

The Kaleidoscope  
of Gendered  
Memory in Ahlam  
Mosteghanemi's  
Novels



# The Kaleidoscope of Gendered Memory in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's Novels

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## INTRODUCTION

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

Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*

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

Written in the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively, *Memory in the Flesh* and *Chaos of the Senses* are Mosteghanemi's attempt to come to terms with the historical legacy of Algeria's colonial past, the traumatic memories through which the nation as a collective remembers the colonial period, and the specifically gendered dimensions of traumatic experience, as well as its symbolic expression through art and narrative. Both novels offer unique perspectives on contemporary Algerian history. As they follow three different, yet related, characters, the novels cover interlocking themes of trauma, memory, and national reconstruction.

*Memory in the Flesh* is told from the perspective of Khaled Ben Toubal, a former guerilla of the resistance in the Algerian War of Liberation, who lost his arm in that war, and who has since moved to Paris to live in self-imposed exile. He is disgusted by the corrupt state of government and the broken ideals of the revolution in his native Algeria.

Established in Paris as a renowned painter, he is nevertheless sick with a sense of loss and nostalgia for his homeland, which manifests itself in his obsessive paintings of scenes around the bridges of his native Constantine. In the midst of his tortured exile in Paris, Ahlam (also called Hayat), the daughter of Khaled's revered revolutionary commander, Taher Abd-al-Malwa, who was killed in the War of Independence, unexpectedly enters his life. Since he last saw her as a little girl, she has grown into an alluringly beautiful young novelist. Khaled falls deeply in love with her. However, for Khaled, the romance represents more than that: Ahlam symbolizes his nostalgia for his motherland, as well as memories of his childhood in Constantine. His dreams of romance, however, are not fulfilled, as Ahlam always proves to be beyond his grasp. She does not share his vision for the future and chooses her own path in life, eventually marrying a high-ranking officer in the Algerian military.

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

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

### Why Mosteghanemi?

Mosteghanemi is the first Algerian woman to write in Arabic (Valassopoulos, 2008, 111; Moore, 2008,81). Her choice to write in Arabic is significant, as is her attempt to articulate questions of gender in an intensely patriarchal Arabophone literary culture in Algeria. Writing in Arabic, for Mosteghanemi, is an explicitly political act—to write in Arabic is to reject French as the language of empire. Dedicating her honour to the



struggles of Arabic writers against the dominance of French, Mosteghanemi declared in her acceptance speech for the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in Cairo in 1998: "Through their [the judges'] tribute to me, they offer moral support to Algerian writers writing in Arabic who confront unarmed the onslaughts of Francophony and its diverse temptations, while they stand patriotically against the dubious and devious tendencies to which Algeria is exposed" ("To Colleagues of the Pen").

Mosteghanemi ended her speech with a tribute to Naguib Mahfouz, himself a fervent advocate of modern Arabic as the only language suitable to the Algerian novel. Mahfouz, as mentor, draws attention to one of Mosteghanemi's major literary concerns as an Arabic-language novelist—to contest the Orientalist assumption that Arabic is a language not fit for the modern novel. For Mosteghanemi, "Arabic is not to be recovered in the flesh of French; rather it must be recovered in its own skin and fleshed out more fully therein" (Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?" 2008, 491). This decisive choice in favour of Arabic, however, is fraught with complexities.

Throughout the 1990s, Algerian cultural life was torn between the failing post-revolutionary *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) and the rise of a new Islamist movement, the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS). The ascendant Islamists launched attacks on scores of Algerian writers and intellectuals, ostensibly for choosing to write in French. Others, who were writing in Tamazight (Berber), or even dialectal Algerian Arabic, were also not spared. In this charged political context, Mosteghanemi supported the use of Arabic, but at the same time "refused to oppose Algerians who wrote in Arabic to their felled Francophone and Tamazight-speaking compatriots" (Tageldin, "Which *Qalam* for Algeria?" 2009, 468).

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

the family whereas now it comes from the reader himself” (Faqr, 1998, 87).

Even as she acknowledges the impact of French gender norms on Arabic-language literature in Algeria, while at the same time challenging assumptions of any inherent link between the French language and Algerian women’s liberation (Tageldin, “The African Novel in Arabic,” 2009, 480), Mosteghanemi refuses both the Orientalist patriarchy of French and the traditionalist patriarchy of Arabic. Instead, her writing is an attempt to find an Arabic that is consonant with the demands, desires, and aspirations of Algerian women.

