of the context of the conservative Arab Muslim society. She

---

[287] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra,* 110.

[288] Verna Klemm, "Beyond Autobiography, Under the Sign of Destruction: The First-Person Narrator in Alia Mamdouh's Novel *Nephtalene*," in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives,* ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas PFitsch and Barbara Winckler, (London, Beirut: Saqi, 2010), 491.

argues that autobiography failed because it focuses on "the individual"[289] and that in itself presents "a statement challenging the idealized collective entity of the religious community, the modern nation and the family."[290] Klemm also observes that the first-person narrative is mainly used in "a number of novels [which are] written during or after the civil war in Lebanon."[291] After all, this characteristic works as an experience that "reveals a history imprinted on the body."[292] Therefore, the multiple first-person narrative works as a tool that reflects the trauma that is caused to individuals whether by social, religious, or political oppressed powers through seeing the events from the characters' perspectives. Al-Shaykh adopts this existing narrative convention in her novel to articulate war experience from various points of view. In contrast to Djebar in Chapter One, who adopts an autobiographical genre in *Algerian White* to defy oppression in Algeria using her own narrative voice. On the other hand, the particular characteristic of multiple first-person narrators is that it provides the author with the distance between her/him and the narrative. That is how Al-Shaykh manages through Zahra and other characters to involve different religious and politically oriented individuals in Lebanon. Another example that supports my argument about the use of the multiple first-person narrators in the novel is when Zahra's brother Ahmad comes back from the fight in the war in the second chapter:

> There was no way of engaging Ahmad in conversation, no finding out what the role was which he performed in this war. With each day a new idea came to him, a new thought he would repeat like a parrot that never stopped mimicking voices […] he wanted to play up the importance of his role because he would then add 'I and the others are fighting imperialism ; we are fighting America. Another day he would remark 'This is all an Israeli conspiracy to split the Arabs […] Few days after that, he might say 'I personally am fighting for the Palestinians cause […] My sister I fight for all under privileged. I stand with the minorities […] And then Ahmad would reach into the pocket of his dark combat jacket and bring out some newspaper clipping from the *Mouharer* or one from *Safir* […]Do you see sister, how they have turned the whole thing into a sectarian issue? [293]

[289] Klemm, 491.
[290] Klemm ,491.
[291] Klemm, 491.
[292] Klemm, 491.
[293] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra,* 141-142.

The dialogue between Zahra and Ahmad reflects the division that rules the Lebanese nation during the war. The fluctuation in Ahmad's answers to Zahra for the reasons of the fight is not due to his own perspective; on the contrary, it is the manipulation of the youth that is practised by the leaders of the war and the sects on individuals. At once fighting imperialism, at once fighting for the cause of the Palestinians, and finally fighting for sectarian issues, Ahmad is not able to define his position on the war. The use of words such as 'parrot' and 'mimicking voices' clarifies the systematic brainwashing of the youth through controlling their emotions based on sectarianism. The reference to specific newspapers such as *Mouharer* and *Safir* [294] also signifies how Lebanese society has been oriented into division through presenting news from specific religious and political perspectives. Zahra answers her brother:

> Sometimes, however, I would ask him whether he ever read newspapers which represented the voices of other warring factions, such as *Al-Amal* or *Ahrar.* 'You ought to read the other papers to get balanced view.'[…] He would say, 'So you side with the others!' 'Not at all,' I would answer. 'Then you side with us?' I would quickly reply, 'No, I never carried a rifle on my shoulder or in my thoughts. I am neutral. I see the pain on both sides.' [295]

Through Zahra, Al-Shaykh is emphasizing again the profound need to listen to all voices in the war and not only involve one perspective by pointing to *Al-Amal* or *Al-Ahrar* newspapers. However, words such as 'balanced view' and 'I see pain on both sides' would not reflect the plurality of views, if Al-Shaykh had used those references to talk about her own perspective on the war. Therefore, the use of the multiple first-person narrative technique in her novel becomes a political literary style that reflects the collective suffering that Lebanese people have endured during the war.

Unlike autobiographical writings which become a popular and revolutionary genre that work as a means of reflecting the identity of women writers in the Arab world, the use

[294] *Safir, Mouharer*, and many other newspapers in Lebanon are supported by political and religious parties to present those parties' perspectives. *Safir* is well known to be supported by the Syrian regime and its allies in Lebanon. *Mouharer* is a platform for the Lebanese national movement and during the war its offices were attacked by Syrian troops after the Syrian invasion of Beirut.
[295] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra,* 142.

of the first person-narrative technique defies this contextualization. According to Pauline Homsi Vinson, most women writers opted for autobiographical writing to engage with the political history of the Middle East and personal memory as a tool to preserve their identity. She also argues that women writers "demonstrate the need for re-evaluations of the constructed nature of cultural and political identities in the region"[296] while deploying autobiographical writings. The personal in the autobiographical writings becomes a reflection of the socio-political and cultural reality from the author's perspective. Therefore, the use of multiple first-person narrators in the novel by Al-Shaykh is not only designed to defy the norms of framing women writers in autobiographical texts but also a space to refuse the domination of the hegemonic powers. It provides Al-Shaykh with a resistance tool that presents her text as the opposite of a mere subordinate to the patriarchal construction of writing.

Al-Shaykh presents multiple first-narrators to tell the story of Zahra and the story of the war from different angles, leaving her readers the ability to judge according to various perspectives. Cooke explains in *Arab Women Writers* that "the mid 1970s have been considered to be an important period in the history of international feminist criticism and literature. Feminist literary theory is no longer an alternative optic."[297] Feminist critiques consider autobiography as a genre that challenges the norms of writing and highlights subjectivity and identity. Therefore, Al-Shaykh's choice of a different form of narration is significant in its impact on her readership. The intersection between feminism and autobiography is somehow responsible for the framing of women writers in this genre. If a woman writer chooses to write an autobiography then a degree of revealing the self and identity and claiming subjectivity is inevitable. According to Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, autobiography explores the borderline between "fact and fiction, the personal and the social"[298] and the "value of the experience" with "the implications of such representations of self for the attribution of both agency and responsibility for actions."[299]

---

[296] Pauline Homsi Vinson, "Sharazadian Gestures in Arab Women's Autobiographies: Political History, Personal Memory and Oral Matrilineal Narratives in the Works of Nawal El Saadawi and Leila Ahmed," *NAWS* 20, no.1 (2008): 79.
[297] Miriam Cooke, "Arab Women Writers," in *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed.M.M. Badawi (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 454.
[298] Tess Coslett , Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. eds., *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London, New York: Taylor& Francis Group, 2000), 3.
[299] Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield, 2.

They also assert that feminism considers autobiography as a literary genre that constructs the gendered self. Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield agree that historically autobiographical writings were marked by a masculine definition and that "the traditional construction of the ideal [autobiographer] as a unified, transcendent subject, representative of the age has favoured privileged white male writers who can fit into this role easily than the marginalized and the disposed."[300] If Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield consider that autobiography is a challenging genre that highlights the voices of the marginalized when written by a woman writer, then, Al-Shaykh proves that the genre of autobiography is not in particular seen as a challenging form. Any form or genre could fit the role of presenting a courageous narration.

Cook, on the other hand, presents a different side of the argument by explaining that one of the ways to overcome the atrocities that have been done to Lebanese society during the civil war, masculine society and masculine voices of the war should be deconstructed and replaced by more feminine voices that focus on society. Lebanese society particularly suffers from a sectarian system in which all components of society belong to a different religious sect. Each sect is led by a leader or *Zaim*. Evelyn Accad explains the masculine values of those leaders who led the war: "The *Zaim* is the macho man per excellence. He embodies not only the usual masculine values of conquest, domination, competition, fighting and boasting but also the *Shatara* (cleverness)."[301] Those leaders, as Accad argues, have also played socioeconomic functions that destroyed the country, and enforced the masculine values of the war. Therefore, Cooke asserts that the feminine voice is one of the ways to resist those masculine values in Lebanese society. During the civil war in Lebanon and, "particularly in Beirut a group of women gradually came to recognize the power of the word."[302] According to Cooke, the Beirut Decentrists were a group of Arab women writers, such as Nur Salman (b. 1932), Hanan Al-Shaykh (b. 1945), Emily Nasrallah and Layla Usayran (b. 1934), the Palestinian Nuha Samarah (b. 1943), the Syrian Ghadah Al-Samman, and the

[300] Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield, 2.
[301] Evelyn Accad, *Sexuality and War: The Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York University Press, 1990), 30.
[302] Miriam Cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1988),68.

Iraqi Daisy al-Amir (b. 1935),[303] who all focus on the war and produce a literature that portrays the new society after the war. Cooke explains:

> Their writings question the patriarchal principles of the Lebanese and by extension Arab society, show them to be corrupt and suicidal, undermine them and construct a new national ethos that is feminine as defined in pre-war terminology. The Beirut Decentrists have collectively described in their literature the unprecedented feminization of society and not the masculinization of society that feminist historians have ascribed to other societies at war.[304]

In the same vein, Cooke says, if feminization of society is a required need for any society that has suffered from war, then autobiography may appear to be the best literary option that any woman writer could choose. However, the form of literature that addresses a diverse society such as Lebanese society was not/cannot be easily configured. With all the political, religious, and class divisions, the form of narration that might recreate a plural national identity of this society seems more complicated. Autobiography then would appear to be a form that excludes and cannot form a plural national identity. If Al-Shaykh herself shows a changeable position from feminism, then autobiography will not serve her purpose but it will contextualize her in one frame. In one of her interviews, she states that: "If I consider myself as a feminist, then I would label myself. And I prefer not to label myself because I feel when writing about women that I am writing by extension to all human beings."[305]On the other hand, Kerre says that Hanan Al-Shaykh "wanted to become an existentialist like Simone de Beauvoir."[306] This contradiction in attitude to feminism from Al-Shaykh's perspective is due to her receiving feminism in her country and the Arab World and how readers and intellectuals interpreted this term, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

Moreover, the relationship between feminism and autobiography seems to be an obstacle to being used in writings about wars. Therefore, Al-Shaykh turns to multiple first-person narrators to record the civil war in Lebanon with its atrocities and strongly to create a space not only for a female character's perspective, represented by Zahra, but also a space

---

[303] Cooke, 454-455.
[304] Cooke, 456.
[305] Paula W Sunderman, "An Interview with Hanan al-Shaykh," *Michigan Quarterly Review,* 31, no.4 (Fall, 1992):628.
[306] Holiday –Karrre, Erin Amann, "Re-Imagining Sharazad, Hanan Al-Shaykh and Feminism of Difference," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 50, no.2 (2020): 162.

for men's perspectives. Through using multiple first-person narrators she gives her readers an insight into the world of men. This technique enables Al-Shaykh to contrast two different perspectives on complex and chaotic gender relations that echoed the war.

Gender relations are strongly highlighted by using the first-person narrative technique in the novel. It allows Zahra and the other male characters to express their opinions on the patriarchal system and sexuality in the Arab World. Al-Shaykh through this technique shows how males criticize masculinity and the patriarchal system from within equally as much as women do, although consequently, they all fall into the trap of this system. The novel begins with Zahra's remembrance of her previous relationship with Malek. Zahra's relationship with Malek, her first lover, which ends with two abortions, leads her to marry Majed in Africa to hide this previous taboo relationship. Although Zahra knows that her parents may rage at her if they discover her abortions and her relationship, she keeps going to Malek. Zahra says in the English novel: "I accepted everything that happened."[307] Malek manipulates Zahra and this manipulation is talked about through Zahra's voice only: "At our third meeting he spoke of love, of Khalil Gibran and platonic affection. He cursed marriage and children […] he had hoped he might marry me, my silence had not encouraged him."[308] The English version presents this relationship as if Zahra is forced to have it, while in the Arabic version and from Zahra's words, readers know that Zahra willingly goes to see Malek: '*kont rāḍiyatn bymā yhduth wa sa yhduith*'[309] ('I was satisfied with what happened and what will happen').[310]While the English-translation presents this relationship as forced by using the verb 'accepted' as I mentioned earlier, Zahra in her own voice in the Arabic text says that she is satisfied with this relationship with no regards to her fears of being discovered and with no regret that she had to undergo under two abortions. This could be read as a sign of resistance to her society. Sexuality, at this particular point, is being used as a liberating tool and the multiple first-person narrators helps readers to engage with Zahra's side of the story. The fact that Al-Shaykh stresses the voice of Zahra in this relationship underlines that sexuality symbolically represents a liberating tool in the novel.

[307] Al-Shaykh,*The Story of Zahra,*26.
[308] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra,* 26.
[309] I loosely followed the America Library Association for Arabic transliteration.
[310] Al-Shaykh,*Hikayat Zahra* (Beirut: Dar Aladab, 2017), *35.* My translation.

Accad has a different view about the treatment of sexuality in Al-Shaykh's novel. She says that in "Lebanese Macho society" men in the present system "try to obtain material goods and territory […] to enlarge their domain and authority" and similarly sexual relations are used for the sake of "confinement and control of women for the increase of male prestige."[311]Accad relates the portrayal of sexuality with the chaos of the war to criticize the masculine values of the Lebanese society and the leaders of the war. Accad argues that "young men of Beirut are not fighting for a cause but for self-indulgence for a sick power for the worst in male values [...] This corruption stems from a poorly understood and badly lived sexuality."[312] By contrast with the use of the multiple first-person narrators and specifically in Zahra's relationship with Malek and the depiction of sex outside marriage is used to express a liberating attitude that defies the traditions of female honour in Lebanese society.[313]

Another important example is Zahra's relationship with her husband Majed. Zahra meets Majed in Africa and he straightaway proposes to her and she accepts:

> I thought all the time about Majed's proposal. I plotted how I might trick him and so get round his discovering that I was a woman who had twice been aborted [sic]. The problem caused me many restless days and nights. No day dawned, in any case, when I didn't open my eyes to feel scared stiff that my father might sometimes find out the truth. I comforted myself periodically with the fancy that nature would never let him learn my secret […]I never asked myself whether my fear of my father was on a mental or a physical level. It was all a part of a conglomeration of fear, of fear, above all that my image of myself might be overturned, the image of which I run off hundreds of copies for distribution to all who had known me since childhood. Here is Zahra the mature girl who says little […] This is Zahra- a woman who sprawls naked

[311] Accad, *Sexuality and War,* 32.
[312] Accad, 51.
[313] Female honour is huge topic that it is not my intention to approach in this chapter. However, look at the writings of:
Fatima Mernissi, "Virginity and Patriarchy," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no.2 (1992), and Nawal El-Saadawi ,*The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1980).

> day after day on a bed in a stinking garage unable to protest at anything. Who lies on the old doctor's table […][314]

Zahra's acceptance of marriage is out of preserving a social image. Although the image that she sees herself is different, the English version presents Zahra as an individual with no free will who made a conspiracy by marriage to save her reputation. In contrast, the Arabic paragraph continues to explain: '*Zahra , hamaltu maratyen , wa ajhaḍtu maratyen , kol hadha ma`a rajol lā ywhebwha wa lā twhebwh*'[315] (I got pregnant twice and I had an abortion twice, I have done all these with a man who he does not love me and I don't love him). Even though Zahra knows that she and Malek are not in love, she is happy with this relationship and she decides to marry not out of love but to hide her scandal. Al-Shaykh, by portraying Zahra as a free agent of her desire in the Arabic text, comes in contrast to her image in the English text. Al-Shaykh through Zahra tries to depict sexual relationships as a liberating form that defies the chaos of the war and its trauma and challenges also the will of Zahra's society and family. Rita Stephan says: "Many men, including theologians and politicians, wrote volumes on the subject [Sexuality and sexual relationship]. Yet only women were restricted from exploring their sexuality"[316] in the context of the Arab World. This particular thinking was more emphasized after the period of colonialism. Stephen explains:

> Middle Eastern and Islamic societies remain fairly preoccupied with women's sexuality; perhaps in response to colonization or as a result of deep reflection on their moral identity. In the first instance— the attitude is a reactionary to the image of the other — […]. Whereas in the later instance, the attempt is to create an exclusive image that is unique to the region's cultural and political characteristics.[317]

This preoccupation with women's sexuality is attributed to the cultural tradition of Arabic society. This hegemony over women's sexuality in society was transformed into a strict censorship over women's writings on sexuality in the Arab World. Women writings on sexuality destabilizes power structure and social control since "Arab men's authority in

[314] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra,* 32.
[315] Al-Shaykh, *Hikayat Zahra*, 43. My Translation.
[316] Rita Stephan, "Arab Women Writing Their Sexuality," *Hawwa* 4, no.2-3(2006), 162.
[317] Stephan, 161.

sexuality is allegedly unchallenged,"[318] according to Stephan. However, Al-Shaykh dares to cross those boundaries drawn for her by the patriarchy and depicts Zahra as a free individual who controls her body despite the constraints of her society. Al-Shaykh rejects all these oppressing authorities that deny women their rights to explore unconventional approaches to sexuality and sexual relationships as means of expressing political and social attitudes.

In the same vein, Al-Shaykh points out the oppressive traditional and religious control of an individual's sexuality. She also, through Majed, Zahra's husband, and Hashem, tries to analyse how men in conservative societies seek to change the old mentality and the old traditions that trap them as well. She presents a very different perspective through Majed and Hashem. Majed, says after discovering Zahra's previous relationship,

> Why had she accepted me in marriage if she had been so frightened at not being a virgin? Why had she married me? Did she think I would never realize the truth? Did I appear to be stupid? I slept fitfully with my painful thoughts. After several days, the intensity of these issues seemed to fade as if such formidable questions become insignificant here in Africa, where there is no culture, no environment, no family to blow them up out of all proportions, for here every man stands on his own like a lone tree, like someone without a past who only has himself. Perhaps it is because there are no parents here, or because those who happen to be here have integrated into Africa and lack any culture to relate to. Traditions surface from time to time, but remain transplanted and so lose their former authority.[319]

Majed, just like Zahra, comments from a position that society enforces on him as an individual in Lebanese society. Words such as traditions, culture, and environment, according to Majed, are constraints that individuals feel, but when they are outside their lands these words are unaccountable. Hashem also has an opinion that is similar to Majed's: "Our generation should be seeking to influence our parents and those whose minds and attitudes remain narrow. But the thing which really concerns me in all this is Zahra's

[318] Stephen, 162.
[319] *The Story of Zahra,* 74.

future."[320] Hashem, just like Majed, is trapped in the tradition of the Arab society, and Al-Shaykh, through the voices of these two characters, condemns these traditions.

This outspoken position regarding sexuality is not new to Al-Shaykh. In her talk at the British Library, she asserted that reading classical Arabic literature, which was filled with poems that discussed sexuality openly, made her discover how the "past reflects diversity and contains a surprising choice of themes."[321] These are unusual for modern Arabs and Arabs have surpassed their heritage. Al-Shaykh also argues that Arab ancestors were free to discuss sexuality while their heirs tasted bitterness. She was highly impacted by the Arabic poet Abu-Nuwas .[322] Abu-Nuwas was well known for his rebellious nature, and he deployed that nature to produce erotic poetry. Her admiration of Abu-Nuwas 's poetry led her to adopt his rebellious perspective. Another significant figure is Ibn Hazm, an eleventh-century Andalusian Poet and intellectual. His most famous writing is *The Ring of the Dove.* This book is about love and its symptoms. Further, Al-Shaykh is influenced by Wallada Bint Almustkfi,[323] an Andalusian poetess who owned a literary salon and is famous for a poem that reads "Give my kiss to whoever desires it."[324] Al-Shaykh's words suggest that the theme of sexuality is not in the novel as a duplication of the war's chaos, as Accad argues, but as a criticism of the patriarchal masculine society in Lebanon and a very liberating tool that Al-Shaykh borrows from Classical Arabic literature.

Al-Shaykh presents a very controversial and outspoken position regarding the political and social atmosphere in Lebanon during the civil war by adopting a multiple first-person narrative. However, when *Hikayat Zahra*, the Arabic novel, was translated into *The Story of Zahra*, the text went through an orientalised process that stereotypes its characters. The translation process deprives the text of its spirit of rebellion and works only as a tool that performs masculine domination to present this text as an easy and accessible product that is marketable to Western readerships.