Critics such as Ellen McLarney and Anastasia Valassopoulos have noted that Mosteghanemi takes up the question of patriarchy in Algerian society in a very subtle manner (2002, 26; 2008, 113). Rather than “recovering” submerged women’s voices, Mosteghanemi instead accesses the figure of woman only through the haze of male recollection. Her novels thus depict in detail the complex workings of the patriarchal fantasy of sublime love—its ecstatic moments, its narcissistic pretensions, as well as the anxieties that underpin every gesture of romantic idealisation or sacrifice. Mosteghanemi’s work is distinctive in that it does not succumb to the temptation of constructing in the process a position of female counter-authority that may be accessed unproblematically by the writer. Mosteghanemi instead puts in question the stable enunciatory position from which to speak in the name of “woman.”

In this manner, Ahlam’s existence is contingent on Khaled’s narration: it is only through his revelation that she is permitted to be in the textual world. It is Khaled who is in a position to categorise her, to define her very existence. Reflecting on the manner by which Ahlam’s voice attempts to penetrate Khaled’s narration, McLarney notes a “female resistance against the dominance of the male voice” (2002, 25). McLarney’s point about Ahlam’s voice “penetrating” Khaled’s narration is important; however, Mosteghanemi’s handling of gender relations in her novels is much more complex than merely showing moments of silent resistance. I argue instead that Mosteghanemi’s work reflects the impossibility of equitable gender relations in contemporary Algeria. Her representation of eroticism, for instance, between the two main characters, avoids responding to patriarchal control and disciplining of women’s bodies, but she also disallows a utopianism of liberated sexual bodies. Mosteghanemi instead adopts a strategy of showing sexual relations in Algerian society as they are, and not as they could be, through the use of traditional romantic gestures, as well as imaginings, to describe the relationship between the characters.

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

At the same time, this does not mean abandoning the question of history. As Mosteghanemi states in an interview, “the aim is to present a historical epic... the novels are also intended as beautiful love stories and reflections on life” (Baaqeel, 2015, 148). Mosteghanemi wishes to convey an account of the historical, namely, “the entire history of the Arabs over the past half century, with their disappointments, complexity, victories, poetic power, and naivety” (148). Critics such as Aida Bamia, however, have sought to separate questions of national history from those of gender—the latter being “not the issue but serv[ing] mainly the romantic structure of the novel” (1997, 86). On the contrary, I argue that *Memory in the Flesh* takes gender to be one of its central concerns. As Valassopoulos argues, Mosteghanemi’s work attempts to “enact ways in which the political and social are mediated, lived, performed, and experienced through the personal” (2008, 111). As the personal becomes the site for an exploration of the interrelated questions of gender, nation, and history, Mosteghanemi explores the affective dimensions of how Algerians today confront the legacies of their traumatic past. As a result, her novels are able to take up a dimension of historical experience that often gets buried under monolithic national narratives of struggle and liberation.

This question of history also allows one to circle back to Mosteghanemi’s formal device of using a male narrator. When pressed on her choice of the male narrator in *Memory in the Flesh*, she remarks that “history can only be narrated by a man; a woman cannot narrate that episode of history. Writing about the particular experience of the Algerian war gains credibility when the narrator Khaled is a man who experienced and suffered its agonies” (Baaqeel, 2015, 149). Mosteghanemi is clearly aware of the politics of history, and by deliberately connecting her choice of male narrator to the practicalities of writing a “credible” story, she is able to throw light on the patriarchal assumptions of those who enjoy such narratives.

## Postcolonial Feminism

The most significant aspects of Algerian society explored in Mosteghanemi's novels are the far-reaching social effects of the Algerian War of Independence and the gendered experiences of this trauma. In this study I enlist postcolonial and feminist theory to demonstrate how Mosteghanemi's style and theoretical approach express not only the effects of the war, but also how these effects are experienced differently through gendered perspectives. The application of postcolonial theory necessarily reveals violent anti-colonial struggle as Algeria's troubled inheritance. Combined with feminist theory, postcolonial theory further allows the interrogation of the importance of gender in terms of historical experience, an area too often neglected in the fervour of national independence. My study thus approaches Mosteghanemi's novels from a postcolonial feminist perspective that enables a constructive dialogue between feminist and postcolonial theory.

The persistent critique of second- and third-wave feminists has meant that feminist theory today cannot but consider other dimensions of social identity formation equally, such as class, race, and sexuality (Valassopoulos, 2008, 21). However, as Valassopoulos pertinently argues, in most discussions about Arab women writers and their status as feminists, Western feminist theory is described unproblematically as a coherent set of ideas that can be transplanted in every historical and social context. In what is also a caricature of Western feminism, "the arguments, disagreements and debates within Western feminist theory (mainly articulated through the rise of gender theory, third-wave feminism and post-feminism) are not voiced" (2008, 10). In discussing Arab women writers, then, the nuances of Western feminist discourse are buried under an ultimately Orientalist impulse to stage the encounter as one between a Western culture of individualism and civil liberties, and a decadent, stagnant Arab patriarchy that subsumes the individual under the demands of the community. Such criticism, paradoxically, has had the effect of limiting the possibilities of engaging with the writings of Arab women writers, their contexts, and their strategies of resistance and expression. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, "it is in the production of this 'Third World difference' that Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes" (1991, 335). Thus the postcolonial critique of Western feminism has sought to dislodge the Orientalist paradigms that still frame the study of Third World women's writings. Postcolonial feminists have argued that Western

feminists' engagement with women in the formerly colonial world has focused more on presumptuously "speaking for," rather than "listening to," the latter (Valassopoulos, 2008, 21). As Lila Abu-Lughod points out, there is an urgent need to rethink the "complex ways that the West and things associated with the West, [are] embraced, repudiated and translated [and] are implicated in contemporary gender politics" ("Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions," 1989, 3).

The feminist critique of nationalism and postcolonial theory, however, has sought to show the ways in which forms of patriarchy have remained in place, and, on occasion, even been strengthened, despite the professed egalitarian principles on which the newly independent nation-states were founded. As Anne McClintock has argued, the progressive ideals of newly independent nation-states were often articulated through a gendered imaginary, so that women came to be represented as the repository of authenticity and purity, through which the nation articulated its principle of historical continuity, against the representation men as the progressive agent of national modernity, embodying its progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity (1995, 359). Even as the postcolonial critique of feminism must be taken up, it is equally important to emphasise its inability to account for its own male-centric institutionalisation as well as theorisation. For instance, Gwen Bergner has brought to light the underlying symbolic economy of exchange which supports Frantz Fanon's thinking on the role of women in the Algerian revolution (1995, 80); along these lines, Meyda Yegenoglu has also argued that, contrary to Edward Said's treatment of representations of sexual difference as a sub-domain of Orientalist discourse, recognizing sexual difference is of fundamental importance in understanding the subject position of the colonised (1998, 2).

Caught in this theoretical impasse of subordinating gender to hierarchies of power, it is doubtful whether postcolonial theory and the political project of decolonisation alone will be able to dismantle existing structures of patriarchal power. As Gayatri Spivak asserts, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 1988, 287). Cautioning against a valorisation of the colonial subject as subaltern, Spivak renders subalternity conditional and contextual. Against the tendency to articulate all forms of power under the totalising sign of "colonialism," she calls instead for a critical approach that takes into account discrete, yet interrelated, forms of power in postcolonial societies. She notes, "Between patriarchy and imperialism ... the figure of the woman disappears, not into some pristine nothingness,

but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (1988, 306). Caught between these two forms of power, the Third World woman finds herself in a position of the doubly-oppressed, occupying a position that cannot be encompassed by postcolonial theory or feminism alone.

It is therefore evident that both postcolonial and feminist theories are constructed around critical exclusions. While feminism continues to struggle with its Westernism, postcolonial theory, too, has had to reconsider a number of its critical theoretical premises. Consequently, I adopt what Kinana Hamam describes as “an intersectional approach that attempts to draw on the productive aspects of postcolonial and feminist theory” (2015, 10). The problems in feminist and postcolonial theory notwithstanding, through a dialogical coming-together of these two approaches it becomes possible simultaneously to critique the Orientalist blinders that constrict the feminist perspective without abandoning the notion of the constitutively gendered formation of the social. Concurrently, I borrow from postcolonial theory an emphasis on the historical effects of the nation-state formed in colonial contexts—on the one hand, its tendency towards homogenising cultural memory, and on the other hand, its potentialities in spurring creative social thought. In doing this, however, I contest the nationalist impulse that orients much research in postcolonial theory. Such an approach attempts to frame the postcolonial moment as one of gaining national independence, speaking implicitly in the name of a nation that has “found again” its independent voice, which had been cut off momentarily by the colonial interregnum. Such a narrow interpretation of the complex realities of colonial difference either reads all forms of violence or injustice in the formerly colonial societies as emerging from colonial violence alone or tends to make the question of gender secondary to the apparently more urgent task of national reconstruction. However, often, in such frantic pursuits of the national past, gender is one of the questions that falls by the wayside.