---

[320] *The Story of Zahra,* 95.
[321] Al-Shaykh, "My Travel," at 10:48.
[322] Abu-Nawas is a prolific Arab poet who lived in the eighth century and accompanied the most famous Abbasid Khalifa *Haroon Al-Rashid,* the Abbasid period is often referred to as the golden age of classical Arabic culture. Abu-Nuwas was famous for celebrating wine and erotic love in his poetry. Wine is banned in Islam but Abu Nuwas considered that wine is a seduction and that seduction is the way to creativity.
[323] Wallada Bint Almustkfi is the daughter of the 11th Umayyad Caliphate of Andalusia.
[324] This line is from a poem by Walda and Al-Shaykh refers to it in her talk at 11:00.

Translation as a Stereotyping Tool

Colonialism stays alive not only in occupation or military forces but also in the mentality of the colonial institutions that reproduce patterns of oppression and marginalizing the other. The literary field is not excluded from these reproductions. The use of stereotyping as a tool to marginalize the East has not only affected it as an image but also impacted the literary productions of that geographical area. The texts that are deemed qualified to appear in World literature or Western Academia, are expected to acquire certain political, sociological, and anthropological qualities. Those qualities depend on the mode of Western consumption for literary texts that belong to the Arab World. These literary texts should reflect the image of the East [325] as "other", otherwise they will not appear for the Western reader. Reading the translated version of Al-Shaykh's novel and comparing it with the Arabic version demonstrates that translation did not engage with moving creativity from one culture into another. In contrast, translating this text worked to marginalize voices in the novel to reproduce stereotypical images of the East.

Arabic culture and its production are not newly categorized as "other culture" by the West. Analysis of the construction of this political and cultural imaginary concept of the "East" as other was first initiated by Edward Said's argument in his well-known book *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. Said offered a new approach to studying the history of the relation between the Orient and the Occident or the East and the West. Orientalism, as Said defines it, is a discourse that is an "enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, logically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period."[326] This discourse, according to Said, facilitates the authority to rule and dominate the East. However, this authority and supremacy over the East made the West reconstruct the East as an inferior place that is ready for "Western intervention and rule."[327] The hegemony of the West over the East enforces certain stereotypes through oppositional polarities that are

[325] I specifically mean by the East, the geographical area that covers the Arab world which the British and the French invaded during the history of colonialism.
[326] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 1991), 3.
[327] Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.
[327] Said, 42.

highlighted by contrast to give legitimatization for this domination. These polarities are summarized by Reina Lewis when she says:

> Orientalism establishes a set of polarities in which the Orient is characterized as irrational, exotic, erotic, despotic, and heathen, thereby securing the West in contrast as rational, familiar, moral, just, and Christian. Not only do these Orientalist stereotypes misrepresent the Orient, they also misrepresent the Occident—obscuring in their flattering vision of European superiority the tensions along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity that ruptured the domestic scene.[328]

Those polarities help to enforce an inferior image of the East, and orientalism becomes, according to Said, "the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and oriental inferiority."[329] This vision becomes a typical Eurocentric way of understanding the East and its components. The Orient also becomes "contained and represented by dominating frameworks." [330]These frameworks were politically and culturally imagined and enforced by Western domination.

Such a definition of the East and the continuous enforcement of political and cultural imaginary concepts about the East all become a rigid and static stereotype that the East is drawn within. These stereotypes were filled with bias and racism, as Rana Kabbani explains, and "the East became codified and static in ways that were final, no deeper perception was permissible nor indeed possible given the weighty heritage of prejudice."[331] The process of stereotyping then depends highly on concepts that were invented by the imagination of writers who projected on the East certain political, cultural frameworks, and values to dominate and claim superiority. Moreover, those stereotypes are expected to continue without any challenge.

It is not only the East that as a political and geographical area has been stereotyped by the Western narrative. The Middle Eastern woman also has suffered from stereotyping and imaginative construction. Kabbani in this regard gives anecdotal accounts of constructing this figure as a passive object and a seductive entity in her society. She explains:

---

[328] Lewis, 16.
[329] Said, 42.
[330] Said, 40.
[331] Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986), 139.

> Europe's feelings about oriental women were always ambivalent ones. They fluctuated between desire, pity, contempt and outrage. Oriental women were painted as erotic victims and scheming witches.[332]

Kabbani also explains that the oppressed and sexualized image of women in the East is constructed through literature and narration and in particular travel narration. Furthermore, there is a need to create depictions of extraordinary female characters that represent exotic and sensational duplicates of what the Western reader or viewer had in their imagination. However, the real image of the Eastern woman remains lost between the literary mythology of the literary imagination and the political and social facts. These misrepresentations created a certain image of the Eastern woman and fashioned a political patriarchy that stole her voice.

In the light of this argument, we can see that Al-Shaykh's translated text, first, suffered from an orientalist discourse that stereotypes the East and its productions. Second, this orientalist discourse is not only practising the muting and the framing of the East, but it also projects the same stereotyping on all its subjects. Women in the Arab world are not only suffering from marginalization in their societies, but also when it comes to representation of an "Eastern other woman", which is a constant narrative that Orientalism produces about them. The double oppression that is performed by gendered Orientalism functions first on the level of representing the East as "other" and second by representing women in the East as "Eastern other women". In orientalist discourse, the benevolent and enlightened West is the constructor of the narration of Eastern women. The entitlement of orientalism to speak for the East and on behalf of the East produces a narrative that fits into the paradigm of the construction of the East in the orientalist discourse.

Orientalism as an ideology has not only framed the East in a certain paradigm, it also interfered with the way the West has interacted with the East's literary productions and literature. In a study by Mohammed Abdulla Hussein Muharram, he shows how Arabic fiction that is written in English and Arabic fiction that is translated into English suffer from systematic marginalization. He also argues that fictions which are related to the Arab World specifically suffer from "exclusions" which are "painted with orientalist and racist

[332] Kabbani, 26.

attitudes."[333] Muharram argues that "patterns of hegemony" are "implicit in the translation process"[334] when it comes to surveying the field of translating Arabic novels into English. The limited appearance of Arabic fiction whether it is translated or written in English, in Western Academia is related to orientalist assumptions.

While Muharram agrees that the marginalization of Arabic literature and its translation into English suffers from an orientalised hegemony, the translation of Arabic literature into the English language has witnessed a process of ideological enforcement. Indeed Susan Bassnett explains that translating Arabic literature into English is not seriously welcomed in the Western world "unless viewed through the lens that compares Arabic writing with the dominant Western trends."[335] Translation, in general, is an act of intellectuality that helps people to enjoy the aesthetic of other nations' literary writings or any other writings. However, since my concern in this chapter is to use the multiple first-person narrators in Al-Shaykh's text to illuminate the stereotyping frame of the translated text, I will analyse translation from this specific perspective.

Chantal Wright argues that translation is a cultural production in the sense that it is "an act of witnessing to literary value and a means of spreading ideas."[336] According to Wright, a translation can shift people's perceptions about different cultures. In this sense, Wright argues that translation has political and ideological motivations that alter the way that people receive foreign cultures. Bassnett on this point argues that translation could construct the image of a different culture while it rewrites a "text written in one language for a new set of readers in another language with different expectations."[337] Both critics agree that some particularities of cultures could be changed in translation because as Wright says that "translation is also a mode of reading." [338]Therefore, it depends on how the translator approaches texts in other languages. Wright says: "There is certainly something political or ideological in this set of motivations […] The ideas and the forms found in foreign literature can challenge but also make a contribution to the domestic cultural products and

[333] Mohammed Abdullah Hussein Muharram, "The Marginalizing of Arabic Fiction in the Postcolonial and World English Curriculum: Slips Or Orientalism and Racism?," *Minnesota Review* no.78 (2012):132.
[334] Muharram, 137.
[335] Susan Bassnett, *Translation: The New Critical Idiom* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 2014), 34.
[336] Chantal Wright, *Literary Translation* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 2016), 18.
[337] Bassnett, *Translation,* 32.
[338] Wright, *Literary Translation,* 19.

values." [339] Translation, according to Wright, helps to reform an understanding and produce knowledge about other cultures. Despite the fact, that in the process of translating some aspects of the text might be altered inevitably, what is at stake here is when this is done to the text to compromise it in the name of a specific political and cultural ideology such as Orientalism.

More importantly, Wright argues that translation sometimes is "a way of assimilating and exerting control, a tool of persuasion, manipulation, and evangelization and in the case of a bestselling book a way of making money."[340] At one point, Wright explains that translation could have the potential to bring about change in cultural values because of the interaction with different cultures. This point might seem problematic because of the alteration in society that translation might motivate. According to Wright, "Translation thus allows ideas to circulate and move beyond their historical and cultural context, making new understanding."[341] Although translation helps in moving texts between two different cultures and giving voice to writers and their causes, this movement might include some acquisition of the original voice in texts. Wright also explains that "beyond rescuing texts from silence imposed by censorship, translation can also play a role in bringing forgotten underappreciated texts to the attention of a wider audience."[342] However, one cannot ignore the fact that some texts might suffer from alteration that might cause a different use of the text from what it was originally. On this point, Bassnett argues that it is difficult for any translator to produce a translation that is "innocent", as she calls it, because of the "hierarchies between languages and cultures."[343]This supports my approach to translation in this chapter, namely that sometimes translation can be used to serve a particular ideology, and in this chapter I argue that it serves the orientalist approach in stereotyping individuals in the Arab World generally and women in specific.

Wright, too, questions the process of translation and asserts that "translation sometimes can serve dominant ideologies—nations, institutions and ideas that already hold

[339] Wright, *Literary Translation*, 18.
[340] Wright, *Literary Translation,* 19.
[341] Wright, 26.
[342] Wright, 26.
[343] Bassnett, 44.

power and influence."[344] It is true that translation as a literary process plays an important role in spreading ideas between cultures, but what if "translation denies and eradicates difference"[345] between cultures. Indeed, Wright argues that not all translation could present a positive role in building bridges but, on the contrary, it might mislead and enforce certain ideologies that "subjugate an entire population."[346]Such a translation would be an ideologically motivated translation as Wright calls it. Al-Shaykh's novel suffers from an "ideologically motivated translation,"[347]or a compromised translation that forces the text to fit into the orientalised paradigm that stereotypes the image of women in the Arab World.

While Wright proposes that translation sometimes could be ideologically motivated, Marilyn Booth raises important questions about the process of translating Arabic texts into English, specifically those written by women. Her main question is related to the ownership of the text. The process of translation, according to Booth, is a complicated and troublesome arena and is not to be compared with any critical or cultural work. The reason for this is that the complication of translation is not only limited to "the extent to which a translation may be said to represent the original and precisely how it does so"[348] but also includes the creation of representations of cultural images. The translator may own the final version of the text by approaching themes and linguistics from a specific perspective. He /She might elucidate or erase certain cultural and linguistic particularities. However, when it comes to presenting a text for the Western audience and marketplace, translation becomes "a rewriting that produces (and is authorized by) authenticity effect that turns fiction into memoir and acts as a pedagogy of the familiar exotic."[349] Booth agrees that the process of translation which is related to Arab fictions depends highly on "a long history of producing the Orientalized Other …or Orientalist ethnographicism." [350] She defines Orientalist ethnographicism as,

> A way of seeing and writing the other that grounds authority in a written narrative of personal experience "capturing" a society through the I/eye; and furthermore,

[344] Wright, 33.
[345] Wright, 28.
[346] Wright, 29.
[347] Wright, 29.
[348] Marilyn Booth, "The Muslim Woman as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating Arabic: *Girls of Riyadh Go on the* Road," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no.3 (2010): 149.
[349] Booth, "The Muslim Woman,", 150.
[350] Booth, 150.

> claiming the authority of graphing the text in a global (and globalizing) language of reception, which is today predominately English. That is not only the translated book but also the figure of the author circulates as a cosmopolitan commodity conversant in the global language of the literary marketplace.[351]

The problem of presenting Arab fiction to the Western audience is not only related to an orientalist paradigm of power but also to presenting and shaping the author in a stereotypical image. The control over the text appears to be not only in the hands of the author. The text will be approached according to certain political and sociological dimensions that rule the imagination of Western readers about Arabic culture.

The question of "who has power over the text" is relevant and significant to understanding the final version of any translated text. In this regard, Booth agrees that this ownership is not only limited to the translator. It also includes publishing houses, editors, and the marketplace. She explains that the production of translated text might "contribute to or undermine dominant images (in a certain venue, at a certain moment) of that homogenized figure"[352] which is moved between cultures. It means that the representation of Arab culture in any text has been transformed to adopt only one dominant image of this culture.

Booth concludes by asserting that the translation in this specific case is a mechanical process and does not serve any artistic or creative function because "every choice to translate something, and every choice of how to translate it, is politically loaded."[353] Likewise, the translation process can mute certain voices and highlight other voices in the text, presenting images and deleting others at the expense of the originality of the text. The outcome of the translation cannot be merely regarded as an artistic work that moves the text between two languages. Rather, it will be a compromised translation of the text, or as Wright calls it an "ideologically motivated translation."[354]

---

[351] Booth, 151.
[352] Booth, 156.
[353] Booth, 156.
[354] Wright, 29.

Indeed, different factors affect the politicization of translation from Arabic to English such as the demand for these translations in the marketplace. However, this is not my point of interest. Another important factor is creating the image of "the Middle East as other". Despite the call to globalize the world, the image of the "other Middle East" with its socially and politically degrading connotations is still the preference of publishing houses, editors, and most clearly politicians. If the works, according to Booth, are a "medium through which the author connects paratextually with her (his) audience,"[355] then these works are considered as doors to see into this culture. According to this logic, texts that are written specifically by women are targets for publishers and editors. Who is better to talk about the "other Middle East" than the most "mysterious and hyper-representative inhabitant and symbol of that world"[356] and who is a "woman"! Women writers usually share in the characterization of their own society because readers normally conflate the text with the author. The image of oppressed women is often under constant investigation by female writers and therefore, texts that have a signature from a female author are always welcome in the Western marketplace.[357] Therefore, translating texts from Arabic into English serves a certain politically motivated ideology which stereotypes women in the image of the "other Eastern woman". Al-Shaykh's text has received this welcome in the Western Market not just because it is a text that is written by a woman. The text in its translated version has the signature of Al-Shaykh as a sign of approval for this translation. Although the translator's name appears in the introduction, Al-Shaykh's approval of the translation distracts attention from the question of "who really owns the text". *The Story of Zahra* appears to readers as a text that is written by a woman and about a woman, and that shows one perspective on the position of women in the Arab world. Despite Al-Shaykh's refusal to be categorized as a feminist writer, in a reductive sense, she has agreed to a translation that approves the stereotyping of the East and presents precisely such a "feminist" text.

In their recent study, Patricia Zaylah, Hoda Hilal, and Lea Yachchouchi recognize that Ford, the translator, has moved Zahra from the Arab World into his Western audience without understanding the contextual reality of Lebanon and the Arab World. He erased all

[355] Booth, 156.
[356] Booth, 157.
[357] This does not mean that texts which are written by male authors are not welcome in the Western Marketplace.

her connections with the context of the Arab World and its culture and presented her with an oppressed and victimized image that the Western audience wanted to see. They assert "the novel was not turned into a non-feminist one but was rather transferred according to the West's understanding of what an Arab feminist text is/should be. As Zahra moves from a local/national context to a transnational one, it appears that her character is flattened, decontextualized, and distorted."[358] The writers of this journal article also agree that the process of translating any text that is written by a woman writer normally generalizes the struggle of women and moves from a specific cultural struggle into a universal struggle. The lack of understanding of the contextual reality leads to the failure in conversation between cultures and enforces one perspective. Therefore, an ideologically motivated translation or a compromised translation shares a role in creating a huge misunderstanding between cultures. To avoid the perpetuation of the cycle of stereotyping, it is important and ethical for any translator to engage fully with the cultural dimension of any text to reach for a better understanding of women's position in society. My argument here builds on and develops those scholars' discussion. It explains how stereotyping affects the process of translation in this text in a way that stops the cultural exchange and rather enforces the inferior image of the East and the other Eastern woman. Al-Shaykh, while depicting the horror of the civil war, highlights strongly gendered and individual relationships in a way to show how each individual interacts with the context of war and the context of Lebanese society.

Moreover, Michelle Hartman also acknowledges that Ford presents a reductively feminist text by highlighting the victimization of Zahra, and asserts that it is quite often that scholars have worked to show that "women's stories from the region often tend to erase positive male characters and hold up individual women as singular exemplary figures in opposition rather than in relation to the men in their lives."[359] Hartman, Zaylah, Hilal, and Yachchouchi all argue that by focusing on Zahra's relationship with her family produces a translated text that has previsioned feminist elements.

Earlier, I analysed Zahra's relationship with Malek and Majed and how the use of the multiple first-person narrative in the Arabic text defies the framing of Zahra in an oppressed

[358] Zaylah, Hilal and Yahchouchi , 11.
[359] Hartman, "Zahra's Uncle," 86.

image. Further, the treatment of Hashem, Zahra's uncle, and his relationship with Zahra exemplify how the process of translation divorces the text from the contextual reality and deprives Western readers of engaging with the cultural and political reality of Lebanon and the Arab World. In the Arabic text, Hashem's political views and his long passages, describing the corruption in Lebanon, contribute to understanding the political reality of the war. In these passages, Hashem expresses his deep commitment to the political cause of his party, the Syrian Nationalist Party in Lebanon. Hartman observes that the "omission of what might seem to be mere details significantly alter Uncle Hashem's character impacting gender dynamics of the novel,"[360] However, my argument focuses on Zahra's relationship with Hashem. Even though this relationship has been presented to readers from Zahra's and Hashem's perspective because of the use of the first-person narrator, however, the translated text empowers Zahra's perspective. When she first arrives in Africa and meets Hashem, she says in the English-translated text:

> When my uncle came into the room, he sat down facing me and began to talk about Lebanon, about Zionist propaganda here and of how Lebanon made no attempt to counter Zionist lies. He spoke of our homeland and I saw how very idealistic he was about his country […] I realized how deeply he wished to return home. Here, in Africa he carried in his mind a symbolic image of his homeland […] he remembered his homeland with remarkable vividness. His idealism was so intense […] [361]

Hashem's attachment to his homeland is symbolized through his relationship with Zahra. It is Zahra's voice in this paragraph that emphasizes this nostalgia. In Hashem's chapter in the Arabic novel, the reference to Zahra as an extension of family and homeland is highlighted through the use of the first-person narrator. Hashem stresses this connection to his homeland through Zahra. She symbolizes Lebanon and the family:

> Her letters were beautiful despite being so sad. I doubted whether she actually remembered […] I used to wonder when I finished reading each letter whether Zahra was aware that it was only through her writing that I maintained my links with both my family and my country. [362]

After this monologue in the English text, a fast shift moves readers and makes them conclude that Hashem has a strange feeling for Zahra after she arrives in Africa. In contrast,

---

[360] Hartman, 98.
[361] Al-Shaykh, *The Story of Zahra*, 15
[362] Al-Shaykh,*The Story of Zahra,* 55.

Hashem in the Arabic text speaks about his feelings towards Africa and that Africa will never be like Lebanon for him. Therefore, Zahra's coming to Africa represents for him a presence of Lebanon and family in Africa. Zahra symbolizes Lebanon for Hashem. Hashem says: 'Ghadan fi al-awtān wa lā shyay se`ua al-awtān. Al-hayat sau`f tatawqf wa sa`aydoha fi al-awtān […] ayndma tasil Zahra ila ifriqia saya`aemony al-hodhn ly annaha alakhyt al-wahyda ma` al-awtān' ('Tomorrow in homeland and nothing but homeland life will stop and I will live again in homeland […] when Zahra arrives today into Africa I will be sad because she is my only connection with homeland').[363]

Ford's chapter about Hashem suggests that Hashem has an implicit sexual attraction to his niece. This influence is made because of the oppressed image by which Ford portrays Zahra. Hashem says:

> My sleep became disturbed and fitful as I agitated in my bed waiting. At day-break Zahra would still be in the adjacent bedroom, the sound of her breathing like a sign of confidence and stability. I tried waking her, I sensed her uneasiness. If I told her my feelings and held her shoulders, she pulled away. If I simply used words without any touch of my hand she would remain as silent as the Sphinx […] If I persuaded her to dance, she would give offer me a hand of cold plastic. She was like that at the movies, too—cold plastic.[364]

Hashem, in Ford's translation, adopts a suspicious feeling towards Zahra. An image such as 'cold plastic' turns Zahra into an object and gives readers the sense that Zahra is sexualised by her uncle. The Sphinx in the English text refers to the ancient Greek mythical creature that appears in *Oedipus the King*, and the use of this image in the English text refers to an incestuous relationship. The cooperation of words such as cold plastic and Sphinx emphasizes the image of oppressed Zahra. However, in the Arabic text, Al-Shaykh uses the image of 'Abw al-hawl', who is a well-known Egyptian antiquity and its meaning is profoundly different from the Greek creature. The presence of Zahra represents for Hashem confidence and stability and the use of the image of 'Abw al-hawl' enforces these feelings because 'Abw al-hawl' is a god who protected the ancient Egyptians. The Arabic text refers to Hashem's feeling as nostalgic for his homeland and family while the translated text

[363] Al-Shaykh,*Hikayat Zahra,*81.
[364] Al-Shaykh,*The Story of Zahra,*58.

enforces a Western orientalised vision about women in the Arab world namely that they are always victimized and sexualized by patriarchy.

Zahra, on the other hand, gives a different perspective about her relationship with Hashem earlier in the English-translated text When Zahra confronts her uncle with his behaviour she says:

> In an ostrich's voice I replied as my heart beat wildly, 'whatever happened to me was your fault!' 'My fault?' He stared at me and asked hysterically, 'My fault? How can you say such a thing Zahra?' Once again in my ostrich's voice not knowing how the words escaped 'I replied, 'Yes Your fault, perhaps you didn't intend it but I never cared for your behaviour towards me.' He yelled back 'What are you saying girl? What behaviour? [...] At the movies when you hold my hand. In the mornings when you slept by my side […] He stood up and went outside the room without looking back. I heard the door slam. He had left me alone trembling with my confession.[365]

Al-Shaykh describes Zahra's voice as the 'voice of ostrich' suggesting that Zahra is either scared or not sure about her position: 'you didn't intend it'. However, Hashem's reaction as 'Hysterically and yelling' reflects Ford's ideologically motivated translation that produces a compromised text of Al-Shaykh's novel. In the Arabic version, Hashem only shows confusion when he says: '*Mny, Lesh 'āam tehky halhaky Zahra'*[366] (Because of me! why you are saying that Zahra). After Zahra finishes her talk, Hashem leaves the room and she is alone. Moreover, in a different chapter in the novel where Zahra meets her husband again, she says: 'Might my uncle save me? He seemed my only hope. He had saved me the first time.'[367] If Zahra is scared of her uncle, then why would she ask him to save her from her marriage?

Ford uses sexuality in his text as a tool to reinforce Western ideology and to portray Zahra as an oppressed victim preyed on by males' desire, whereas sexuality in the Arabic text is read as liberating and Zahra is an active agent of her desire. Although Accad and Ford share the same reading of sexuality in the novel, the multiple first-person narrators allow Al-Shaykh to dive inside each character and present different perspectives in her text. The

---

[365] *The Story of Zahra, 33.*
[366] Al-Shaykh, *Hikayat Zahra,* 43.
[367] Al-Shaykh,*The Story of Zahra,* 91.

representation of sexuality in orientalised discourse represents an act of domination over the East and its individuals. In the same way that the colonial powers have enforced their ideology on the East and have constructed the image of its individuals, the translator of Al-Shaykh's text enforces his ideology on the text and claims authority to talk on behalf of the writer and the characters to deliver orientalised political rhetoric thereby ignoring the actual suffering of all individuals because of the war.

Conclusion

Al-Shaykh's novel combines the disappointment of individuals in Lebanese society with the reality of corruption and division that promoted a long-lasting civil war that destroyed Lebanon till today. The highlighting of women's position in Lebanese society and their engagement with the liberation movement is reflected through the use of the first-person narrator through multiple voices and the theme of sexuality. Al-Shaykh's novel *Hikayat Zahra* defies the framing of women writers in particular and limited literary genres such as autobiography. However, all these revolutionary tools that I analysed in this chapter did not give Al-Shaykh the privilege to decide the way that her voice is moved to another audience and readership. In contrast, Al-Shaykh approved a translation that is ideologically motivated despite her several announcements in favour of the freedom of speech for individuals in the Arab World. She accepted an act of stereotyping that produced a politically compromised novel and showed one perspective. Orientalized stereotyped images alter her text and show that Arab women writers and intellectuals do not always have to resist their own patriarchal culture but they have to resist another patriarchy that performs on them the same oppression and limitations. Power, authority, and domination are not only performed in politics between governments, they are also performed between different institutions of publishing and the translation process that stands behind those, to erase voices that are different and to dominate other cultures.

Chapter Four

The Unnamed Female Narrator's Nightmares: Absurdism and Fantasy in Ghada Al-Samman's *Beirut Nightmares*

At the outset of the Lebanese Civil War and in particular, during *Harbi l-Hotelet* or "The Battle of the Hotels" in November 1975, the novel of *Beirut Nightmares* (*Kawabis Bayrut,* 1976) was written by the Syrian writer Ghada Al-Samman.[368] This infamous battle is important in the history of the civil war because it targeted the district of Downtown Beirut. This area witnessed economic growth during the Golden Age of the 1960s. Different militias such as the Phalangists, the Lebanese National Front, Pan-Arab, and Syrian activists sought to control this area because it has the highest building, the Holiday Inn, which became the symbol of this battle.[369] *Beirut Nightmares* is part of a trilogy by Al-Samman that was written directly about the Lebanese civil war: *Beirut's 75* (1975), which is considered by critics as a prediction of the Lebanese civil war, *Beirut Nightmares* (1976), and *The Night of the First Billion* (1986). *Beirut Nightmares* has been translated into several languages: Polish (1984), Russian (1987), German in both, West Germany (1988) and East Germany (1990), Italian (1993) French (1993), and lastly English (1997).[370]

In the previous chapter, I argued that *The Story of Zahra* by Hanan Al-Shaykh underwent ideologically motivated translation, which in turn reinforces the stereotypes of Arab women writers and women in the Arab World in general. This can be seen in the way that the multiple first-person narrators in the Arabic text are transformed in the translation. I also argued that the political use of multiple first-person narrators gives a broader collective perspective on the war and the suffering of the Lebanese people. However, in this chapter, I show how Al-Samman in *Beirut Nightmares* presents a critical perspective on Lebanese society from the point of view of an unnamed female narrator and other stories within her story. To unfold this narration, Al-Samman uses different literary techniques such

[368] Ghada Al-Samman was born in Damascus, Syria in 1942 to educated parents. Her father was a university professor and then the minister of education in the Syrian government after the Independence of Syria. Her mother was a writer. Al-Samman obtained a B.A in English Literature at Damascus University and then an M.A. at the American University of Beirut.

[369] Other hotels were highly affected by this battle such as Phoenician Inter-Continental, the hotel ST.Georges, the Normandy, and the Alcazar.

[370] The translation of the novel into these languages indicates that it had a wide reach; however, my intention in this chapter is not to focus on translation.

as fantasy and absurdism in a metafictional frame. While *Beirut Nightmares* is not an absurdist text, elements of absurdism help to echo the war in several episodes. Fantasy plays an important role in portraying violence and transferring the daily life of the Lebanese people into a nightmarish status. By showing the role of the war that turns the lives of the Lebanese into nightmares, Al-Samman redefines the role of Arab intellectuals through writings that create the seed of revolution. The impact of her narrative voice through the unnamed narrator in the text works to empower the position of women Arab intellectuals and writers in confronting the corrupt regimes in the Arab World, taking into consideration that the unnamed narrator is herself a writer and journalist in the text.

Therefore, I will first summarise the unconventional style and structure of *Beirut Nightmares* and the critical response which, I contend, have not adequately grasped the role of absurdism and fantasy in the text, nor its genre as a novel. Then, I will unpack these elements, arguing for the text's status as a novel, as opposed to merely a diary or journal, its use of absurdism to reflect the irrationality of the war and fantasy as a socio-political tool to question reality and realist mode of depiction. The final section in this chapter turns to the role of writing and intellectualism in engaging with the crisis in the Arab World.

The novel's title represents the reality and the routine of the war by the word *Kawabis* (Arabic for 'nightmares'). The state of nightmares portrays the reality of the war as a vision that is on the border between life and sleep or death. The unnamed narrator says in the novel: "As I stood on the dividing line between life and death, I felt a kind of mysterious tranquillity enveloping my spirit."[371] Al-Samman writes from a liberating position that allows her to revisit the reality and to rewrite the war through episodes that she calls nightmares. Each nightmare represents one episode, whether it is real, nightmare, or fantasy, and the novel lasts for 197 episodes. Thus, Al-Samman experiments with the conventional novel form which typically progresses in a linear fashion. At the end of the novel, Al-Samman includes notes for further projects of more nightmares and invites her readers to continue writing the series of nightmares. This technique notifies them that the state of nightmares is endless, whether it is a real nightmare or a day in the civil war. It also mirrors the political reality of the Arab World, describing the endless suffering of people there.

[371] Ghada Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* trans. Nancy. N Roberts (London: Quartet Books, 1997), 131.

The novel starts with uncovering the catastrophic night that the unnamed female narrator and her brother spent when the Battle of the Hotels began in the downtown district of Beirut. The unnamed narrator describes her incarceration in her three-storey building, located opposite the Holiday Inn, with her brother Shadi, her neighbour Uncle Fu 'ad, his son Amin, and their servant. The unnamed narrator spends a period of time locked in her apartment, and she has the capacity only to move between floors, between her apartment on the third floor, her uncle's apartment on the ground floor, and the pet shop in the next-door building. The only connection that the narrator has with the outside world is the radio and the telephone. This connection with the world does not give the unnamed narrator a sense of the passage of time. In several places in the text, the unnamed narrator reminds her readers that she has lost track of time. She says: "Everything had become a blur to me-even the passing of the days."[372] The nightmares are not numbered according to dates but these episodes represent actual nightmares, days from the war that feel for the reader like nightmares, and hallucinations. These hallucinations take the form of fantasy which adds a clearer definition to the nightmarish state. The combination of the nightmares, actual events of the war and fantasy mirrors the war and shows that the reality of the war is simply a "nightmare".

The novel contains several stories with other characters that disturb the narration, but they have a symbolic link to the narrator's main story. For example, the story of the fortune teller, although it has no connection with the narration directly, refers to the political corruption of leaders of the war in Lebanon. In a way, those stories challenge the linear progression of the novel but they greatly contribute to the picture of the nightmares by showing different aspects of the dark reality of the war.

In her novel, Al-Samman depicts the level of violence that was inflicted on people in Lebanon. Readers are made to believe that the ugly reality of the war turns into nightmares for the Lebanese, and they are not able to separate between the state of reality and the state of nightmare because of the violence. Nightmares become the second face of reality in Lebanon. Al-Samman empowers her own voice by depicting the life of the civil war from the perspective of the unnamed female narrator. The routine of life during the war recorded in the novel shows different experiments in literary styles such as fantasy and absurdism.

[372] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 187.

Elements of absurdism are clearly stated in the text, and they help to show the state of nightmares in the war. Also, the use of fantasy to depict violence draws a more vivid picture of the state of nightmares in the novel. The ambiguous juxtaposition between what is supposed to be real and what is supposed to be a nightmare is articulated through fantasy. Realism as a narrative mode stands unable to portray the sad environment during the 1960s and 1970s in the Arab World because of the political and military defeats. This frustrated political environment nourished the imagination of writers in the Arab World to use different experimental anti-realist modes to address the status quo. Therefore, the deployment of fantasy in drawing images of violence in the novel shows how reality becomes strange and inseparable from nightmares. When Al-Samman was asked about her narrative style in *Beirut Nightmares,* she answered:

> There are art schools that tend to portray one picture of human reality and try to bring it into line with a preconceived context, be it political, ideological or psychological. All art schools try to enshrine their own modes of representation. In fact, there is no single human reality, each human being has more than one self, and he interacts at all levels in political, metaphysical, psychological and economic spheres. That is within an intricate network of vast, endless action, reaction, and in-action. Even fantastic reality is not purely fantastic; it is rather part of living reality, dream, nightmare, death, madness, metaphysics, sickness, and isolation. All these are facets of infinite truth. Thus, for me, the style of novel writing is a means to an end, and content determines form like a river which digs its own course.[373]

Al-Samman argues that reality cannot be portrayed in narration using only one aspect. Therefore, the need to deploy various narrative forms is determined by the reality it seeks to capture. Absurdism and fantasy work together in the novel to highlight the state of nightmares in Beirut. The voice of the unnamed female narrator through multiple stories within her story crystallizes the collective suffering of the Lebanese people in the war.

Critical responses to Al-Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* have not explored the relation between literary styles such as fantasy and absurdism in creating the sense of nightmares in her novel. Although scholars such as Miriam Cooke have mentioned that Al-Samman is impacted by the movement of absurdism, none of them have yet considered the impact of

---

[373] Ghada Al-Samman, *The Tribe Interrogates the Killed Woman* (1981):280. Translated by, Nedal Al-Mousa in "The Impact of the Lebanese Civil War on Weaving the Texture of the Narrative of Ghada Al-Samman's *Beirut Nightmares,*" *AWEJ For translation &Literary Studies* 4, no.4 (October 2020):240.

absurdism in this text in particular and its role in creating the sense of hopelessness that the war generates. In addition, the use of fantasy to portray images of violence is almost absent in the field of scholarship for this author. I read fantasy in this novel as a political critique which realism could not offer. Fantasy and absurdism both express the dilemma that the Arab world suffers from in Al-Samman's text. Similarly to Hanan Al-Shaykh who presents her novel *The Story of Zahra* from several perspectives, Al-Samman deploys multiple narrations by presenting different perspectives in the accompanying tales of the city. Al-Samman's narration also depends on combining different literary styles, such as absurdism and fantasy, to convince readers of the necessity of dissecting the ugly reality of the war.

Furthermore, my approach to the text departs from that of many critics who describe the text as having a diary format reflecting the civil war. They have not considered the text as a novel and the significant role of fantasy and absurdism. Miriam Cooke approaches *Beirut Nightmares* as a representative text of the Lebanese Civil War by observing close and small details that draw the image of the war. She explains that Al-Samman "used the journal as a distinctive literary device,"[374] and that enables Al-Samman to record the war through self-awareness which is "reflected in an almost psychedelic stream of consciousness."[375] Yasmine Khayyat [376]also agrees with Cooke that the genre of the text is a journal format. Renee Michelle Ragin, on the other hand, argues its genre is a "semi-autobiographical chronicle of a woman's attempt to survive during the infamous Hotel's War of 1975-1976."[377] By contrast, Nedal Al-Mousa takes a different approach by arguing that the civil war in Lebanon works as a fertile ground that enhances the imagination of Al-Samman and that factual representation of the events has led to inadequate portrayals of the war.

Al-Mousa argues that the civil war drives Al-Samman to give another portrayal of reality by deploying different modes of representation that have surrealistic elements in a diary-like genre. Al-Mousa's main focus is to prove that the civil war works as a stable

[374]Miriam Cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 43.
[375] Cooke, *War's Other Voices*, 43
[376] Yasmine Khayyat, "Memory Remains: Hunted BY Home in Lebanon (Post) War Fiction," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, no.1-2 (2016).
[377] Renee Michelle Ragin, "Women's Literature of the Lebanese Civil War," *The Literary Encyclopedia* (2019):2.

background which creates a narrative texture for Al-Samman.[378] In a similar way, Pauline Homsi Vinson shows the diverse literary styles that Al-Samman deploys in her trilogy about the civil war. She highlights the use of symbolism and allegory. Other critics, such as Nadine A. Sinno approaches the text differently. Her analysis focuses on the use of fantasy as a method to show the significant damage that is done to the environment, "namely plant and animal life."[379] She explains that Al-Samman displays substantial environmental awareness through her unnamed narrator. According to Sino, fantasy in this novel helps to show the psychological tie between humans and animals at times of distress, whereas my focus on fantasy takes another route. Fantasy will be analysed as an experiment that contributes to the novel by reflecting the horror of the civil war and depicting images of violence. A recent study by Renee Ragin Randall tries to map the works that Al-Samman wrote during the sixties and the seventies about supernatural constructions to recreate the violent climate of Lebanon during the war.[380] However, the space to analyse the novel *Beirut Nightmares* about absurdism and fantasy is still open.

Hanan Sbaiti also analyses *Beirut Nightmares* concerning the politics of feminism to bring to attention the political and social imprisonment that women in the Arab world suffer from.[381] With a specific look at women in the Middle East, Sbaiti relates the physical imprisonment that the unnamed narrator undergoes because of the civil war with the social imprisonment that women in the Arab World deal with because of patriarchy. She argues that Al-Samman, just like her narrator, finds in writing a sanctuary from the conditions that oppress them. However, writing for Al-Samman in this novel does not free her from patriarchy only; it is used as a tool to encapsulate her philosophical thoughts regarding the role of intellectualism in challenging the corruption in the Arab World. *Beirut Nightmares*

---

[378] Nedal Al-Mousa, "The Impact of the Lebanese Civil War on Weaving the Texture of the Narrative of Ghada Al-Samman's *Beirut Nightmares,*" *AWEJ For Translation & Literary Studies*, 4, no.4 (October 2020): 238.
[379] Nadine A Sino, "The Greening of Modern Arabic Literature: An Ecological Interpretation of Two Contemporary Arabic Novels," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20, no.1 (2013):130. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/ist 013

[380] Renee Ragin Randall, "Lebanon in the Devile's Waters: The Literary Supernatural in Ghada Al-Samman's Civil War Triology," *Middle Eastern Liteartures* 25, no.2-3 (2023).
[381] Hanan Sbaiti, "Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares:* A Woman's Life," *Women's Studies International Forum* 32, no.5 (2009).

challenges the corruption of the political regimes in the Arab World and patriarchy by deploying literary representations such as fantasy and absurdism.

Al-Samman's perspective on intellectualism about diaspora thinkers and intellectuals is encapsulated in articles by Louis Yako and Nidal Al-Kousairy.[382] Both agree that Al-Samman defines the role of intellectualism in challenging the power system in the Arab World, especially after the defeat of 1967.[383] This trauma has not only affected the consciousness of the Arab nation and drained its emotions. It has also created a sense of sorrow that was reflected in Arabic literature.[384] Yako finds that "connecting the fate of the writer with people, merging the intellectual's well-being with that of others and linking national duty to individual freedom are recurring themes in Samman's writings."[385] In *Beirut Nightmares*, Al-Samman engages in commenting on the political reality of Lebanon and the Arab World. As we shall see, in this novel she emphasizes that the act of writing preserves the reality of the war with its violent ugliness to combat the depoliticizing of Arab intellectuals in general and Arab women writers in particular. Concentration on Al-Samman's thought regarding the role of intellectualism is crucial in understanding the on-going crisis that the Middle East endured in the previous fifteen years. The title of the novel implies the hidden reality of the Arab World as a defeated nation that is ruled by corrupted regimes. Al-Samman says in one of her interviews that "Dreams, madness, invocations, and hallucinations are literary tools that help me to probe the depth of humanity […] The point is to wake up, what's most important in a nightmare is for the individual to persist from within his sleep to wake up and get up from the nightmare. The will to wake up is what we [Arabs] are lacking."[386] Therefore, the combination of the literary styles that are adopted by Al-Samman—namely

[382] Nedal Al-Kousairy, "War in Feminist Syrian Novel (*Beirut Nightmares*)," *Tishreen University Journal* 44, no.2 (2022).
[383] The year 1967 is an important date in modern Arabic History in which the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were defeated by Israel. It was called the Year of Defeat (*Naksa*) in Arabic.