The specificities of political and cultural context have meant that Arab feminist activists and writers have developed a unique agenda of political priorities, feminist practice, and theorisations of gender. To capture the specificities and commonalties in gendered experience and expression, I adopt the postcolonial feminist emphasis that “women’s experiences cannot be contained within a single narrative of oppression. In other words, it [postcolonial feminism] constructs women’s identities and narratives as historically specific yet contestable and changing in interrelated ways. This shows that women in postcolonial cultures are interlocked within plural power axes such as race, class, and gender, all of

which constitute their lives and responses” (Hamam, 2015, 11). My approach thus affirms the plurality of perspectives, their irreducible polyphony, and the possibility of dialogue and collective reconstruction.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, I additionally explore the centrality of the themes of war and trauma in Mosteghanemi's novels. Algeria's War of Liberation is a definitive traumatic moment. For the author, the war was more than a struggle through which a nation won back its freedom. I have thus drawn on the conceptual apparatus of trauma studies to theorise the relationship between the “originary” experience of trauma—the Algerian War of Independence—and its “subsequent” narrativisation as memory. While Elaine Scarry and other critics' studies of the relationship between trauma, art, and recovery are particularly productive in situating Mosteghanemi's novels as an attempt to heal the traumatised subject—the Algerian citizen—Cathy Caruth's understanding of the traumatic event as an aporia allows us to theorise the problematic question of referentiality and representation in narratives of trauma through the concepts of latency and belatedness (1995, 92, 162).

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

## Approaching Mosteghanemi

Anastasia Valassopoulos and Lindsey Moore are among the few scholars in anglophone academia who have critically engaged with Mosteghanemi's novel, *Memory in the Flesh*. While both readings adopt a broadly postcolonial feminist approach, they do so with varying emphases. Even as both approaches take as their starting point the intersectionality of postcolonial and feminist theory, Valassopoulos argues for a stronger emphasis on the former, while Moore affirms the significance of the latter. My approach takes up both Valassopoulos's ideas of the relationship between the protagonists as a literary strategy of allegory and Moore's

feminist focus on the specifically Algerian context in Mosteghanemi's novels.

Valassopoulos's project looks to move away from a purely feminist emphasis and interpretation: "it is possible to conceive of many productive contexts within which to study and analyse contemporary Arab women's writing without recourse to tried and tested feminist methods" (4). She describes her reading of Mosteghanemi as one that "does not fall either into the trap of the book as national allegory or as an ineffective feminist intervention into male representations of female characters" (2008, 123).

Thus, on the one hand, Valassopoulos marks divergent postmodern concerns about the ethics of the encounter with the radical Other. According to her, "Khaled and Ahlam are strangers, yet somehow not only bound by a set of events in the history of Algeria (a history or set of events that is impossible to ignore), but also bound in the knowledge that the history they share has been differently negotiated by each of them" (2008, 117). On the other hand, Valassopoulos resists the nationalist reading that interprets Ahlam as the embodiment of the nation. In Valassopoulos's reading, the interpersonal dynamic between the protagonists emerges as a complex relationship in which "both characters struggle with interpretations of each other" (2008, 121). Valassopoulos's strategy of reading the work of allegorising as a two-way activity is particularly innovative. As many postcolonial scholars argue, the national allegory is not so much a formal choice that is available to authors as it is a structuring form that is constitutive of the postcolonial imaginary (Moore 2008, 82; Prasad 1992, 158-160). At the same time, by foregrounding the multiplicity of allegorical narratives and fantasies of the nation, Valassopoulos is able to read these as an inclusivist, participatory project, characterised by a two-way process of constructing allegorical narratives of the nation.

In my own reading of Mosteghanemi, I maintain a stronger feminist emphasis, arguing that this two-way process is also an unequal, gendered relationship. The key point for Mosteghanemi, I argue, is not just to show the difference in the national allegory of men and women, but also to show how one comes to be legitimised as national past, while the other becomes subterranean, unable to participate in the work of national remembrance in a collective spirit. In this sense, my approach differs significantly from that of Valassopoulos: I find the dominance of one narrative as legitimate national history to be a problem arising out of the embedded patriarchy of the postcolonial political order, rather than out of a skewed orientation of interpretation. Thus for the character of Khaled, Ahlam embodies his fantasy of the nation, while she sees him as an archetype of the bygone



revolutionary generation. Even as each allegorise the other, they do so in remarkably different ways: through his love for Ahlam, Khaled reenacts his fidelity to the ideals and sacrifices of the war; in contrast, Ahlam attempts to come to terms with the trauma of those years while fully living in the present. The unequal gender and power relations between them are made clear by the narration of their encounter being told through Khaled's perspective.