[384] This literature is usually called the literature of the defeat.
[385] Louis Yako, "If We All Leave, Who Will Cut the String: Exiled Intellectuals in Ghada Al-Samman's Thought," *Arab Studies Journal* 26, no.1 (2018):115.

[386] Pauline Homsi Vinson, 'Ghada Al-Samman: A Writer of Many Layers,' *AL-Jadid Magazine* 8, no. 32 (2002). http://www.aljadid.com/content/ghada-samman-writer-many-layers.

absurdism and fantasy—echo the factual reality of the Arab world. The nightmares in the title of this novel represent this reality.

Beirut Nightmares as a Novel; not Merely a Diary or Journal

In the scholarship on *Beirut Nightmares*, there are varying classifications of its genre, pointing to the ambiguous form of this text. On the one hand, Miriam Cooke categorises it as a journal. Other critics like Nedal Almousa argue that the genre of the text has more of a diary-like format. Cooke explains that the journal format helps Al-Samman to document the war in a series that unravels the normality of the war. She explains: "The dailiness is recounted, it is not divided into days but is a continuum linking events and moods."[387] Cooke then argues that war is the "ultimate rupture" but life "had to be lived as normal."[388] However, the structure of the text contrasts with what Cooke considers as a journal format as will be discussed below. Almousa also categorizes this text as a diary format. Deborah Martinson observes that it could be difficult to define what a diary genre is because critics have interpreted this genre differently. She says that: "William Matthews's 1977 article on diaries […] define[s] them [diaries] as a daily record, normally formal and regular in style", while "Edward Siedensticker insists that the diary is a self-centred writing […] different from both autobiography and memoir."[389] Martinson also mentions Lawrence Rosenwald's definition of a diary as "personal writing [that] is a chronological ordered sequence of dated entries addressed to an unspecified audience."[390] Those different definitions of diary make it difficult to theorize and give it a clear structure and *Beirut Nightmares* departs from those definitions. The presence of actual nightmares, hallucinations, fantasy, and different stories that have little casual connection with the linear progression of the events manipulates readers' expectations aligning it with the novel genre rather than a diary or journal. *Beirut Nightmares* is a novel that records the impact of the war physically and psychologically.

In particular, Al-Samman's text lacks an important characteristic of the diary genre, which is dating the events in the text. The unnamed narrator tries to convey the meaning of nightmares by dislocating the sense of time which is unlike the rational, linear, and

---

[387] Cooke, *War's Other Voices*, 46.
[388] Cooke, *War's Other Voices*, 46.
[389] Deborah Martinson, *In the Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and* Fiction (The Ohio State University Press, 2003), 5.
[390] Martinson, *In the Presence of Audience,* 5.

chronological narration of the diary. The nightmares are numbered and not dated and also do not correspond to consecutive days. The sense of time being unrecorded is conveyed in the structure of the novel, and this structure echoes the characters' lived experiences of the war. The unnamed narrator says: "I'd lost track of how many days I'd been held as a prisoner in our apartment building, completely cut off from the outside world."[391] Another important example is that Al-Samman invites her readers to add their nightmares as a prelude to the novel to creating a collective memory of war experiences as opposed to the format of the diary.

Al-Samman's text is a record of the days that the unnamed female narrator spent trapped in her apartment, and also a record of the psychological state that the war imposes on her through those days. Further, it is a record of different stories and fantasies that impose on readers a state of confusion and uncertainty and destabilize the relationship between fiction and reality. This experimentation with genre confuses the readers and manipulates their expectations in reading a war text. Unlike the traditional diary, which details one individual's daily experience, the book has a variety of characters: some are real, and some are fantastic. The reason why Al-Samman includes those different stories alongside the story of the unnamed narrator is because she wants to show the collective experience of the war in disorientating people and depriving them as a whole of peace. This structure of the book contrasts with the diary genre by providing, along with the story of the narrator, the stories of different characters and their tales within the wider city. For example, the story of the graveyard in episode number 135 is about a community leader who visits a graveyard in which "there had been quite an influx of new residents."[392] The leader knocks on their doors to listen to their untold stories. However, there is a newcomer to the graveyard who was killed because he left flowers at checkpoints: "Someone could lose his life for no reason."[393]This story shows that Al-Samman is describing the whole of Lebanese society and records the days of these people.

[391] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 306.
[392] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 338.
[393] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 338.

Another piece of evidence is the story of blood transfusion which criticizes sectarianism and division and shows the collective trauma in Lebanese society. The character of Nadim demonstrates how sectarianism affects the whole society:

> Responding to a plea for blood donors, that he'd heard on the radio, Nadim went down to the hospital one morning to donate some of his blood […] Meanwhile, thanks to Nadim's gift of blood, Salim had begun to feel life stirring in him once again […] At around the same time, Nadim set out in search of someone belonging to the 'other' religion with the intention of killing him […] As soon as Nadim discovered that Salim belonged to the 'other' team's religion, he pulled the trigger and shot him dead.[394]

Al-Samman shows in this story the extension of suffering into the Lebanese nation by portraying the image of one unified blood going through two different veins. Nadim and Salim belong to two different sects. When Nadim donates his blood to Salim, as if he gives him life again and by that giving himself life again. However, Nadim did not kill Salim only; he killed himself when he was looking for people from other religions to kill. Al-Samman shows how sectarianism works. It starts with others and then eventually finishes with everyone. No one is protected if division and hatred prevail.

Furthermore, the unnamed narrator mentions to readers that she is writing a novel, which is the text they are reading. This happens towards the end of the book when the narrator retrieves her bag after she is rescued: "The bag in question contained notes for a future novel which I was planning to call *Beirut Nightmares*."[395] However, the unnamed narrator also emphasizes the act of writing *Beirut Nightmares* as a day-to-day record: "On top of Yousif's things I placed the manuscripts of some of short stories and notebooks filled with memories that I'd written over the previous seven years. Along with them, I put the rough draft of *Beirut Nightmares* which I'd been recording day by day and moment by moment."[396] This imposes a productive ambiguity upon the novel which lacks certainty and closure, just like the war. What distinguishes this text is that it has a clear characteristic which is showing the bewilderment of the world of war that it describes.

---

[394] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 249.
[395] Al-Samman*, Beirut Nightmares,* 364.
[396] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 178.

Patricia Waugh says, "Fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality"[397] is called metafiction. Metafiction does not only "examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, [it] also explore[s] the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional world."[398] What is more important is that metafictional writing contributes to the idea that "reality or history is provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures."[399] If metafictional writing responds to the ordered reality in fiction, to portray the truth, then Al-Samman's deployment of the metafictional genre is an embodiment of her perspective in portraying reality in writings as mentioned earlier. However, the metafictional technique, as Waugh explains can be found in both modernist and postmodernist literature. *Beirut Nightmares* in this regard shares some characteristics of postmodern metafiction such as non-linear narrative and self-conscious narration, and belongs to its timeframe. Despite this, postmodernism is a limiting framework for a text that has many other aspects and indeed contradicts some elements of postmodernism such as the attitude towards portraying the truth in writings.

Beirut Nightmares embodies a dimension of self-reflexivity and that adds to the confusion that is created within readers. Al-Samman is not the main character nor the main narrator, but her main narrator/ character is a Syrian writer with biographical similarities. This confusion between the world of fiction and the world outside fiction is generated through the uncertainty that the novel brings to readers. Such confusion helps Al-Samman to articulate social and cultural criticism without projecting the self and claiming authenticity. She also leaves her readers the chance to judge her work without imposing individualism.

Moreover, Al-Samman's main protagonist does not have a name; instead, she goes unnamed in the novel. This technique makes *Beirut Nightmares* an elaborate study of the fragmented collective self during the war. The metafictional framework in the book helps

[397] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Taylor &Francis Group, 1984), 2.
[398] Waugh, *Metafiction,* 2.
[399] Waugh,7.

the unnamed narrator to express the collective suffering of the Lebanese. The unnamed narrator says in nightmare number 68:

> As I stood on the dividing line between life and death, I felt a kind of mysterious tranquillity enveloping my spirit—the kind of tranquillity that I suspect must be experienced by those who've crossed over from the realm of sanity to that of madness. It was the inward peace that lies beyond pain. It was the same sensation that always came over whenever I sat down to write to record what was to become *Beirut Nightmares.* The sounds of gunfire from the battle ranging in the street were growing steadily louder […][400]

Then in nightmare number 69:

> The battle continued to rage …
>
> No doubt there were many slain lying on the roads surrounding my house, while others were still in torment, not yet having been relieved by death's arrival. There was not a single ambulance that would dare come near this accursed place. The wounded, lying only a stone's throw away from me would have to suffer for a long time, since I was helpless to do so much […] I was feeling pain in my eye […] whenever the battle heated up, the pain would come back, as if it weren't my own wound, but the wound of the entire city... [401]

Those two paragraphs show the fragmentation that the unnamed narrator suffers from during the war. It is not merely Al-Samman's unnamed narrator's fragmented self that is reflected; it is the collective self that is displayed through the unnamed narrator. The first paragraph describes the state of the unnamed narrator. Moving between sanity to madness imposes on her a strange tranquillity that drives her into fragmentation because of the war. In the second paragraph, Al-Samman starts from the unnamed narrator's fragmentation that she portrays in the first paragraph to the fragmentation and the agonies of the whole Lebanese people. Even the city is personified and suffers because of the war when the unnamed narrator refers to her wound as the wound of the city. Al-Samman's choice to perplex her readers when considering the genre of her text defines her philosophy when it comes to portraying real life in writing.

---

[400] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares ,* 131.
[401] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 132-33.

Absurdism: Reflection of the War

Al-Samman started her writing career in the early 1960s. Internationally, the decade before, the 1950s, witnessed the emergence of a very complicated and intellectual movement, mainly in theatre, called the Theatre of the Absurd. Theatre of the Absurd or absurdism is a huge and sophisticated movement that I will not be able to convey in a few paragraphs. However, in this chapter, I will not apply the theatrical techniques of the theatre of the absurd to the novel. Instead, I will show the influence of the ideas and thoughts of this movement on Al-Samman's text. To be clear, I am not arguing that Al-Samman's text is absurdist, but that elements of absurdism and characteristics of absurd literature are clearly traceable in *Beirut Nightmares*. It is important to note that the lack of existing analysis on the impact of absurdism on Al-Samman's novel *Beirut Nightmares*, although Cooke mentions the following about Al-Samman's affinity with absurdism: "Theatre of the Absurd, [is] a highly suitable topic for someone who seems to treat the whole of life as an absurdist stage, with herself as the main character playing out whatever role suits her at the moment."[402]

Al-Samman was highly impacted by absurdism and even the topic of her M.A. thesis was on the theatre of the absurd.[403] Renee Michelle Ragin argues that Al-Samman's literary styles channel the socio-political challenges that the Arab region was going through. She says about Al-Samman that: "Her choice to write her master's thesis on the theatre of the absurd in part reflected both the rapidly changing pre-civil war conditions in Beirut and the successive coups[404] underway in her homeland."[405] Therefore, her novel *Beirut Nightmares* could be read in the broader political context of the region at that time. The influence of absurdism in this novel comes as a response to the chaos of life amid the war, and it is noticeable in its bleak existentialism and portrayal of the loss of connection between humans and despair because of the war.

---

[402] Cooke, *War's Other Voices, 5*.
[403] I tried hard to read Al-Samman's M.A.; however, this was difficult as it was submitted seventy years ago.
[404] After Independence, Syria witnessed several military coups that ended when Hafiz Al-Assad became the president in 1971.
[405] Renee Michelle Ragin, "Hunting the Barzakh: The Wartime Émigré in Ghada Al-Samman *Al-Qamar Al-Murabba," Mashriq &Mahjar* 5, no. 2(2018):2.

Absurdism as a movement in theatre and literature emerged in response to the horror of World War Two and the Holocaust, according to Michael Y. Bennett. Writers such as Martin Esslin, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett [406], Albert Camus, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, and Jean-Paul Sartre are all associated with absurdism. Anxiety and fear comparable to those imposed on people in Europe because of World War Two were imposed on people in the Arab World within a different political context of colonialism and its aftermath. Al-Samman wrote at a time when the Arab World faced several defeats such as the *Naksa* in June 1967 followed by the loss of Palestinian lands in Gaza and the West Bank to Israel and the civil wars in Lebanon and Algeria. Roger Allen also adds that even before these political moments, the Arab World was not a stable place and that "During the 1950s and into the 1960s the majority of countries within the Arab World witnessed enormous changes, both political and social […] Many countries went through the process of revolution involving a varying degree of violence and social disruption."[407] This political turbulence makes its way into the writings of Arab writers. Writers in the Arab World had to express their thoughts about the political disappointment of revolting against the status quo. Many of them addressed the challenges and the instability by presenting literary experiments that transcend these instabilities. In particular, "Between 1967 and 1975, many of Al-Samman's writings deal with Arab national struggle against Zionism and imperialism," [408] according to Accad. Therefore, Al-Samman challenges political corruption by portraying the loss of human beings and their silence when the war machine works, using absurd characteristics such as the hopelessness of human conditions during wartime, and tragicomic moments that fill some of her episodes.

Although Al-Samman adds a significant contribution represented by literary experimentations such as absurdism to the existing body of Arabic Literature, she is not the first Arab writer impacted by the philosophy of absurdism. Tawfik Al-Hakim[409] (1898-1987) was the first writer to introduce the term absurdism into Arabic Literature with all the

---

[406] *Waiting for Godot* is a play that was written by Samuel Beckett in 1952 and first produced in 1953 in Paris, considered the most notable text that is related to the Theatre of Absurd.

[407] Roger Allen, "The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M.M Badawi (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 197.

[408] Evelyne Accad, "Freedom and the Social Context: Arab Women's Special Contribution to Literature" *Canadian Woman Studies* 8, no.2 (1987), 43.

[409] Writers such as Yousef Idris, *Flipflop and his Master* (1964), Naguib Mahfuz, *Tharthar Fawq al-Nil* (1966), Mustafa Mahmoud *Man and the Shadow* (1966) and many other writers have used the characteristic of the Absurd in their writings, according to Mona Shafik Fayad, 33.

ambiguity and challenges that it has, according to Mona Shafik Fayad. This term was introduced into the Arabic language as *la-M'aqul* which means "irrational". Fayad also says that *al-abath* conveys the meanings of "absurd" and "absurdism". The atmosphere in the Arab World in the 1950s and onwards encouraged Arab writers to redefine and re-evaluate their literary styles to represent the national defeat and its circumstances. When the term absurdism as a literary style first appeared in Arabic Literature, critics showed different attitudes between acceptance and rejection. Some have considered the absurd as a Western trend, just like the novel and the theatre, and that it only consists of cheap comedy that does not reflect the serious condition of the Arab World. Others see the absurd as an ideology that could not reflect the truth of Arab society because it revolves around individualism. By contrast, some believe that absurdism "is rooted in the tradition of the Arab countries as a form and content."[410] However, whether accepted or not, absurdism as an experiment made its way into the writings of Arab writers and mirrored the political and social scene in the Arab World then. Fayad argues that "The fifties [were] a time of change and revision […] There were also profound doubts about the direction in which the Arab World was heading […] These doubts were reflected in the literature of the times."[411] These uncertainties that occupied the Arab world led writers to rebel against the old order in literature that is mainly 'traditionalism' and "look towards existentialism as a possible source of ideas."[412] Fayad also says that "From existentialism to the absurd it was only one step accomplished through the translations of Camus."[413] Thus, the influence of absurdism in Arabic literature was the result of political chaos. Moreover, absurdism as a literary trope is a clear commentary on the uncertainties that the history of the Arab World reveals.

It should be pointed out that similar debates revolved around Absurdism in Europe. Absurdism did not only reflect anxiety because of the horrors of World War Two. It also came to challenge the old tradition of arts in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. Avant-garde movements in arts such as expressionism, Dadaism, and surrealism defy realism as a form of expression and reject the idea that realism can portray life as it is. In this regard, Bennett puts his argument thus:

---

[410] Mona Shafik Fayad, "The Impact of Absurd on Modern Arabic Literature: A Study of the Influence of Camus, Ionesco and Beckett," (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1986), 38.
[411] Fayad,"The Impact of Absurdism," 29.
[412] Fayad, 30.
[413] Fayad, 31.

> While expressionism was clearly a reaction to realism's supposed limitation, Dadaism's expression of nonsense (in direct contrast to the linearity and logic of realism) was a reaction to the perceived failures of logic and rational thought that led to the Great War (WWI). Dadaism was a largely political anti-war anti-bourgeois art movement. Surrealism soon grew out of Dadaism. Surrealism thought that liberating the imagination through the examination of dreams, free association and the unconscious could change the world in a positive way.[414]

Just as those avant-garde movements in the vision arts came to challenge the ability of realism to portray reality, absurdism came to challenge realism in literature and theatre. Avant-garde movements have hugely contributed to the ideas of absurdism. Cornwell observes that the avant-garde movements "sought to experiment in form and content and stood to revolt against tradition."[415]In short, this view is similar to that held by the critics and writers in the Arab World who embraced absurdism as a challenging form to portray the political upheavals.

Beirut Nightmares documents the vulnerability and uncertainty that human beings, animals, and even buildings face during the Lebanese Civil War. Al-Samman's unnamed narrator is trapped inside her building with no hope of surviving. Absurdism revolves around the relationship between human beings and the universe and that this relationship works in a way that contradicts harmony and rationality. Incoherence between humans and the universe is the main characteristic that signifies absurdism. Martin Esslin in the *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) explains the sense of loss expressed by human beings when disconnection between harmony and reason leads to absurdism. He quotes from Albert Camus: "A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of lights, man feels stranger […] The divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity."[416] This explanation that is presented by Esslin highlights the hopelessness that surrounds human beings in an irrational universe. Human beings in the philosophy of absurdism are reduced to machines that live a purposeless and senseless life.

---

[414] Michael Y. Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13.
[415] Neil Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 74.
[416] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), xix.

However, to define what absurd[417] is, is a difficult task. To start with, Bennett observes that the "Theatre of the Absurd" is like Existentialism. "Existentialism is not a philosophy" but is considered as a "label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy."[418] So is the theatre of the Absurd, Absurdism, or the philosophy of Absurdism, according to Bennett. He states that Absurdism as an intellectual movement is not a literary movement, but a label placed upon several desperate writers (whose I mentioned earlier) who revolted against traditional theatre in "sometimes similar and sometimes widely different ways."[419] Therefore, absurdism could be used as a term that refers to certain characteristics in the text that allow a different radical form that differs from the classical form. Absurdism's main goal is not to achieve harmony and reason in the text as a whole but to generate perplexity in the reader about the meaningless of existence. On the other hand, Neil Cornwell in *The Absurd in Literature* (2006) quotes from Chris Baldick in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990) that "absurd as a term" is "derived from the existentialism of Albert Camus and often applied to the modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value."[420] This definition presented by Baldick and Cornwell conveys the state of uselessness and hopelessness experienced by human beings when confronting universal circumstances such as the war. However, Cornwell mentions several definitions of absurdism or the absurd. He says:

> *Webster New Collegiate Dictionary* confirms the noun absurd as the state or condition in which man [sic] exists in an irrational meaningless universe and in which man's life has no meaning outside his own existence[…]*The Oxford Dictionary* gives the original meaning of absurd as 'out of harmony '[…]' with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.[421]

These definitions of the word absurd explain how the circumstances of human beings enforce on them the state of meaningless because of losing hope and faith. The state of the incomprehensibility of a human's condition could be encapsulated by the absurd in literature. In *Beirut Nightmares,* the unnamed narrator, like the rest of the Lebanese, finds that her circumstances imprison her with no space for hope. Their days and routines have turned into endless nightmares. They have been placed in a world that dehumanizes them,

[417]The terms "Absurd" and "Absurdism" will be treated as the same.
[418] Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd,* 2.
[419] Bennett, 2.
[420] Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature, 1.*
[421] Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature,* 3.

where communication is impossible because of the war. In *Beirut Nightmares,* the unnamed narrator describes this incomprehensibility that the Lebanese people find themselves in because of the civil war and encapsulates an important element of absurdism which is the hopelessness of human conditions. In nightmare number 77 the unnamed narrator says after hearing several explosions:

> Is it necessary to die unarmed, scared and very confused? And if I got killed now, I would be only considered as murdered but not as a martyr! I would be happy to know that my death would make the world more humanitarian, but unfortunately it will be the opposite. My corpse will be added to the other corpses in the nearby street and it will make it dirtier. That is the story […] a death with no reason makes a human being only a stupid victim. I will not die for no reason […] Not every death is a victory, what is more important for a human being is to die for a reason and to have a life that has a meaning.[422]

The civil war brings a sense of the inevitability of death and lack of hope, and that enforces on the narrator the decision to choose how to die. Words such as 'confused' and 'unarmed' describe the narrator's state of hopelessness. It is not a new reality only for the unnamed narrator; it is a new reality for the Lebanese people. Their death is for no reason they are dying in numbers just to make their political leaders win.

The feeling of incomprehension and the lack of harmony between the Lebanese people and their circumstances because of the war are not the only impact of absurdism on the text. Bennett argues that absurdism is a movement that is "composed of amorphous undefined collection of thoughts and practices."[423] Al-Samman's text lasts for 197 nightmares or episodes. Although those episodes narrate about twenty days during the Lebanese Civil War in which the unnamed narrator tries to escape her building, multiple episodes disrupt the plot in an illogical way and present her scattered thoughts. For example, when the unnamed narrator is describing her wishes on how to die in the civil war in nightmare 77, nightmare number 78 disrupts her narration about death and brings in a story about an actor called Nano who resembles the president. Then, in nightmare number 79, the unnamed narrator returns to document her movements in her building and refers to

[422] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 111.
[423] Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of Absurd,* 2.

the idea of being trapped in her apartment. It is as if Al-Samman is portraying through nightmares the same circular movement that confines the narrator in her building. The narration of the nightmares works as a mirror of the confinement of the Lebanese people. The unnamed narrator says in nightmare number 79:

> Here I was moving within my new little routine—my civil war routine. I would spend my nights in Amm Fu'ad's ground-floor apartment fearful of the perils I might encounter if I ventured upstairs. Then at dawn I'd ascend to my own flat as if death could come only by night, or as if rockets could be fired only in the dark! I spent my days alone in the house wandering about aimlessly like a lost soul, reading old newspapers, writing in my diary, giving myself over to nightmarish day-dreams and answering phone calls from friends […] I'd run for cover to the hallway where I'd sit listening to the short—wave band (the forbidden station). The real facts about what was taking place would come pouring out in what seemed like a torrential black. And whenever I heard a cry of distress I'd go racing to the window […] At other times I'd contact friends in the hope of locating someone who might be able to extricate me from my hellish predicament. I'd try …I'd fail.. I'd think about Yousef and agonize and think about my brother and agonize some more. I'd wait for nightfall to come so that I could visit my neighbours in the pet shop, then return once again to my sarcophagus on the first floor to try to get some sleep. And so on […] [424]

The routine that the unnamed narrator describes in this episode resembles a circular movement that defies the linear plot of the traditional novel and diary, which chronologically charts a person's day-to-day experiences. As previously mentioned unlike a diary, which presents sequential accounts of days, the nightmares in this text do not correspond to days. The unnamed narrator's movement echoes the illogical and senseless meaning of the war. The word "sarcophagus" invites readers to think about the psychological state of the unnamed narrator and the Lebanese people as being entrapped in their circumstances. These circumstances lead them to one conclusion which is death. The word "sarcophagus", which is similar to the word "tomb", is used instead of bed to refer to the condition that the war enforces on people in Lebanon.

Another important element of absurdist characteristics in the text is the treatment of spatial and temporal dimensions. As Fayad explains about absurdism more generally, "Space is often abstracted to the degree that it becomes a reduction of real space. The characters

[424] Al-Samman*, Beirut Nightmares,* 130.

may even experience a retreat from physical space into mental space."[425] In *Beirut Nightmares* the unnamed narrator in the novel experiences this retreat from her physical apartment into her nightmares and hallucinations each time she hears the sound of bullets and explosions. Days have turned into nightmares, and the unnamed narrator is entrapped inside those nightmares. Her apartment is turned into a part of the nightmares. Also, the structure of time in Al-Samman's novel helps to show the impact of absurdism. Fayad asserts that "time is treated as an artificial and external intrusion on human life brought about the requirements of organized society."[426] If time organizes society, then the chaos of the war eliminates this organization and the passage of time turns out to be meaningless in front of death. Space and time in the novel are reduced to nightmares also. Nightmares and fantasy are the current space of the unnamed narrator and the passage of time is absent because of the infinity of the nightmares. Time and space have become meaningless dimensions in the novel and work in an absurd process to mirror the war. In episode number 104, the unnamed narrator says, "No it had to be either Saturday or Sunday, which meant that people ought to be occupying themselves with simple mundane problems such as where to spend the weekend! [...] In countries whose populations are starving, the weekend-like the rest of the week-is a time of mass annihilation, a time to be spent not planning outings but burying the dead."[427] Time and space have turned into tools to increase people's suffering during the civil war. Mass annihilation and burying the dead replace normal activities in the life of Lebanese people.

Although the novel consists of 197 episodes that portray the nightmare of the civil war, those episodes do not work as a unified plot that directs the reader to a resolution. On the contrary, those episodes contradict the Aristotelian structure because several episodes disrupt the narration of the unnamed narrator by presenting different short stories and parables that have no logical connection with the narration of her daily life while she is entrapped in her apartment. Al-Samman presents several stories in the novel that connect symbolically with the narration rather than having a causal link to the text. This experimentation presents the text as an experimental novel, adding to its absurdity and links to absurd literature. Bennett argues that there are common threads that can be found

[425] Fayad, 6.
[426] Fayad, 6.
[427] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 234.

in absurd literature written between the 1950s and the 1970s, such as the "experimentation with non-Aristotelian plot lines."[428] He explains that the plot in any absurd literature lacks a narrative arc in a way that there is no identifiable or clear conflict that heads towards a resolution. Bennett also observes that such techniques in absurd literature could be achieved by deploying a "tragicomic genre".

The tragicomic genre is one of the most distinguished characteristics of absurd literature. Tragicomedy happens when comedy and tragedy intertwine in such a way which results in readers feeling confused about their reaction to the text. Tragicomedy is a genre label frequently given to Beckett's oeuvre. Bennett mentions that "Beckett's tragicomedy expresses both tragic and comedic insights but—maybe even more noticeable—Beckett's opposing generic elements often seem to cancel each other out, cancelling out the movement of tragedy and/or comedy, resulting in dramatic and theatrical stasis."[429] *Beirut Nightmares* shows moments of tragicomedy in certain episodes. However, the structure of the novel does not show a stasis because of those moments. In contrast, an absurd tragicomic genre is used in different episodes to express the absurdity of life during the war.

In episode number 104, the unnamed narrator observes after the death of her neighbour uncle Fu 'ad: "What looked like a condescending smile had spread over the bluish lips, which had parted to reveal a set of false teeth. It was the Mona Lisa! The Mona Lisa, civil-war style! The Mona Lisa, vintage 1975!."[430] This episode exemplifies the tragicomic genre by describing a sad event such as the death of the narrator's neighbour as: "Just like an overdone horror film",[431] and framing it to the reader with black humour. The narrator describes the smile placed over the face of the corpse as the smile of the Mona Lisa. Al-Samman tells her readers that the Lebanese when they die they smile to mock their lives and the experience of the war. The grotesqueness of Fu'ad's deathly smile evokes discomfort because it represents a fusion between life and death. The comparison between his smile and the Mona Lisa's smile supports this discomfort and this emotionally layered situation because it provokes readers to understand the reason behind his smile. The use of the words "false teeth" describes how tragic and false the war is unpacking by that the

[428] Bennett, 19.
[429] Bennett, 55.
[430] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,*233.
[431] AlSamman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 233.

genre of the tragicomic and adding to this grotesque portrait that Al-Samman draws about the absurdity of the war.

Another important example that explains those tragicomic moments is found in episode number 118. When the servant is killed by one of the missiles, the unnamed narrator has to stay with Amin and two other corpses. This represents the ugly reality of the war and brings to the readers moments of sadness. Al-Samman on the contrary again mocks this ugly reality by deploying techniques of absurdism. The narrator says: "And here were Amin and I, obliged to stay together in a single room at one end of the flat […] Now there was a corpse in the garden and another in the rubbish bin. In addition, I had a third 'cadaver' sharing the same room with me -namely Amin- only he, unlike the other two bodies, was a chatterbox!."[432] Although, the narrator is surrounded by death and corpses, she describes those moments in an ironical way to defy moments of death. The narrator again turns horror moments into a black humour by describing the only living human being with her 'Amin' as a chatterbox.

In another episode number 24, when the unnamed narrator's brother tries to run from their apartment to get some food,

> Someone was knocking on the door. It was our elderly neighbour, Amm Fu'ad. 'Has your brother come back?' he inquired. 'My brother?' I replied. 'But he went down to see you!'. In a dejected-sounding voice, he said: he came down to see us and we hadn't laid a good food supply so he decided to go and get some things for us. He said we'd die of hunger if these battles kept up […] I shouted 'how could he have done that? [...] Don't you realize that they even shot a dog that had the nerve to cross the road' […] I shouted again 'he isn't armed!' Amm Fu'ad said sorrowfully: 'he insisted on going and he took my pistol with him'. 'But your pistol is an antique' […] And I found myself wondering: Do you suppose my brother really went on some sort of heroic mission to bring back food? Or is it just that like me, he's scared to death […]I did not blame him. In fact I envied him for his courage! In this kind of hell, perhaps the only sort of heroism possible for unarmed people like us was to do exactly what my brother had done: flee! To stay alive…alive…alive...[433]

In episode number 46, after a long wait, the unnamed narrator receives a call, to be informed that her brother is imprisoned for possessing a gun without a licence. She says: "I

[432] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 286.
[433] Al-Samman ,*Beirut Nightmares,* 34-35-36.

bolted over to it [the phone] like a mad woman thinking it might be my brother. It was not. It was an unfamiliar voice saying […] 'he's in prison' […] I laughed and laughed and laughed until I choked on my tears. 'Oh Beirut! Oh, theatre of the Absurd!' "[434] This situation that the unnamed narrator's brother finds himself in is a practical definition of the tragicomic genre in absurd literature. In wartime, when the voice of nonsense and irrationality speaks, humanity is relegated to the margin. In the Arabic version, the unnamed narrator says *Bayrut Ya masrah la-m'aqul* which is translated into 'Beirut, Theatre of the Absurd'. 'Absurd' here signifies the irrationality of the war. Also, the unnamed narrator, her brother, and the rest of the Lebanese people are the main characters in Beirut during time of the war. If Al-Samman refers to Beirut as "the theatre of the absurd" because of the war, then her novel is a medium to show this absurdity by adopting absurd characteristics.

Beyond the absurdity of the war, Al-Samman's choice of a female narrator is very significant in showing an important perspective on the condition of women in the Arab world. Elements of absurdism in the text not only echo the war but transcend the agony and fear of the Lebanese people. They also transcend masculine ideology and place it under interrogation by pointing to the situation of women in the Arab World. The unnamed female narrator says in episode 14: "I'd always been a captive without noticing it […] Or maybe I'd always been aware of my captivity and had been constantly trying to break the bars of my cell. If so, then my constant longing to reach out for the horizon and the sky beyond it is really nothing but a part of my longing for inner freedom: real freedom, not merely the freedom to roam about inside a huge prison with borders for walls—commonly known as 'the homeland'!"[435] These words give a glimpse into Al-Samman's views regarding the situation of women in this part of the world. The unnamed female narrator is a long-term prisoner because of masculine hegemony. The unnamed female narrator has experienced psychological imprisonment because of masculine dominance long before her actual imprisonment in her house due to the war. Al-Samman is referring to the absurd situation that women are placed in in this society. A man might feel absurd when he is placed in a hopeless situation according to the earlier definition of absurdism. However, Al-Samman exceeds this definition and shows that the unnamed female narrator and any woman in the

[434] Al-Samman , *Beirut Nightmares,*73.
[435] Al-Samman *, Beirut Nightmares,* 21.

Arab world are in an absurd situation even before the war. As Al-Samman writes in an essay called "The Terror of Criticism" (1987),

> During my career I have faced two main criticisms [...] The first is the masculine criticism that deprives me of my right in choosing my main character as a female. They classified my writing under the category of "women's literature" which they consider less valuable than my male counterparts' literature. From the beginning, I chose to revolt against that oppression and I declared that I am free in choosing my heroes or heroines […] Besides the masculine criticism, I faced a feminine criticism that obliges me to devote my writings to highlight women's issues and serve their rights […] I refuse to be slave to either of them and I see both of them as two opposing sides of one idea which is confiscating my literary creativity […] My refusal is based on my insisting on the literary creativity that drives me to defend all the oppressed in the Arab world, including women.[436]

Al-Samman's choice of a female narrator gives her a tool to shed light on the plight of women in the Arab World and to bring attention to the silenced and ignored experiences of women. However, Al-Samman goes further than that to bring to attention the suffering of all individuals in the Arab World on all levels.

Fantasy as a Socio-political Tool

In her treatment of the fantasy genre in *Beirut Nightmares*, Al-Samman captures the hard reality of the socio-political condition of the Arab World and the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War. In her study of Ghada Al-Samman's short story collection *The Square Moon* (1998), Hanadi Al-Samman argues for the reasons behind choosing the fantasy literary genre in the aforementioned collection and observes that fantasy helps Al-Samman as a woman writer to invigorate her voice by presenting "uncharted territories of supernatural"[437] to refer to the dilemma of reality. She presents a study of the fantasy genre in *The Square Moon* and places Ghada Al-Samman on the map of writers who deploy fantasy in their narratives. She says that "Samman becomes the first female writer who moulded her Arabic narrative into the Western genre of fantasy fiction and its

[436] Ghada Al-Samman, "The Terror of Criticism," (1987) in *An Arab Free Woman: The Incomplete Works 16*, (Beirut: Ghada Al-Samman's Publication, 2006), 49, 50, 51. My translation
[437] Hanadi Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 104.

preoccupation with imaginative worlds beyond immediate reality."[438] Al-Mousa also mentions that the civil war works for Al-Samman as a vehicle that enforces on her the use of different literary representations, although he does not specify the use of fantasy as one of those literary representations. Randall also acknowledges Al-Samman's role in showing a literary interest in the supernatural, as it is called in his study. Randall agrees with Al-Mousa that the Lebanese Civil War works as a vehicle that contains Al-Samman's literary contributions. For Randall, the supernatural in Al-Samman's trilogy about the war shows Arabo-Islamic cosmologies, Euro-American psychoanalytical notions, and Shakespearean aesthetics that result in supernatural construction which in its role highlights human violence in war.[439] However, my focus on fantasy departs from those scholars' studies and instead provides an analysis of fantasy as a literary genre that works as a political tool in the text to enhance the absurdist portrayal of war's atrocities. Also, my focus in this section will be on fantasy as a mode of expression that Al-Samman uses to portray the reality of violence in the civil war. The deployment of fantasy to depict violence in Al-Samman's text occurs at a time when realism seems unable to present this horror. Her choice of using fantasy is an attempt to retrieve the reality of the civil war.

The ugly reality of the civil war in Lebanon has urged writers to use different genres and that might enable them to portray the violence and the horror of the civil war. In their introduction to *Writing and Fantasy* (1999), Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White argue that "the fantastic acts as a secondary text to reality, variously acting as a commentary on or a mimesis of it."[440] Fantasy, then, starts from reality and takes readers into another world to question their original world. Although fantasy and magical realism share huge similarity, but fantasy as a socio-political tool which criticizes the ugly reality of the war is what I found productive in analysing *Beirut Nightmares*. Stephen M. Hart says in *A Companion to Magical Realism* (2005):

> One of the most contentious areas surrounding the analysis of magical realism is the intrinsic depth attached to the use of fantasy in magical-realist novels. Is fantasy, for example, simply a case of escapism or does it voice a concrete political critique? Does fantasy in a magical realist novel indicate the hallucinations of an artist who is

[438] Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure,* 104.
[439] Ranadll,"Lebanon in the Devil's Waters,"154.
[440] Ceri Sullivan, Barbara White, eds., *Writing and Fantasy* (Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 2.

> in the process of retreating from the world around him or does it [embody] the desire to a more just political world.[441]

According to Hart, "the conceptual problems" of magical realism and fantasy "emerge clearly when one juxtaposes the notion of 'magic realism' with competing or overlapping terms,"[442] such as fantasy. On the other hand, Hart explains that: "Magic is derived from the 'supernatural' elements of 'local' or 'indigenous' myths, religions or cultures." [443] Also, Hart observes that the "lines between the two modes or genres [Magical realism and Fantasy], however, have never really been clearly drawn,"[444] because of the similarities between these two genres. However, this line starts from reality and the role of fantasy is "a manifestation of desire, and its frustration in shaping discourse and policy."[445] Magical realism, on the other hand, depends on the intertextuality between "materials taken from local myths"[446] to interrogate reality. Events in fantasy are also related to the supernatural. They also cannot be interpreted by the laws of the world but eventually, there is a rational explanation for these events, according to Hart.[447] *Beirut Nightmares* starts from the reality of the civil war and creates a bridge between ordinary life and extraordinary states of being such as nightmares and hallucinations. It also connects real characters with unimaginable situations. Al-Samman's desire to let the dead talk, for example, is an expression of discontent with what the living people are saying. Depicting violence on a fantasy level in *Beirut Nightmares* invites readers to feel the need to question the ugly reality of the civil war. Fantasy in this novel is not escapism from the horror of the civil war, but a strong mode of expression to criticize and portray the political upheavals in Lebanon.

It is important to note that the deployment of the fantasy genre in Arabic literature is not new, and I quote from Al-Samman: "There is a rich tradition of classical, medieval, and even modern examples of fantasy and science fiction narratives among Samman's male counterparts."[448] She mentions several examples of the fantastic tradition of Arabic literature that date back to the twelfth and the thirteenth century, which was called the

---

[441] Stephen M. Hart, Wen-Chin Ouyang, ed., A *Companion to Magical Realism* (Woodbridge, 2005), 101.
[442] Hart, 14.
[443] Hart, 16.
[444] Hart, 19.
[445] Hart, 18.
[446] Hart,17.
[447] Hart,106.
[448] Hanadi Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure,* 104.

literature of *al-aja'ib* (”literature of wonders”). One text is called *Aja'ib al-Hind* (“The Wonders of India”)[449] which was an early manuscript that belongs to this section of literature. However, Hanadi Al-Samman argues that the deployment of the fantasy genre in premodern and early modern Arabic literature by male authors “is to celebrate the uncanny and the unattainable utopian state,”[450] in contrast to Ghada Al-Samman whose main interest I argue is to question the political and the social reality through fantasy. In *Beirut Nightmares*, Al-Samman uses fantasy to construct political rhetoric and criticism of the status quo of the civil war. By transporting us between reality and fantasy, without the ability to recognize in which setting the unnamed narrator is narrating, Al-Samman encourages readers to question the ugly reality of the civil war. The state of nightmares is the outcome of the surrounding violent reality and inner world of the narrator.

Brian Stableford defines fantasy as “the faculty by which simulacra of sensible objects can be reproduced in the mind: the process of imagination. What we generally mean when we speak of “a fantasy” in psychological terms is, however, derived from an exclusive rather than an inclusive definition of the term.”[451] In this definition, fantasy is the production of imagination that is enforced because of cultural context. However, we cannot ignore that fantasy is a fluid concept because it is the production of the imagination. For this reason, Rosemary Jackson says that “it is difficult to develop an adequate definition of fantasy as a literary kind,”[452] because it covers a wide range of any kind of “literature which does not give priority to realistic representation: myths, legends, folks, and fairy tales, utopian allegories, dream visions, surrealist texts, science fiction, horror stories, all presenting realms ‘other’ than the human.”[453] What is important is that the fantastic in literature works as a subversive element to the real. Jackson makes clear that fantasy is associated with imagination and that “literary fantasies have appeared to be free from many of the conventions and restraints of more realistic texts: they have refused to observe unities of time, space and character, doing away with chronology.”[454] Moreover, Jackson asserts the idea that fantasy in literature is a characteristic attempt to compensate for the loss of

[449] See *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (1986) for further examples.
[450] Al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure,* 105.
[451] Brian Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (Scarecrow Press Inc, 2005), xxxvii.
[452] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy* (Taylor &Francis Group, 2005), 13.
[453] Jackson, 13-14.
[454] Jackson, *Fantasy,*2.

cultural constraints and that fantasy "is a literature of desire which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss."[455] Therefore, fantasy in *Beirut Nightmares* is the production of the civil war and it is for this reason I read fantasy as political, a means of depicting of horror and violence that the civil war brings to Lebanon.