Lindsey Moore, in contrast, foregrounds the ways in which women in the Arab world continue to be oppressed *as women*. At the outset, she accepts the argument that the term feminism remains contested in Arab Muslim public discourse. It is dismissed as an elitist theoretical tendency of "foreign" origins, and regarded as an extension of the West's project of cultural imperialism. Even as she shares a wariness towards privileging gender as an analytical category (at the cost of marginalising questions of race, class, religion), Moore nevertheless emphasises the many ways in which "women have been subject to constraints and forms of violence *as women*" (2008, 4).

Consequently, even as she calls for a flexible, contextually-defined, non-totalising definition of what constitutes feminist practice, Moore is equally interested in showing the historical inequalities in the Arabophone literary sphere that exclude women writers—at times subtly, but sometimes blatantly—by infantilising and discouraging them. Thus, situated against a theoretical perspective that calls for a limiting of the critical powers of feminist discourse in order to foreground the national/colonial question, Moore turns her attention with even greater urgency to the ways in which Arab women claim a voice, doing so in "self-reflexive ways that do not simplistically equate acts of speaking, writing, or viewing with presence, authority, or truth" (2008, 8). Calling for a texturing of the national narrative with psychological and emotional truth, rather than tired repetitions of the *people as one* thesis, Mosteghanemi draws attention to the libidinal potential of writing to redefine the nation (Moore, 82). Against the monolithic image of the nation and its people, Mosteghanemi's work thus opens up the possibility of representing the nation in all its polyphonic diversity. Simultaneously, by showing these new dimensions of voice and literary expression to be subordinated, the author also gestures towards the fundamentally hierarchical character of the present national imaginary.

In the work of both Valassopoulos and Moore, however, the postcolonial feminist orientation is argued primarily as an extension and redrawing of the limits of feminist thought. For both, the theoretical impetus is towards remedying the residual Orientalism of feminist theory,

in order to articulate a more inclusive and nuanced notion of feminism. As Valassopoulos states, “what I argue for is an evolving and revolving cycle that informs as well as transforms the idea of Western and other feminisms” (2008, 16).

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

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

### **Kaleidoscope as Both Theory and Metaphor**

The kaleidoscope, with its emphasis on seeing and focus, made out of bits of mirror and coloured paper, is essentially a play on perspective—as one changes the perspective of their gaze, different colours and patterns appear. The shifting patterns reveal the phenomena of the refractive and splitting effects of light that combine to form a kaleidoscopic vision. The motif of the kaleidoscope also resonates with the history of mosaic art in the Arab world, thereby drawing attention to the specificity of Algerian art

and history that the novels treat. Pierre Bourdieu likened the structure of Algerian society to a “kaleidoscopic mechanism” (1962, 93-94), where each social group is subject to intense cultural interpenetration. Each group nevertheless draws from a common corpus of cultural practices and meanings, even as they give it a distinctive personality through variations in emphasis.

My theoretical framework turns to this notion of the “kaleidoscopic” mechanism to read Mosteghanemi’s representation of Algeria’s traumatic colonial and postcolonial history, and its continuing patriarchy. I will demonstrate how she adopts a narrative technique that, so to speak, replicates these effects through literary techniques, such as layered narratives, metonymy, and fragmented stream-of-consciousness narratives. The fractured patterning of the narratives allows one to situate the questions of trauma, gender, memory, art, and nation in a way that does not simplify the complexity of the antagonisms and contradictions involved. In a kaleidoscope, every shift in perspective generates a new configuration of views. Through a similar shifting perspectival approach, I show the different roles men and women played during the Algerian War of Independence, but also the ways in which their “recollection and transformation” and their “frame of interpretation and the acts of transfer” might also be gendered (Hirsch & Smith 2007, 22).

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

Why these two novels? These novels deal with contemporary events, while delving extensively into Algeria’s long, traumatic twentieth century. Furthermore, the novels take up the question of gender and patriarchy in Algerian society from various perspectives. While earlier critics’ insights are useful to my work, this study considers *Memory in the Flesh* in tandem

with *Chaos of the Senses*, unlike previous critics. I argue that the full scope of Mosteghanemi's imagination becomes evident only when these two novels are read together, in conversation with each other, thereby establishing a dialogic novelistic universe in which Mosteghanemi situates characters, events, and experiences. I argue that not only are the two novels significant in themselves, but together they open up to new levels of interpretation. These aspects of her work, I argue, are brought forth most clearly through what I call the kaleidoscopic mode of reading. To do justice to her literary imagination, one cannot read these texts in isolation. Mosteghanemi's overall intention of exploring the complex social realities of postcolonial Algeria is fully elaborated only when the two novels are seen as two literary voices and perspectives coming together in a dialogic engagement. While *Memory in the Flesh* turns to the unresolved questions of the past, *Chaos of the Senses* takes up the mundane everyday through which the real effects of this troubled legacy must be confronted.

### **The Politics of Translation**

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

modernity and feminist subjectivity, as they are framed in Western academia. Notably, her exploration of gender constructions in Algerian society—with its emphases on the complexity and affirmation of dialogism—ultimately does not fall in line with a simplistic notion of women's "liberation" and the realization of feminist subjectivity. For Mosteghanemi, notions of trauma, recovery, and memory are the key signposts that allow her to construct a narrative that can provide a gendered commentary on Algerian history, politics, and culture.

In consideration of feminist subjectivities, Indian feminist, Tejaswini Niranjana, suggests that translation both shapes and takes shape "within the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism" (1992, 2). As Bassnett and Trivedi argue, "For too long translation was seen as purely an aesthetic act, and ideological problems were disregarded" (1999, 6). The ideological aspect of the process of translation of postcolonial novels into English is critical in the West's reception of these Arab feminist writers because it ensures that the complex engagements of Arab feminists, within their local context and with each other, are reduced to so many "struggles" by Oriental women to become fully modern, "feminist" subjects.

For instance, in their enthusiasm to embrace Assia Djebar as a post-modern francophone writer, the *Academie francaise* have failed to acknowledge her deep misgivings about the burdens and anxieties that emerge from writing in the language of the colonial oppressor. In doing so, they have chosen to arrest the critical force of her work by fixing her identity as a "postmodern" writer. As Miriam Cooke argues, Djebar's work ends up producing the paradoxical effect of "re-exoticising" the Orient, by opening up for it the French-language cultural milieus and social spaces that it had hitherto been unable to access (1989, 142). Even as Djebar's entry into the *Academie* in 2005 as the first francophone writer from the Maghreb marks a widening of the notion of "francophone," it is also the beginning of a new regime of language imperialism that "fixes" her place as a representative of "the Maghreb" in the francophone world. Precisely in the moment when World Literature is being redefined in the face of the postcolonial critique as a reconstituted Orientalist project of literary production, the francophone academy can only admit her as a writer from the Maghreb, one who most importantly writes in French.

Djebar is thus at pains to assert "*une autre Histoire*" (another history) of the French language that acknowledges the historical role of French in destroying indigenous languages and cultures. Adopting a position of an "insider and outsider" to *la langue* of French, she states, "The French language—your own, ladies and gentlemen—turned mine, at least in

writing ... French is thus ... perhaps the target of my utopia, I will even say; tempo of my breathing from day to day: what I would like to sketch for you, in this instant in which I remain a silhouette poised on your threshold” (Tageldin, “Which *Qalam* for Algeria?” 2009, 472). In contrast to Djébar’s nuanced position of insider and outsider, Pierre-Jean Remy began his response speech notably by situating Djébar within the typical Orientalist frame: “Algerian and Muslim, especially Muslim women—born in a time when silence was the voice of the women of your country, the little girl who was born in Cherchell 150 kilometers west of Algiers—might seem light years away from the *Académie*” (“Response,” 2016). Remy proceeds to construct a narrative of Djébar’s life as a long and winding road to the true home of the French language—the *Académie* itself. The dominant theme in his speech is her struggle to become truly French: “[You are] so close to us, because you wanted. You wanted, despite the voices of the past that have continued and continue to haunt you; other voices, another language, your mother’s singing” (Remy 2016). He ends his speech with “Welcome among us, among us, Ma’am!” (Remy 2016). She comes to the *Académie* always as a representative of francophone literature and culture from a former colony, returning to its imperial centre. The magnanimity of his welcome is offset by a studied deafness to Djébar’s call for a reconstituted, decentred French literary tradition. For Remy, she comes to the *Académie* always as a representative of francophone literature and culture from a former colony. She must bear the burden of implicitly representing the silenced women of the Orient, yet in doing this also affirms the glory of the imperial centre and its glorious culture. On the one hand, Djébar affirms the uniqueness of her personal journey as a French writer with her location and history in a former colony of France and the troubled engagement with her legacy that it sets off. On the other hand, Remy sees her “arrival” in the halls of French literature as having been possible, despite, rather than because of, her uniquely situated personal and intellectual biography.