Al-Samman, through her unnamed narrator in *Beirut Nightmares*, breaks from the linear narrative and blends the real with the unreal, days with nightmares, and presents fantasy in her narration to create an alternative frame that looks at the horror of the civil war. Sullivan and White explain that fantasy in narrative works as "compensatory stories" that are "produced by the unconscious which allow the individual to work over versions of this moment of loss of unity between the self and the other."[456] The documentation of the days of the civil war by the unnamed narrator allows fantasy to become a state that the reader feels confused about. Is the unnamed narrator narrating about reality or is she producing a narration that works as a frame for reality? By blending reality with fantasy without drawing any defining lines between them, Al-Samman recreates the state of the nightmares for her readers. In episode number 41, the unnamed narrator screams:

> Ah nightmares, nightmares…
>
> They were sprouting inside my head and climbing the walls of my brain like some sort of wicked mythical plant….
>
> Ah nightmares nightmares….
>
> They were erupting from inside my head (or might they have been outside as well?). At first I would see them when I close my eyes….. But now I was seeing them constantly, even when I had my eyes wide open. [457]

This vision that the unnamed narrator points to is a state where fantasy is produced. Jackson explains that fantasy "is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it."[458] The context of *Beirut Nightmares* is the civil war and in several episodes, fantasy comes as a correspondence to this cultural trauma. It is used as a medium to question and subvert the reality. In episode

---

[455] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 3.
[456] Sullivan and White, *Writing and Fantasy*, 2.
[457] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 65.
[458] Jackson, *Fantasy*, 3.

number 93, Al-Samman writes about a dialogue between a child and Death. Death is personified as a character and tells the child that even he is tired from harvesting people's souls in Beirut:

> 'What is your name, sir?' the boy asked him. 'My name is Death,' replied the old man. The boy recognized the name, though only vaguely. It did not arouse any particular emotions in him […] 'What kind of work do you do, sir?' he asked. 'I am the hardest-working person in the whole city,' the old man replied. 'For the past eight months I've been working night and day without a moment's rest.' […]
>
> 'Why don't you emigrate with me?' the boy asked him. 'I've decided to leave this city forever. I can't bear to live here any longer. All the toy stores are closed, there isn't much to eat and it's too cold. And not only that, but I can't even sleep anymore, because every night my mother wakes me up, along with my brothers and sisters, then drags us out of bed and piles us on to the tile floor in the hallway for fear the house will be hit by a bomb.'
>
> 'You are right my little one.' said the old man, 'Life here has become intolerable even for me.' […]The child had become so engrossed in listening to the old man's tale of woe […] Then he asked the old man: 'Why do they hate you in this city?' 'Hate me?' […] I didn't say they hated me. In fact, they love me in a way I've never been loved in any other country in the whole world. They even name their streets, their rivers, and their bridges after me. [459]

Death has been personified in Beirut, this city that never gets tired of taking away its people's lives. Even Death cannot endure the amount of killing in that city. Death becomes intolerable to Death itself. This idea is applied in fantasy and the dialogue between the child and the Death. During the civil war, death has been turned into a normal activity that people see and hear every day. The normality of an extraordinary incident like death urges Al-Samman to use fantasy as an alternative form of narration to invite readers to question the oddness that has become the Lebanese people's normality. Ugly reality surpasses fantasy in the civil war. In the same episode, Al-Samman portrays the normality of death:

> 'To be perfectly honest,' the old man replied, 'it looks as if I won't be able to emigrate anywhere […] my clients never let up for a minute. In fact, they've founded an organization in my name. It is called 'Long Live Death'. Then he opened up his notebook where he kept his accounts and invoices. To the little boy, the huge book looked like a book of fairy tales. Then Death began reading his invoices […]

[459] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares*, 194-195.

> Invoice: Khalil Abu Faris is standing at the entrance to the Electricity Authority in the Mar Mikhail quarter. Before long he'll be fatally wounded in the head by an armed man. You are requested to come and collect immediately. [460]

Death becomes a bureaucratic process whereby he is invoiced to collect people's souls in Lebanon. Death reads those invoices from a book for the child as if they were fairy tales. Fairy tales in this novel work in a way that contradicts the peace that it often brings to children. Indeed fairy tales depend on "structure in which a magical transformation of miraculous event brings about a satisfying, happy ending," [461] as Jack Zipes explains. In different parts of the world, children have the chance to read about fairy tales that take them to the world of sweet dreams and imagination in their happy endings. Zipes observes that: "The fairy tale was to speak for happiness and utopia,"[462] whereas Al-Samman transforms in fantasy the fairy tale with happy endings into a macabre fairy tale that portrays the violence of the civil war. Fairy tales as Zipes argues, "emanated from an oral tradition in which small groups of people interacted with a storyteller […] who responded to their needs and demands, then this narrative form, […] did have immediate significance for the teller and the hearers, representing their belief systems and tastes in a voice or voices with which they identified."[463] Death, as portrayed in Al-Samman's novel, reads to the child about what most of the children in Lebanon hear every day during the civil war which is cycle of killing and death.

The fantasy element in the novel becomes the nightmares of the city. Al-Samman's objective in this novel is to blend reality, nightmares, and her imagination's production to invite her readers to analyse deeply the reality of the civil war. As Jackson explains, in modern times fantasy "does not invent supernatural regions, but presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something 'other'."[464] *Beirut Nightmares* portrays Beirut as the city of estrangement; this city, which once was the ideal of the East, has turned into a place that is occupied by death. Its people cannot differentiate between their days and their nightmares.

---

[460] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 196.
[461] Jack Zipes, *Happy Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.
[462] Zipes, 3.
[463] Zipes, 3.
[464] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 17.

The reality of violence in Lebanon during the civil war is hard to comprehend. By using fantasy, Al-Samman takes the reality of the civil war and breaks it into moments of fantasy, thereby creating a space to challenge and subvert reality. Jackson explains that "The etymology of the word fantastic points to an essential ambiguity: it is *un*-real. Like the ghost which is neither dead nor alive, the fantastic is a spectral presence suspended between being and nothingness."[465] Episodes of fantasy in the novel explain the psychological state of the Lebanese people, a state between life and death.

In contrast to absurdism, which is related to irrationality, fantasy is "intimately linked to the real and rational".[466] As Jackson explains, "it is not to be equated with irrationality. Anti-rational, it is the inverse side of reason's orthodoxy. It reveals reason and reality to be arbitrary shifting constructs, and thereby scrutinizes the category of the 'real'."[467] The fantastic in the text challenges the reality and it should produce a different reading of reality. In this regard, Sullivan and White explain that "Jackson has argued forcefully that subversion is a political function of literary fantasy."[468] Al-Samman, while using fantasy in some of her episodes in the novel, firstly, mirrors the anarchy of the civil war by including some fantastic episodes, and, secondly, presents another reading of this anarchy. In episode number 95, Al-Samman brings attention to the sectarian roots of the civil war in Lebanon. People in Lebanon did not only die because they have a certain religious identity, but even in death sectarian political and religious affiliations play an important role in classifying people:

> 'This bottleneck's getting to be more than I can take.' Saber kept saying this over to himself as he received the latest truckload of corpses. 'I can't take it anymore,' he thought to himself again as he stared at the pile of bodies that had just been dumped in front of him. In his capacity as supervisor of the government—run cold—storage locker, or 'the frozen graveyard' […] Saber was responsible for finding a place for all the new corpses […] 'This is getting out of hand [...]' Hemmed in on all sides by mangled, dismembered bodies, he stumbled over two or three of them whichever way he turned. He wasn't normally bothered by how crowded the locker was[…] During his days as a ticket vendor at a local cinema, he used to get a sense of satisfaction from seeing the seats filled […] However, the problem he now faced was that the cold-storage vault had become so full that there wasn't single seat left […]

[465] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 20.
[466] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 20.
[467] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 21.
[468] Sullivan and White, *Writing Fantasy,* 5.

> One of the bodies shouted: 'I am the nephew of the Sunni Muslim minister [...] Another cried out: 'I am the nephew of the Christian Maronite minister. If you do not let me in, you'll be violating the principle of equal representation among the sects and allowing corpses to be seated along sectarian lines!
>
> 'I am a Shi'ite!' cried another.
>
> 'I am Druze,' shouted still another […]
>
> 'I am an Orthodox Christian!' shouted out another.
>
> The fourth chimed in, saying: 'I am a Jew from Wadi Jumayyal […]'
>
> […] 'That's it! I am a goner!' Sabir said over and over to himself, shuddering with dread and revulsion at the litany of threats he'd been subjected to. He opened up the vault and began chasing out all the unidentified corpses. Then […] he stood at the doors shouting: 'Tickets! Tickets, please! Show me your tickets- that is, your identity cards! If you are poor come this way, please. […] This is a government-run locker, mind you, so everything has to be done the proper way!'.[469]

Al-Samman, by using a fantastical representation of sectarianism in Lebanon, asserts the triumph of the violence that is based on sectarianism rather than the ideals of coexistence. Sabir who used to work in a cinema as a ticket vendor, is now working in a mortuary. He deals with corpses rather than people. The image of dealing with dead people rather than the living portrays the amount of killing that happens during wars. 'Pile of bodies' refers to the idea that bodies of dead people are worthless in a country that is ruled by sectarianism. It also shows the lack of respect when dealing with dead people, because death has become the only reality in Lebanese society. The use of phrases such as 'this is getting out of hand' and 'stumbled over two or three of them whichever way he turned' supports this idea. The reference to the religious sects that construct Lebanese society through different corpses symbolizes the collective pain that all sects suffer from. It also highlights the dominance of each sect and the corruption that it follows. Each corpse claims that it has the privilege to be placed first which is a symbol of the rejection of others within one society. The government in Lebanon that is supposed to protect and serve the Lebanese people is criticized by Al-Samman's fantasy. Fantasy reveals the deep sectarianism in Lebanese society. Fantasy and elements of absurdism work together in the novel to create the state of nightmares that the civil war brings to Lebanon.

Writing is the only Reality

[469] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares ,* 219-20-21-22-23.

In contrast to absurdism and fantasy that encapsulate the chaos of life during the war, Al-Samman's assertion of writing as an act of preserving one's identity and as an act of revolting is portrayed as the only real act in the novel. Against the sounds of the bullets and the violence that comes with it, writing from her point of view is a logical act that can preserve identity amidst all the chaos. Therefore, Al-Samman presents a significant analysis of the act of writing and its role combined with the role of Arab intellectuals in leading change, reflecting awareness of, and commitment to the political and social issues in the region. Her vision of the role of Arab intellectuals and writing presents a solid background when examining the critical period that the Arab World has gone through. This vision could be applied today to the role of intellectuals and writing in preserving the memory of the last fifteen years (Post-Arab Spring) in the history of the Arab world.

Beirut Nightmares was written in a period that witnessed an extreme sense of defeat and writers had to lead their battles on paper. Elias Khoury in "Beyond Commitment" says that

> The issue that the civil war [in Lebanon] revealed was the crisis of Arab modern culture and politics. Needless to say, that this war was the mirror of the Arab Mashriq, and this mirror revealed the deep problems which had been suspended since the *Nahda*. What is worth noticing here is that this war, with all its implications on the Mashriq, opened the way to profound questions; instead of only limiting writing to describe and/or formulate a position, it also became a quest for discovering self and society, the meaning and the blindness of history. The quest requires that the writer has to have an eye capable of reading the present as if it is the past, thus giving his/her text the distance and the capacity to criticize, identify, destroy, rebuild and heal the wounds at the same time. [470]

Khoury acknowledges in his hypothesis that the civil war in Lebanon works for writers and intellectuals as a turning point in redefining their perspectives on the political and social corruption in the Arab World. Other historical moments, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, contributed to this redefinition. Al-Samman is not far from this hypothesis, as acknowledged by critics; she showed a full commitment to the political causes in the Arab World.

[470] Elias Khoury, "Beyond Commitment," in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflection on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s,* ed, Friederik Pannewick, Georges Khalil (Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2015), 85.

Therefore, in *Beirut Nightmares* and according to Al-Samman, writing and the role of intellectuals cannot be separated from the causes of the society that they address. Yako observes that "connecting the fate of the writer with people and merging the intellectual's well-being with that of others and linking national duty to individual freedom are recurring themes in Samman's writing."[471] In *Beirut Nightmares,* Al-Samman chooses a narrator that works as a writer and a journalist just like herself. However, the writer goes unnamed throughout the novel and that creates a sense of collectivistic identity that readers cannot ignore. Through her writing, Al-Samman articulates social and cultural criticism and transforms the individual's suffering into the suffering of the nation. Another important piece of evidence for this point is that Al-Samman chooses to dedicate her book to the unnamed workers who printed her book. She says in the preface:

> I dedicate this novel to the workers in the typesetting room
> Who at the moment are putting its words in order
> And who do despite the storm of rockets and bombs swirling about them
> Knowing that this book
> Will not bear their names [472]

This dedication that Al-Samman makes, encapsulates her vision of writing. *Beirut Nightmares* is a novel that is presented as an account by an unnamed narrator and is dedicated to unknown workers in the context of the absurdity of the war. In contrast to the bombing, words eternalize the suffering and preserve the memory of the agony of the war. Words also reflect the truth that bullets work to hide during wars. Al-Samman sees in writing an act that challenges the sounds of the bullets. In Episode 32, the unnamed narrator says:

> Life has taught me that it was no use running away from where I truly belonged. I was a daughter of this land, a daughter of this Arab region so ridden with unrest and

[471] Yako, 1
[472] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* The dedication.

> turmoil that it threatened to boil over at any moment. I was also a daughter of this war. This was my destiny.
>
> My gaze was fixed on the shelf that held the books I'd written, as well as scores of others I'd translated over a period of ten years of work in a revolutionary publishing house. I found myself whispering: And I also had a part in bringing about this war. True, I'd never carried a weapon in my entire life […] Yet the lines I'd penned had always conveyed a call for a change, a call to cleanse the face of this homeland of ours of all ugliness, washing it with justice, joy, freedom and equality […] I have spent my whole life serving these causes with the only weapon I know how to use well...
>
> But a well-used pen is better than a stray bullet. [473]

In this paragraph, Al-Samman challenges our expectations and raises questions for her readers. Is she writing about her experience as a writer in the Arab World? Is the lived experience of wars and trauma in the history of the Arab World a non-negotiable topic that writers have to deal with? However, Al-Samman tries to portray moments of doubt in about the ability to write when she says "a well-used pen is better than a stray bullet."By contrast, writing preserves the suffering and portrays the collective memory of the violence of the war in her words. These moments of doubt are the accumulation of the practice of the oppressive regimes that enforce constraints on writers when it comes to freedom of expression. In *Beirut Nightmares,* Al-Samman doubts the 'pen as a weapon' in front of the war machine. This self-reflexive criticism of the ability of the writer to question his/her approaches to the profound transformation that the Arab World has witnessed is clearly shown in the unnamed narrator's words. In episode 94, she says:

> The reason is that first and foremost, I'm a writer which means the pen—rather than the gun—is the only tool that I really know how to use in trying to bring about changes […] for the thinker, however, the role is reversed: Discuss, then act—and with as little violence as possible. [474]

The courage that writing gives to writers should not be compromised. However, Al-Samman displays those moments of doubt not to show the fear of supporting change but to convince her readers that writing is the only act of reality that could speak in front of the war machine. In a different episode 70, the unnamed narrator says: "I'd managed to write *Beirut Nightmares* […] I wondered: Do you suppose I'll live to see these words in print? Or will I be

[473] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 47-50.
[474] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 215.

incinerated along with them beneath the ruins of this house?"[475] Under the bombing, the unnamed narrator thinks only of her words that could retell the nightmares that Beirut lived during the civil war. Writing is the only possible way that preserves the suffering of people when the history of politics tries to manipulate the truth. In episode number 94 the unnamed narrator is talking to the corpse of Uncle Fouad, "As a writer whose primary allegiance is to truth, I have no choice but to take a stand against "injustice" wherever I see it."[476]

In contrast to these moments of doubt, the unnamed narrator always finds a welcome solitude and a sense of belonging in her library. The unnamed narrator states in episode 82:"My library contained the only things in our whole house that I considered to be real treasures."[477] Moreover, in episode number 118, she says: "My library was not a mere collection of books […] It was a dialogue. Every book it contained represented a human being with whom I'd engaged in a conversation, an exchange of ideas that had now been recorded in its margins […] So one could never say that my books were just for decoration."[478] This attachment to her library symbolizes the relationship between the writer and his/her words. Although the unnamed writer displays her experience as a writer who blames herself for the destruction that comes with change, *Beirut Nightmares* summarizes the need for free words that eternalize and preserve the memory of this violence.

Conclusion

Beirut Nightmares is a novel that presents moments from the civil war in Lebanon by using different literary experimentations to reflect the horror of reality. Al-Samman's work reveals another side of women writers' methods of probing deeply into Lebanese society's political and social corruption. Even though critics like M.M. Badawi accuse Al-Samman of producing a long novel that "suffers from repetitiveness and some structural weakness"[479],

[475] Al-Samman, 136.
[476] Al-Samman, 217.
[477] Al-Samman, 175.
[478] Al-Samman, 292.
[479] M.M. Badawi. *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 188.

locating this novel within its political and social context challenges this criticism because the civil war in Lebanon was no ordinary war. Instead of a diary, the novel genre works as a record for the unnamed narrator's voice and other characters' voices which enhance the experience of collective suffering for readers. Moreover, the literary experiments that Al-Samman uses in this novel, such as fantasy and traces of absurdism, are features that eternalize the moments of violence in the history of the Arab World. Absurdism mirrors the illogicality of the war and traces the hopelessness of individuals in the face of a devastating experience like the war. Fantasy, on the other hand, works as a second reality that depicts all the horror of the war. The ability of Al-Samman to show the suffering of the Lebanese through the perspective of one unnamed narrator and her nightmares and fantasies makes the novel an account of voices that challenge this ugly reality. In the face of the arbitrary and chaos of the war, writing as a weapon is the only reality that defies the narrative of the war.

Conclusion

Putting War in Words

This thesis has been a study of selected works by four women writers, Assia Djebar, Ahlam Motsteghanemi, Hanan Al-Shaykh, and Ghada Al-Samman. The literary texts studied in this thesis are *Algerian White* (1996) and *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* (1997) by Assia Djebar, *Memory in The Flesh* (1997) by Ahlam Mostaghanemi, *The Story of Zahra* (1980) by Hanan al-Shaykh, and *Beirut Nightmares* (1976) by Ghada Al-Samman. These literary texts were inspired by the civil wars in Algeria and Lebanon during the timeframe 1975-2000. I have shown in this study that Djebar, Mosteghanemi, Al-Shaykh, and Al-Samman all experiment with narrative voices and literary genres to articulate experiences of women during wartime, to convey the socio-political complexities of conflicts, to highlight women's marginalization of women's voices, and to construct a collective memory of these conflicts by defying oppression and division that resulted from the linguistic conflict in Algeria and sectarianism in Lebanon.

Ghada Al-Samman in her novel *Beirut Nightmares* asserts the role of the writer in resisting oppression and violence during conflicts when she says: "Yet the line I'd penned had always conveyed a call for a change, a call to cleanse the face of this homeland of ours of all ugliness, washing it with justice, joy, freedom, and equality [...] But a well-used pen is better than a stray bullet."[480] These words by Al-Samman explain the role that writings and words occupy in defying the voice of violence and oppression. Writing, for Al-Samman and

[480] Al-Samman, *Beirut Nightmares,* 47-50.

the writers in this thesis, is a weapon that is effective in preserving the pain and the agonies of society during wartime. Assia Djebar also responds to the death of her friends by writing *Algerian White* to commemorate the memory of those who died in the War. I found that writing for the writers in this thesis defies and challenges oppression, and preserves the violence and the bloody events that people witness when criminals are not brought to justice. Writing also commemorates the memory of those who were killed during conflicts. It also preserves the memory of subjugated people, their fears, their dreams, and their aspirations, and more importantly, the reality that they are human beings.

This thesis, therefore, shows the important role that war literature plays in the literary field. War literature in the Arab World is more relevant today than ever before. It might serve as a sign of brave resistance and a reminder of the memory of the historical and political turning points in the region. It also should continue to attract more critical analysis to reach for a better and wider understanding of all the surrounding political and social conflicts. Therefore, redefining the role of war literature as a maker of cultural, political, and historical dimensions of society is profound when narrating about the war in the Arab World.

By examining war literature in the Arab World, readers not only have the chance to understand the horrific physical dimensions of wars, but are also invited to engage with other facets of the conflict by reflecting on the collective suffering of its people . This is why writing about wars does not often offer optimistic solutions. The reason is: how could any writer truly measure the psychological pain in words and how could any writer make any orphan forget seeing her/his family members in pieces? Most of the characters in the works studied in this thesis encounter death in one form or another. In the collection of short stories *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories*, all the women characters eventually die, and Djebar herself, experienced death when she lost several close friends in *Algerian White*. Khaled at the end of *Memory in the Flesh* sits alone with his writings in his old room after the loss of Ziad, Hassan, and Ahlam/Hayat. Zahra is killed by a sniper while she is pregnant in *The Story of Zahra* and eventually, the unnamed narrator is saved alone with her manuscripts of *Beirut Nightmare*s. Djebar, Mosteghanemi, Al-Shaykh, and Al-Samman in their texts all echo the drastic reality of the war in their countries and these

endings summarize the political, social, physical, and psychological loss that people endured during wartime.

The civil wars in Algeria and Lebanon offered the writers studied in this thesis a fertile environment of themes because of the political and social conflicts and the complexities that result from them. Indeed, the current heated situation in the Arab World also provides numerous political and social themes and experiences to write about war in Arabic literature. Women writers of today, just like the writers of this thesis, will provide an anecdotal account of the war. They will engage with more psychological and physical demonstrations of the ramifications of any war in the Arab World. Djebar discussed in *Algerian White* the loss of her friends from her perspective, and so will another writer. Mosteghanemi's Khaled bin Toubal went through a physical disability because of the war. I am sure another writer will expand on this idea and a new genre that covers disabilities and wars might be added to the Arabic literature. Zahra and other characters in Al-Shaykh's novel encountered the social difficulties of the war. Another writer will show how these challenges such as displacement, forced immigration, lack of education, hunger, famine, incurable diseases, and several other problems that societies in the Arab World will face as a result of the current conflict. Al-Samman's unnamed narrator in *Beirut Nightmares*, who could be any other narrator, moved to fantasy to reflect on the absurd world of the Lebanese Civil War. She brings several imaginary characters to convey the ugly reality of the war and to challenge this reality. Therefore, when it comes to putting war in words, my research combined the writers' different perspectives and understandings of the socio-political dimensions of the war.

Although this thesis concentrates on some selected works by Djebar, Mosteghanemi, Al-Shaykh, and Al-Samman, this thesis has reclaimed the territory of war literature for women writers. I have shown that women writers in this thesis also demonstrate that history and politics can be documented away from male writers' point of view. The emphasis on women's voices during conflict times is relevant to understanding the complex relationship between oppression, the world of politics, and the literary world. On the other hand, in the traditional patriarchal society of the Arab World, war literature was mainly dominated by male narratives. Zeidan, as I argued in Chapter Two, claims that women writers in the Arab World generally have not performed a political and historical

engagement in their narration when it comes to describing war and its ramifications.[481] Yet I have shown in this thesis that Djebar, Mosteghanemi, Al-Shaykh, and Al-Samman deploy in their literature about civil wars in their countries, Algeria and Lebanon, various literary genres such as short stories, autobiography, and novels as a political statement. By using textual analysis, I have demonstrated that those literary genres strengthened the political positions of those writers. Further, those writers also used these various narrative voices as a form of political resistance against hegemonic powers, aiming to prevent their voices' erasure, and to participate in bringing the marginalized voices of women into the centre of society. The understanding of the writers' choices of narrative voices in their chosen literary genres reflects the significant role that those writers achieve when writing about the political prospects of the Arab World. Although critics in the Arab World accused women writers, stating that "the literature of the war belongs to men rather than women,"[482] as Paul Starkey argues, these women writers showed in their writings a huge commitment to the chances of political advancement in the Arab World.

The main thrust of this thesis was to examine the choice of narrative voices in the frame of various literary genres such as autobiography, short story, and novels as a means of resistance. Djebar used mainly women's fictional voices and her own autobiographical voice to attract readers to her position, whereas Mosteghanemi ironically used the male narrative voice to draw political awareness in her novel. Al-Shaykh used multiple first-person narrative voices to reflect on the collective suffering of Lebanese society. Like Al-Shaykh, Al-Samman reflects on the collective suffering ; however, she used the voice of unnamed female narrator with other stories in her novel to show multiple perspectives on the war. All the writers in this study present the war and the division caused by the war from the perspective of different voices, thereby challenging patriarchal hegemonic powers that aimed to silence them.

My thesis began with Djebar's *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* and *Algerian White* to look into how politics and history intertwine in two different literary genres short story and autobiography. I argued how these two genres worked for the interest of Djebar's political stance . The genre of short story and autobiography supported

[481] Zeidan, 74.
[482] Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 149.

Djebar's defence of a pluralistic Algerian collective identity. Although my methodology did not depend on exploring the collective trauma that affected the Algerians due to their political history, I found the writing of Shoshana Felman in "Education and Crisis or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,"[483] was helpful in presenting Djebar's several female characters' experiences during colonialism and the civil war in preserving moments of violence and bearing witness to these historical junctures. The use of the short story genre in *Algerian Stories* also showed the historical political trauma from several women characters' points of view. This approach supported my argument that the use of the genre of the short story helped to clarify Djebar's political position. The use of the autobiography genre in *Algerian White* was studied in comparison with the short story genre, and it showed equally that Djebar- the writer- is just like her women characters defies the narrative of the hegemonic power in Algeria. Laura Marcus' work on constructing autobiography was useful in arguing for the importance of writing this genre by Djebar. [484]

I did not only define Djebar's political position in this thesis by the literary genres that she chose, I have also argued that the use of the French language was a significant factor in Djebar's career. Reflecting on the history of the linguistic conflict in Algeria, Djebar is located on the map of writers who chose to write in the French language as a strategic political choice. During colonialism, the French language was the tool that challenged the colonial power, whereas, during the civil war the French language was for Djebar her strategic choice of defying the policy of Arabization forced on Algerians after the Independence. The textual analysis of the two prose narratives by Djebar reveals that the political choice of that language had an impact on Algerian identity and it inscribed women's voices on the map of the narrative of the civil war.

In Chapter Two, my study of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, the first Arabic Algerian novel, demonstrated her political commitment to her country Algeria. By adopting a male narrative voice, she ironically negotiated with society and disrupted power structures, unveiling the weak and fragile dimensions of masculinity, and offering a different route to women's voices in Algerian society. *Rhetoric of Irony* by Wayne C. Booth[485] and

[483] Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
[484] Laura Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
[485] Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Lydia Rainford's *She Changes by Intrigue: Irony, Femininity and Feminism* [486] were very helpful to clarify irony as a political strategy which explains the choice of the male narrative voice in this novel. Mosteghanemi skilfully by adopting the male narrative voice ironically brought attention to her political position. Irony unveiled the defeated masculinity that is suffering because of the civil war and questioned the reliability of the male narrative voice. Mosteghanemi also shows that a woman writer should not limit herself to adopting a female narrative voice to attract readers, proving by that the relationship between politics and history could be written about from the perspective of a woman writer who could use any narrative voice. The understanding of the role that the Arabic novel genre plays in the Algerian literary world is crucial in comprehending the significant impact that both Mosteghanemi and *Memory in the Flesh* created in Algerian and Arab literary circles.

In the same vein, Djebar and Mosteghanemi showed in their texts that language can be a unifying factor that contributes to strengthen their political position. While French gives Djebar the ability to criticize colonialism and patriarchy, Arabic was the language that helped Mosteghanemi to express her refusal of the constraints imposed on Arab women writers. The linguistic diversity perceived within the structure of a defeated society, like the Algerian society during the Independence and the civil war, will result in a linguistic conflict that could add to the suffering of the people. The conflict between the language of the colonizers and the language of the official institutions in Algeria led to the exclusions of writers who used the Arabic language during colonialism and the French language after Independence. Adopting the argument in *The Empire Writes Back* helped me to justify both writers' choices of language.[487] Both Arabic and French worked for the two writers as tools to vocalize their voices and defy oppression. Djebar and Mosteghanemi both demonstrate that language could be a factor that brings Algerians to one desirable goal. They also show that the choice of language for a writer is also a political statement and an expression of free will.

Division in Algerian society was based on the linguistic factor that excluded writers in the period of Independence and the civil war. In contrast, understanding division in

---

[486] Lydia Rainford, *She Changes by Intrigue: Irony, Femininity and* Feminism (Brill, 2005).
[487] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Practice and Theory in Post-Colonial Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

Lebanese society opens the door to a world of religious, social, and political complexities. My study compares the treatment of the Lebanese Civil War in the works of Hanan Al-Shaykh and Ghada Al-Samman in Chapters Three and Four respectively, reveals that both writers used multiple points of view in their novels to critically dissect the sectarian division and fragmentation in Lebanese society. I have argued that Al-Shaykh's use of multiple first-person narrators in her novel *The Story of Zahra* is important because of the political background of Lebanese society. This technique in narration depicted the chaos that division enforced, and presented various perspectives on the war through different characters. It also helped to highlight opposing political views. Djebar as previously mentioned, used autobiography and her own voice to challenge the hegemonic power in her country. These different perspectives offered by both writers present a nuanced approach to both wars.

Additionally, I have shown that Al-Shaykh used sexual relationships strategically as an empowering and liberating tool. The use of multiple first-person narrators stresses this attitude because each character gives readers a different way of thinking about sexuality within the context of Lebanese society. My study finds that such a technique in narration is important in a divided society like Lebanon. I have argued that in contrast to autobiography, a form in which a woman writer sometimes is framed Al-Shaykh's adoption of several voices in her novel enables her to refuse and reject the framing of women within patriarchal tradition of writing. It also gives her a unique resistant political position. My close analysis of the text and the writings of Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield about how autobiographical writing by women writers and feminism are related supported this argument. [488]

The study moved on to explain that the novel in its Arabic edition represents a text that combines multiple points of view in its approach to the Lebanese Civil War, and that gives Al-Shaykh a politically resistant position. However, when this text was introduced to Western audiences in English, it suffered from an 'ideologically motivated translation' that reproduced orientalist stereotypical images of individuals in the Arab World. The translation of the novel enforced orientalist frames of individuals in the Arab World. The study of

[488] Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. eds., *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London, New York: Taylor& Francis Group, 2000).

Orientalism by Edward Said,[489] Rana Kabbani,[490] and Reina Lewis[491] led me to understand how translation in this novel was used as a tool for enforcing stereotypical images of women in the Arab World. Translation is an intellectual process that helps people to comprehend other cultures and understand the components of those cultures, according to Wright.[492] However, in this chapter, my analysis found that the text of Al-Shyakh went under an 'ideologically motivated translation' to enforce the pre-constructed orientalist images of people in the Arab World. The textual analysis and the comparison between the Arabic text and the English text enable readers to understand the obstacles that a woman writer in the Arab World suffers from. This chapter raises the question of marginalizing and stereotyping the image of women and women writers in the Arab World not only in the context of their cultural and social surroundings but also in a different environment. My study finds that although translation is an extremely profound intellectual process that bridges cultures and in particular and regarding this thesis, I referred to in Chapter Two the important role that translation played in advancing the novel genre in Arabic. However, my research finds that, in Al-Shaykh's text, the ideology that ruled the translation was politically motivated. This ideology is based on an orientalist approach which supports the mentality of colonialism. Therefore, my research found that it is important to criticize the entitlement that any patriarchy practises on women and their voices.

This marginalizing of women's voices drove Al-Samman to create a parallel world in which she could use her voice loudly to question the ugly reality of the war. I have found that Al-Samman pointed out the collective suffering of the Lebanese, and targeted sectarianism Just like Al-Shaykh. However, Al-Samman depends on the narration of an unnamed female narrator and other stories that contributed to the plot of the novel to present multiple perspectives on the Lebanese Civil War. This unconventional style and structure in the novel make this text a distinctive war text because it is not a normal documentation of days of the war that are found in diary or journal forms. The chaos and the complexities of the war are both reflected in the way that this novel is written. The intertwining between days of the war and nightmares influences the style of narration, and

[489] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 1991).
[490] Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986).
[491] Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[492] Wright, 22.

underscores the ugliness of the war. Although the unnamed narrator documents the war in a non-linear metafictional narrative , these styles give the text a unique structure that echoes the horrible reality of the war. Al-Samman demonstrates that the ugly reality of the war could not be framed in a conventional narrative. The exploration of the characteristics of absurdism in the novel reflected the illogical events of war. Through the analysis of several episodes in the text, and by using theories of absurdism by Neil Cornwell and Michael Y Bennett,[493]I have shown that Al-Samman's text contains elements of absurdism. I also explained that fantasy became a socio-political tool that Al-Samman used to uncover the huge impact of division on Lebanese people with the help of Ceri Sullivan's and Barbara White's writings on fantasy.[494] In her unique approach to portraying the war in her text, Al-Samman illustrates that the ugliness of the war and the oppression it brings could not be configured in realistic depictions.

The writers in this thesis called for a better understanding of women's position within their societies during times of conflict by using different voices in their texts. My thesis found that these writers adopted various literary approaches in their engagement with feminism. In Chapter One, I highlighted Assia Djebar's commitment to focus only on women's voices by depicting women's characters that told the history of Algeria. Readers have the chance to see Algeria from another aspect that defies the colonial and patriarchal narrative of the history of Algeria and focus on the personal experiences of women during war times. In chapter two, while Mosteghanemi uses a male narrative voice to tell the history of her country, she raised a question about the silenced voices of women who were forgotten during conflicts. In Chapter Three, I showed that Al-Shaykh's text portrays the Lebanese Civil War through the experiences of multiple narrators, offering the readers diverse perspectives of one reality which is the war. In Chapter Four, I analysed how Al-Samman tells the story of the war from the point of view of her unnamed female narrator demonstrating that she is not only a prisoner because of the war; she is also the prisoner of her society that deprives her of freedom. Djebar, Al-Samman and Al-Shaykh in their writings opted mainly for a main female character to tell the story of the war. The narrative voices

[493] Neil Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) and Michael Y. Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[494] Ceri Sullivan, Barbara White, ed., *Writing and Fantasy* (Wesley Longman Limited, 1999).

that Djebar and Mosteghanemi used show how both interact with social structure and emphasize their understanding of women's needs . Al-Samman and Al-Shaykh in approaching the Lebanese Civil War both used a woman as the main character as in *The Story of Zahra* or the unnamed female narrator as in *Beirut Nightmare.* However, both writers also employed multiple points of view to contribute to the narration and to explore political and religious dimensions of the civil war. Both writers have dealt with the political and religious division that ruled Lebanese society by bringing multiple perspectives together to portray the collective suffering of the Lebanese.

However, I have found that the writers in this thesis all share one point in their texts, which is that, although our societies show vivid power hierarchies that rule the lives of people, the suffering of all individuals is clear and unquestionable. The practices of the oppressive regimes and the new colonial projects in the Arab World deprive all individuals alike of their dignity and basic rights such as food, warmth, and health. Although, in practical terms, women in the Arab World have suffered from patriarchal rules due to political, religious, and social complexities, the lack of examination of the hard political context and oppression imposed on individuals add to the decline of living status in the region. Djebar, for example, highlights the killing of her male friends in her autobiography. Mosteghanemi displays the agonies of Khaled as a reference to the agonies of all individuals in the Arab World, Al-Shaykh invites her readers to assess the circumstances of all her characters and their pain, and Al-Samman worked to show a similar perspective using different literary styles such as absurdism and fantasy.

This thesis has presented multiple aspects of analysis regarding the studied texts, chosen from the same historical period between1975-2000 and inspired by the Algerian and the Lebanese Civil Wars. The main factor that could lead any country to a civil war is division. By comparing writers who at once adopted the language strategically to defy the linguistic conflict in Algeria, and who criticized the division that classifies people based on their religious and political sects in Lebanon, those writers opted for multiple aims. They have used writing as a way to preserve the suffering of their people. They have fought oppression, war machine, and patriarchy through their writings, resisting by that the marginalization of their voices. These courageous women have taken a huge responsibility in achieving their quests of peace and freedom, and showed resilience to place their voices

within the literary map of the Arab World. Those women writers have used their voices eloquently and vocally to fight tyranny with their texts and prove that writing is a weapon.

As this thesis was being completed, another horrific war took place in the Arab World. The war in Gaza again opened the door to another painful and violent experience.[495] A similar violence erupted in the Arab World after the Arab Spring because of different oppressors but with a similar intention. It became even clearer that colonial powers and dictatorship regimes share almost one purpose which is confiscating people's voices and silencing them for the interest of their ideological projects in the region. This attitude from any oppressor enforces the conviction that words and narration can document the violence and be a witness of history. Moreover, writing is the only weapon that criminals and oppressors have no power to combat.

The current events in Gaza, when narrated, will serve as further evidence of defiance against the oppressors and as a means of commemorating the memory of those who died. A writer may be unable to document the screams and the fears but he/she can portray in words how children are shredded and how people's bodies are deformed and cut into pieces. A writer will surely portray the cries of the woman whose children were killed by a missile before they had dinner and will mention Reem 'the soul of my soul' as her grandfather called her before he buried her.[496] A writer might portray the scene of the man who held his child's remains in a plastic bag and write about Sidra Hassouna, the little girl, whose body was "dangling from the ruins of the destroyed building in Rafah."[497] Hind, the little girl, who was trapped with other members of her family in a car, and unfortunately, her young age and her screams did not save her from the attack, will be written about.[498] Rania Abu Anza, who after ten years of infertility lost her ten-month-old twins during one of

[495] This war started on the 8th of October 2023, and until the day I finished writing my thesis, it has not ended, on the contrary it has reached Lebanon.
[496] "Soul of My Soul' Palestinian Grandfather Helps Injured People in Hospital," *Middle East Monitor* December, 2023. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231206-soul-of-my-soul-palestinian-grandfather-helps-injured-people-in-hospital.
[497] "Palestinian Envoy to UK Reveals 8 Relatives Killed in Rafah," *Arab News* February, 2024. https://arab.news/j6fw5
[498]Owen Jones "Hind Rajab's Death Has Already Been Forgotten. That's Exactly What Israel Wants," *The Guardian* August, 2024. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/aug/18/hind-rajab-israeli-state-atrocity?CMP=share_btn_url.

the Israeli raids,[499] will be transformed into a memory that might appear in one of the literary works. Those memories of real people, if written, will remind readers that in a specific geographical area, two million people were silenced and ignored. The Palestinian poet Reffaat Alareer wrote a poem before he died in one of the airstrikes by the IDF. He says *"If I die, You must live to tell my story*".[500]

[499] Wafaa Shurafa and Samy Magdy, "After Ten Years of Trying, A Palestinian Woman Had a Twins. An Israeli Strike Killed them Both," *Los Angeles Times* March, 2024. https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2024-03-04/after-10-years-of-trying-a-palestinian-woman-had-twins-an-israeli-strike-killed-them-both.
[500] Sinna Antoon, "If I Must Die, A Poem by Refaat Alareer," *In These Times* December, 2023. https://inthesetimes.com/article/refaat-alareer-israeli-occupation-palestine.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila, ed. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East.* Princeton University Press, 1998.