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

woman that has “not yet” experienced the fruits of Western feminist thought.

At the same time, however, Mosteghanemi has been interpreted by the Western publishers of her translations as a writer of Oriental romance and nostalgia, set in a contemporary milieu. A look at the titles of her translations, first by the American University of Cairo Press (AUCP), and then Bloomsbury, give a glimpse of these dynamics at work. The first book of Mosteghanemi's trilogy was translated by AUCP as *Memory in the Flesh*, while Bloomsbury chose the more nostalgic, romantic title, *The Bridges of Constantine*. While AUCP has not translated the third book in the trilogy, the Bloomsbury edition is entitled in a similar vein, *The Dust of Promises*. Market forces play a significant role in such processes; decisions about translating, editing, publishing, distribution, and course adoption are all made with economic as well as literary factors in mind (Amireh, *Going Global*, 2012, 4). The novel's title, in this sense, is of course critical in influencing popular impressions about her work, to the extent that the title evokes a sense of the content of the work. The Bloomsbury titles consciously, while incorrectly, situate these novels by “the first Algerian woman writing in Arabic” as a sentimental voice, one that is implicitly subdued, submissive, and seemingly incapable of political consciousness.

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

While later in this study I take up some instances of the mistranslation of words that have shaped the reception of Mosteghanemi in Western academia, here I first address the politics at work in popular translations of Mosteghanemi's novels, which are evident in the book covers that have been designed for them. The cover of *The Bridge of Constantine*, for instance, depicts a woman in a black veil, set against a pattern of traditional tiles with geometric patterns. Clearly, this reflects none of the political themes of the novel, choosing instead to appeal to deeply stereotyped assumptions about Arab women that are prevalent in Western

readers' reception of the text—namely the veil, and the supposedly “Islamic” geometric tile patterns. In this manner, “cultural products, including Third World women’s texts ... in the process of moving across national/cultural boundaries, are transformed by the reception context, their meanings reproduced and reshaped to fit local agendas” (Amireh 2000, 3). Relocated from the specifically Algerian context in which the Arabic novel was written, read, and discussed, Mosteghanemi’s place in the English-language market already seems fixed: as a woman who has broken the shackles of patriarchal Arab Muslim society by “learning” how to write, she “arrives” only as a sentimental “voice,” and not as a “proper” writer.

In the case of postcolonial writers, the question of an international audience—neither primarily former colony, nor colonizer—is in turn related to a marked trend towards the internationalization of literature (Tymoczko 1999, 31). This attempt to render Mosteghanemi’s perspective on Algeria’s postcolonial history as nostalgic romance, I argue, is not just a fleeting marketing strategy. Rather, it is an attempt to depoliticise the most critical aspects of her work. The translation, as such, is a negation of her political choice to write in Arabic. Moreover, her construction in Anglophone literary circles as a romantic writer forecloses any critical engagement with the most difficult political questions raised by her with regard to colonialism and gender. I thus situate myself against such a tendency to view Third World women as fetishized markers of “cultural authenticity.” Rather, my kaleidoscopic reading looks to re-negotiate the idea of cultural authenticity, placing under question established notions of trauma, memory, gender and nation, all of which have been mobilised in different ways to reproduce a *grand narrative* of national healing and unity.

Against such a tendency to view Third World women as markers of “cultural authenticity,” whose texts provide “windows” into other cultures, there is a need to “focus on the text of reception and to analyse the process set in place where these voices travelled to other contexts” (Amireh, et al., 2000, 2). My study thus situates itself as one such attempt to understand the complexities and complicities through which Mosteghanemi articulates her understanding of Algeria’s traumatic past, without reducing her to the status of a mediator through which recent social and political realities may become somewhat more comprehensible to Western understanding. Rather, I attempt to elaborate the specificity of the context out of which her concerns emerge and the literary expression she gives to them.

This study therefore argues that the particular polyphonic, kaleidoscopic ways in which Mosteghanemi constructs her narrative



engagement with Algerian history importantly refuse a binary opposition of male versus female, engaging instead with the complexity of Algeria's specific postcolonial history. This approach affords the reader a nuanced position from which to read, so that exotic or reductive representations of Algeria are avoided. Mosteghanemi's work, I argue, ultimately seeks to construct a bridge between contrasting, gendered narratives about past and present Algerian politics and historical traumas, all of which, I argue, gesture towards the importance of analysing the trauma of other nations through their both their own personal and collective, as well as gendered memories, to allow postcolonial literary scholars a new methodology for understanding different cultures through their specific conflicting histories and traumatic experiences.