Accad, Evelyne. *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*. New York University Press, 1990.

Accad, Evelyne. "Freedom and the Social Context: Arab Women's Special Contribution to Literature." *Canadian Woman Studies* 8, no.2 (1987):34-48.

Aitel, Faiza. *We Are Imazighen: The Development of Algerian Berber and Identity in Twentieth Century Literature and Culture*. University Press of Florida, 2014.

Al-Amine Merhi, Anicee. "Conflicts and Wars: Women's Silent Discourse." In *Arab Feminism: Gender and Equality in the Middle East*, edited by Jean Said Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi and Rafif Rida Sidawi, 234-256 . London: I.B.Tauris, 2014.

Al-Hassan Golley, Nawar. *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.

AL-Kousairy, Nedal. "War in Feminist Syrian Novel (*Nightmares of Beirut*)." *Tishreen University Journal* 44, no.2 (2022):144-154.

Allen, Roger. “The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt.” In *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*, edited by M.M. Badawi, 193-222. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Al-Mousa, Nedal. “The Impact of the Lebanese Civil War on Weaving the Texture of the Narrative of Ghada Al-Samman’S *Beirut Nightmares.*” *AWEJ for Translation &Literary Studies* 4, no.4 (2020):238-248.

Al-Musawi, Muhsin Jasim. *The Post-Colonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*. Boston: Brill, 2003.

Al-Samman, Hanadi. *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship and the Diaspora in Arab Women’s Writings*. Syracuse University Press, 2015.

Al-Samman, Ghada. *Beirut Nightmares*. Translated by Nancy N Roberts .London: Quartet Books, 1997.

Al-Samman, Ghada. *Kawabis Bayrut*. Beirut: Ghada Al-Samman’s Publication, 2016.

Al-Samman, Ghada. *A Free Arab Woman: The Incomplete Works 16.* Beirut: Ghada Al-Samman’s Publication, 2006.

Al-Shaykh, Hanan. *The Story of Zahra*. Translated by Peter Ford. London: Quartet Books, 1996.

Al-Shaykh, Hanan. *Hikayat Zahra.* Beirut: Dar Aladab, 2017.

Al-Shaykh, Hanan. “My Travel through Cultures: Languages and Writing-from Abu Nuwas to Bint Al-Shaykh.” Talk presented at the Knowledge Centre, the British Library, London: UK, November 7, 2019, 56:27. https://youtu.be/M_etRG1o-k8?si=mhMH__io2JOsrm0j

Amine, Qasim. *The Liberation of Women and the New Women: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism.* Cairo: The American University Press, 2000.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.

Anderson, Linda. *Women Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures.* Great Britain: TJ Press Padstow Ltd, 1997.

Antoon, Sinna. "If I Must Die, A Poem By Refaat Alareer." *In These Times* December, 2023. https://inthesetimes.com/article/refaat-alareer-israeli-occupation-palestine. Last accessed 15/09/24.

Arenfeldt, Pernille and Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, eds. *Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A Century of Transformations from Within*. The American University in Cairo Press, 2012.

Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

A Sino, Nadine. "The Greening of Modern Arabic Literature: An Ecological Interpretation of Two Contemporary Arabic Novels." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature of Environment* 20, no.1 (2013): 125-143. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/ist013. Last accessed 07/07/24.

Baaqeel, Nuha Ahmad. "An Interview with Ahlam Mosteghanemi." *Women: A cultural Review* 26, no.1-2 (2015):143-153.

Baaqeel, Nuha Ahmad. "Decolonising Languages: Towards a New Feminist Politics of Translation in the Work of Arab Women Writers, Ahalm Mostegahnemi, Nawal al-Sadawim and Assia Djebar." *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* 7, no.3 (2019):39-40.

Badawi. M.M. *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing.* London: Virago Press Limited, 1992.

Badran, Margot. "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond." *Journal of the Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no.1 (2005):6-23.

Bamia, Aida A. "*Dhakirat al-Jasad* (*The Body's Memory*)*:* A New out Look on Old Themes." *Research in African Literature* 28, no.3 (1997):85-93.

Bassnett, Susan. *Translation: The New Critical Idiom*. Abingdon and New York. Routledge, 2014.

Bennett, Michael Y. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Ben Salem, Lobna. "Fugitive without Knowing it: Language, Displacement and Identity in Assia Djebar's Autobiographic Narratives." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 6, no .4(2015):20-27.

Ben Salem, Lobna. "Taming Trauma in the Land of the Million Martyrs: Reading Assia Djebar's Algerian White." *Postcolonial Text* 9, no.2 (2014):1-14.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. London: Penguin, 1991.

Booth, Wayne C. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 1974.

Booth, Marilyn. "The Muslim Woman as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating Arabic: *Girls of Riyadh Go on the Road*." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no.3 (2010):149-182.

Bougherria, Meriem. "Restor(y)ing the Post-colonial Algerian Narration in the Fiction of Ahlam Mosteghanemi." PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2020.

Butler. Judith. "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism" in *Feminist Theorizes the Political,* edited by Joan Scott and Judith Butler, 3-21. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Butler, Judith*. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* London: Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 1999.

Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." In *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader,* edited by Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas. 365-380. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.

Cameron, Deborah. *Feminism and Linguistic Theory.* London: MacMillan, 1985.

Carlier, Omar. *Entire Nation et Jihad: Hoistoire Social des Radicalismes Algeriens* . Paris: Presses de le FNSP, 1995.

Chaudhuri, Shohini. “Masculinity in Crisis.” In *Feminist Film Theorists*, 105-119. London: Routledge Taylor &Francis Group, 2006.

Cheriguen, Foudil. “Politiques Linguistiques en Algerie.” *MOTS* no.52: 62-73.

Cixous, Helene. “ The Laugh of the Medusa.” In *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism,*edited by Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndi. 416-431.Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Cooke, Miriam. *Women and the War Story*. University of California Press, 1997.

Cooke, Miriam. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Cooke, Miriam. *War’s Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil war*. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Cooke, Miriam. “Telling Their Lives: A Hundred Years of Arab Women’s Writings.” *World Literature Today* 60, no.2 (1986):212-216.

Cooke, Miriam. “Arab Women Writers.” In *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M.M.Badawi, 443-462. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Cornwell, Neil. *The Absurd in Literature.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

Coslett, Tess, Lury, Celia and Penny Summerfield, eds. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. London. New York. Taylor& Francis Group, 2000.

Croisy, Sophie. “Algerian History, Algerian Literature and Critical Theories: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Linguistic Trauma and Identity Reformation in Postcolonial Algeria.” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 10.no, 1 (2008): 84-106.

Dalgarno, Emily. *Virginia Woolf and the Migrations of Language* .Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage,2011.

Djebar, Assia . *Algerian White.* Translated by Marjolijn de Jager and David Kelley. London: Seven Stories Press, 2003.

Djebar, Assia. *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian stories*. Translated by Tegan Raleigh. London: Seven Stories Press, 2010.

Dokali, Samia. "Language Policy Implications on the Economy: Arabisation Policy and Economic Development in Algeria." *Journal of Economics* 114.no, 1(2013):72-89.

Donadey, Anne. "In Memoriam: Assia Djebar."*Modern Language Association of America* 131, no. 1(2016): 147-152.

El-Geressi, Yasmine. "Hanan Al-Shaykh: I am Tired of Being referred to as an Arab Feminist Writer."*Majall,* (2018):np.

El-Saadawi. Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. Translated by Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

Elsadda, Hoda. *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel.* Syracuse University Press, Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Elsadda, Hoda. "Gender Studies in the Arab World: Reflections and Questions on the Challenges of Discourses, Locations and History." In *Arab Feminism: Gender and Equality in the Middle East*, edited by Jean Said Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi and Rafif Rida Sidawi, 19-30. I.B.Tauris, 2014.

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Anchor Books, 1961.

Fayad, Mona Shafik. "The Impact of the Absurd on Modern Arabic Literature: Study of the Influence of Camus, Ionesco and Beckett." PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1986.

Felman, Shoshana. "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 13-61. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Forsdick, Charles and David Murphy, eds. *Postcolonialism Across the Disciplines: Postcolonial Thought in the French Speaking World.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.

Hafez, Sabry. *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature.* London: Saqi, 1993.

Hart, Stephen M. and Wen-Chin Ouyang, eds. *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Woodbridge, 2005.

Hartman, Michelle. "Zahra's Uncle, or Where Are Men in Women's War Stories?." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 51 (2020):83-107.

Hatem, Mervat. "What Do Women Want? A Critical Mapping of Future Directions for Arab Feminisms." *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no.1 (2013):91-101.

Hayek, Ghenwa. "Whitewashing Arabic for Global Consumption: Translating Race in *The Story Of Zahra*."*Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no.1 (2017):91-104.

Hiddleston, Jane. *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria*. Liverpool University Press, 2011.

Hiddleston, Jane. "Political Violence and Singular Testimony: Assia Djebar's *Algerian White*." *Law and Literature*17, no.1 (2005):1-20.

Hoft-March, Eliane. "*Oran Langue Morte* by Assia Djebar." *The French Review* 72, no.5 (1999):935-936.

Holiday-karre, Erin Amann. ""Re-Imagining Sharazad" Hanan Al-Shaykh and feminism of Difference." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 50, no.2 (2020):155-187.

Holt, Elizabeth M. "In a Language That Was Not His Own: Ahlam Mustaghanami's *Dhakirat al-jasad* and its French Translation *Memoires de la Chair." Journal of Arabic Literature* 39(2008):123-140.

Homsi Vinson, Pauline and Nawar Al-Hassan Golley. "Challenges and Opportunities: The Women's Movement in Syria." In *Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A century of Transformations within*, edited by, Pernille Arenfeldt and Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, 65-92. The America University in Cairo Press, 2012.

Homsi Vinson, Pauline. "Shahrazadian Gestures in Arab Women's Autobiographies: Political History, Personal Memory and Oral Matrilineal Narratives in the Works of Nawal El Saadawi and Leila Ahmed." *NWAS.* 20, no.1(2008):78-98.

Homsi Vinson, Pauline. 'Ghada Al-Samman A Writer of Many Layers,' *Al-Jadid Magazine* 8, no.32 (2002) http://www.aljadid.com/content/ghada-samman-writer-many-layers. Last accessed 06/06/24.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion.* Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.

Jones, Owen. "Hind Rajab's Death Has Already Been Forgotten. That's Exactly What Israel Wants." *The Guardian,* August, 2024. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/aug/18/hind-rajab-israeli-state-atrocity?CMP=share_btn_url. Last accessed 20/09/24.

Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World.* London: Zed Books Ltd, 1986.

Kabbani, Rana. *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule.* London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986.

Kabbani, Rana. "Fatal Passivity: Women in Arabic fiction." *Third World Quarterly* 10, no.1 (1988):338-341.

Kamal, Amr. "Undoing Odysseus's Pact: Marginal Faces and Voices in the Narratives of Assia Djebar and Agnes Varda." *Romanic Review* 106, no.1-4 (2015):47-70.

Khaf, Mohja and Nadine Sinno, eds. *Constructions of Masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa: Literature, Film and National Discourse.* Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2021.

Khatib, Lina. *Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008.

Khatib, Abdelkebir. *Maghrebe Pluriel.* Translated by Lobna Ben Salem. Paris: Donel, 1983.

Khayyat, Yasmine. "Memory Remain: Hunted by Home in Lebanon (Post) War Fiction." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, no.1-2(2016):34-61.

Kim, Rina and Claire Westall. *Cross-Gendered Literary Voices: Appropriating, Resisting, Embracing.* Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012.

Klemm, Verna. "Beyond Autobiography, Under the Sign of Destruction: The First -Person Narrator in Alia Mamdouh's Novel *Nephtalene.*" In *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspective,* edited by Angelika Neuwirth. Andreas PFitsch and Barbara Winckler, 484-494. London and Beirut: Saqi, 2010.

Larson, Charles R. “The Fiction of Hanan Al-Shaykh: Reluctant Feminist.” *World Literature Today* 65, no.1 (Winter, 1991):14-17.

Lewis, Reina. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Mackey, Sandra. *Lebanon: A House Divided.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006.

Marcus, Laura. *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford University Press, 2018.

Martinson, Deborah. *In The Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction.* The Ohio State University, 2003.

McGuire, Susan Bassnett. *Translation Studies*. London : Routledge,1988.

McLarney, Ellen. “Unlocking the Female in Ahlam Mustaghanami.” *Journal Of Arabic Literature* 33,no.1 (2002):22-44.

Mernissi, Fatima. “Virginity and Patriarchy.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5, no.2 (1992):183-191.

Miller, Christopher L. *Nationalist and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998.

M Moghadam, Valentine, ed. *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies.* London: Zed Books, 1994.

Moore, Lindsey. *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film.* London: Routledge, 2008.

Mortimer, Mildred. *Women Fight Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War.* London. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018.

Morris, Pam. *Literature and Feminism.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.

Mortimer, Mildred. “Assia Djebar’s Algerian Quarter: A study in a Fragmented Autobiography.” *Research in African Literature* 28, no. 2(1997):102-117.

Mosteghanemi, Ahlam. *Memory in the Flesh*. Translated by Baria Ahmar Sreih and Peter Clark. Cairo: American University Press.2003.

Mosteghanemi, Ahlam. *Zakirat el Jassad.* Beirut: Noufal, 2013.

Mosteghanemi, Ahlam. "Algerie: Femme et Écritures (Algeria: Woman and Writings)." PhDdiss,.Translated by Shaden M Tageldin. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985.

Mosteghanemi, Ahlam. "To Colleagues of the Pen." *Al-Ahram Weekly On-Line* no. 409(1998).

Mostegahnemi, Ahlam. "A Brave Historical Decision." @AhlamMostegahenmi, July 30, 2019.

Muharram, Mohammed Abdullah Hussein. "The Marginalizing of Arabic Fiction in the Postcolonial and World English Curriculum: Slips? Or Orientalism and Racism?." *Minnesota Review* no.78 (2012):130-145.

Neuwirth, Angelika. "Linguistic Temptations and Erotic Unveiling : Rashid al-Daif on Language, love, war and Martyrdom." In *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspective,* edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pfitsch, and Barbara Winckler, 110-133. London and Beirut. Saqi, 2010.

"Palestinian Envoy to UK Reveals 8 Relatives Killed in Rafah," *Arab News* February, 2024. https://arab.news/j6fw5. Last accessed 08/09/24.

Pannewick, Friederik, Georges Khalil and Yvonne Albers, eds. *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*.Germany: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2015.

Purkiss, Diana. *Literature and Politics During the English Civil War.* Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Ragin, Renee Michelle. "Hunting the Barzakh: The War Time Émigré in Ghada Al-Samman's *Al-Qamar Al-Murabba.*'" *Mashriq& Mahjar* 5, no.2 (2018):1-18.

Ragin, Renee Michelle. "Women's Literature of the Lebanese Civil War." *The Literary Encyclopedia* N/A (2019):1-9.

Rainford, Lydia. *She changes by Intrigue: Irony, Femininity and Feminism.* Brill, 2005.

Randall, Renee Ragin. "Lebanon in the Devil's Waters: The Literary Supernatural in Ghada Al-Samman's Civil War Trilogy." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 25, no.2-3 (2023):150-167.

Rice, Alison. *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria*. University of Virgin Press, 2012.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* Penguin Books, 1991.

Salhi, Zahia Smail. "Between the languages of Silence and Woman's Word:Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djebar." *International Journal of the Sociology and Language* no. 190 (2008):79-101. https://0-doi-org.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/10.1515/IJSL.2008.013. Last accessed 27/07/2024.

Saliba, Kamal. *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*. London: I.B Tauris, 2005.

Sbaiti, Hanan. 'Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares:* A Woman's life.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 32, no.5 (2009):377-381.

Schneider, Annedith. "Mourning in the Language of Minority: Assia Djebar's Algerian White." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 19, no.2 (2006): 41-50.

Seodu Herr, Ranjoo. "Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism." *Meridians* 12, no. 1 (2014): 1-30.

Serrano, Richard. *Against the Postcolonial: "Francophone" Writers at the Ends of French Empire*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007.

Seyhan, Azade. "Enduring Grief: Autobiography Poetry of Witness in the Work of Assia Djebar and Nazim Hikmat." *Comparative Literature Studies* 40, no.2 (2003):159-172.

Shurafa, Wafaa and Samy Magdy. "After Ten Years of Trying, A Palestinian Woman Had a Twins. An Israeli Strike Killed Them Both." *Los Angeles Times* March, 2024. https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2024-03-04/after-10-years-of-trying-a-palestinian-woman-had-twins-an-israeli-strike-killed-them-both. Last accessed 14/09/24.

Silverman, Kaja. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Silverstine, Paul.A. "An Excess of Truth: Violence, Conspiracy Theorizing the Algerian Civil War." *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no.4 (2002), 643-650.

Simon, Daniel. Translates "A Brief Conversation with Assia Djebar." *World Literature Today* 80, no. 4 (2006):15.

Simpkins, Scott. “They Do Men in Different Voices: Narrative Cross Dressing in Sand and Shelley.” *Style* 26, no.3 (1992):400-418.

“Soul of My Soul’ Palestinian Grandfather Helps Injured People in Hospital,” *Middle East Monitor* December, 2023. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231206-soul-of-my-soul-palestinian-grandfather-helps-injured-people-in-hospital. Last accessed 14/09/24.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea,* edited by Rosalind C. Morris, 21-78. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Stableford, Brain. *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature.* Scarecrow Press Inc, 2005.

Starkey, Paul. *Modern Arabic Literature* . Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Stephan, Rita. “Arab Women Writing Their Sexuality.” *Hawwa* 4, no.2-3 (2006):159,180.

Stephan , Rita. “Women’s Rights Activism in Lebanon.” In *Mapping Arab Women’s Movements: A century of Transformations within*, edited by, Pernille Arenfeldt and Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, 111-132. The America University in Cairo Press, 2012.

Sullivan, Ceri and Barbara White, ed. *Writing and Fantasy.* Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999.

Sunderman, Paula W. “An Interview with Hanan Al-Shaykh.” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 31, no.4 (1992).

Tageldin, Shaden.M. “The African Novel in Arabic” In *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, edited by Irele F Abiola, 85-102. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Tageldin. Shaden.M. “Which Qalam for Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation and Language in Djebar’s *L’amour La Fantasia* and Mustaghanimi’s *Dhakirat Al-Jasad.” Comparative Literature Studies* 4, no.3 (2009):467-497.

Tlatli, Soraya. “Language as Medium and as Fiction in Assia Djebar’s Work.” In *A Companion To World Literature*, edited by K.Seigneuries. California: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2019.

Towhig, Erin. “Gender, Genre and Literary Firsts: The case of Zhor Wanisi and Alam Mosteghanemi.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 15, no.3 (2019):286-306.

Valassopoulos, Anastasia. *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context*. London. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.

Van De Peer, Stefanie. “Assia Djebar : Algerian *Images-son* in Experimental Documentaries” In *Negotiating Dissidence: The Pioneering Women of Arab Documentary*,110-139. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* London: Taylor& Francis Group, 1984.

Woodhull, Winifred. *Transfiguration of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonizing and Literature.* University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Wright, Chantal. *Literary Translation*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Yako, Louis. ‘If We All Leave, Who Will Cut the String: Exiled Intellectuals in Ghada Al-Samman’s Thought.’ *Arab Studies Journal* 26, no .1(2018): 115-140.

Zayed al-Oriami, Suad. “Arab Feminism-Obstacles and Possibilities: An Analytical Study of the Women’s Movement in the Arab World.” In *Arab Feminism: Gender and Equality in the Middle East*, edited by Jean Said Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi and Rafif Rida Sidawi, 132-144. I.B.Tauris, 2014.

Zayla, Patricia, Hoda Hillal and Lea Yahchouchi. “Women Moving Across cultures: The Representation of Zahra’s character in the Target Version: A Case Study of Hanan Al-Shaykh’s *The Story of Zahra*.” *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies* 9, no.4 (2021):1-21.

Zeidan, Joseph T. *Arab Women’s Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Zipes, Jack. *Happy Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*. London: Routledge, 1997.