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

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

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

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

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

**Chapter Four** considers the way that Mosteghanemi makes use of gendered memory in relation to art in the two novels. Her two protagonists, Khaled and Ahlam/Hayat, are male and female, respectively, and their ways of expressing and remembering trauma through their production of art are markedly different. Furthermore, the ways in which they remember trauma, through their different gender perspectives and experiences, as well as their respective choices for producing art (painting and writing), necessarily help to shape their understandings of the present as well as the future for Algeria. An argument that was begun in the previous chapter is thus extended in this chapter to demonstrate how

Mosteghanemi is able to deploy a unique kaleidoscopic mode of narrative construction that allows her to explore questions of the gendered character of traumatic memory, and more specifically, its problematic representation in art. This chapter further demonstrates how art, and acts of creating art, can also be gendered, according to subjective experience and memory. Understanding Mosteghanemi's purpose in deploying gender as a way of exploring history, trauma, and art ultimately demands recognition of the autonomous agendas of women writers in contemporary Algeria.

**Chapter Five** analyses Mosteghanemi's polyphonic narrative strategies, arguing that her work is concerned with the ways in which Algeria's traumatic past is currently being dealt with by its citizens. Mosteghanemi's narrative structure, which is used to frame the present, is initially constituted out of a plurality of positions, parallel, yet sinuous, and intermittently interwoven in and out of accord with each other, yet nevertheless progressing towards a future that is emerging out of a kaleidoscope of qualitatively differentiated experiences of trauma. Drawing on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, I foreground Mosteghanemi's strategy of meta-narrative and designate it a "polyphonic layering" that critiques the prevalent discourse in modern Algerian Arabophone literature, with its tendency to allegorise the nation in the figure of the woman. I argue that deploying the meta-narrative techniques of polyphony or dialogism to represent the gaps and antagonisms that constitute the Algerian present offers the reader a dual narration of her novels as a means through which to express the trauma of the revolutionary period in Algerian history, and the crises of identity and purpose that haunt the post-revolutionary generation, for the purposes of forming an idea of the history of the nation as an act of active "remaking." This work of remaking the nation must necessarily be a collective endeavour that can accommodate the pluralism of conflicting world views, which constitutes the present political situation in Algeria. Algeria's future can only be forged through a collective expression of trauma and a reconstitution of the past.

## Conclusion

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

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

## CHAPTER ONE

# HISTORICISING AHLAM MOSTEGHANEMI

Isn't history the one thing that prevents the future from being?  
Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Chaos of the Senses*

### Introduction

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

The novels also explore the importance of the city of Constantine, which functions both as a literary and historical fact as well as a focal point of resistance, leading up to and through the Algerian War of Independence. The city is a locus of remembrance for Khaled in the post-independence years. The novels additionally provide fictional perspectives of the collective memories of Algeria's painfully dramatic recent history. The overall contribution of the novels is not so much the recounting of the terrible events of a brutal war and ongoing terrorist activity; these aspects of history are mentioned but are not the main focus of the narrative. Instead, Mosteghanemi's main concern is to describe the legacy of suffering that remains after the battle for independence has been won, and

to demonstrate how past suffering still affects those who have inherited the daunting task of building a free Algeria in the midst of such an extreme, bloody backdrop.

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

### **A Brief History of the Present**

Under colonialism, Algeria was governed as an integral part of France by the French Ministry of the Interior, and not, like many other African territories, as a protectorate. Under this system there was a governor-general appointed by France and three prefects who represented the departments of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine at the central government in France (Horne 2006, 33). Citizens who had come from France to settle in Algeria were given somewhat pejorative names, such as *petits blancs* or *pieds noirs* (Prochaska 1996, 698) and had many privileges that were not available to the indigenous population, including voting rights and access to the centralised French education system. This is the regime that produced the character of Khaled in Mosteghanemi's novels, complete with his indigenous Islamic heritage, as well as his thoroughly French education and sensibility.

On May 8, 1945, as France celebrated its liberation at the end of the Second World War, Muslim protesters organised a surprise demonstration in the town of Sétif, in order to stage their own national celebrations, including the waving of the Algerian flag, which was forbidden by the authorities. This sparked a violent incident that quickly escalated, drawing