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A SETBACK INTO THE BODY: A STUDY OF WOMAN IDENTITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AHLAM MOSTEGHANEMI'S MEMORY IN THE FLESH (THAKIRAT AL-JASAD)

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ABSTRACT

The current study is an endeavor to investigate the woman identity and national identity in a well-known Iraqi novel byMosteghani as a woman writer. The novel starts out as a love-letter to a woman, it slowly unravels the idealization of the Arab homeland and forces the narrator to reconstruct what it means to be an Arab and Algerian. As the love between Khalid and Ahlam proves treacherous, so does the Algerian city of Constantine emerge.*Thakirat al-Jasad* (*Memory in the Flesh*, 1993), is dedicated to the author's militant father and to the Francophone Algerian poet and novelist, Malek Haddad (1927-78), a literary god-father of sorts to Mosteghanemi, who decided after the independence of Algeria in 1962 not to write in a foreign language any more, and ended up not writing at all**.** It is concluded that memory in the Flesh has the merit of presenting a rare glimpse of the feelings of the progeny of the martyrs. Long neglected by literature, they are now taking the stand to tell their own story.

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Introduction

Unlike textbooks that tend to teach by preaching, novels teach the reader by showing.[1] A novel has the capacity to discuss its topic in the context of human experience, not in an abstract and detached form. Moreover, it can transcend artificial boundaries that divide people of different backgrounds and civilizations by addressing every aspect of humanity of the character. This interacts with humanity of the reader on many levels, thereby magnifying the similarities and diminishing the differences between the reader and the character. A novel can allow an individual form a vastly different cultural background to deeply understand the cultural reality of the characters. Simply stated, novels can bring people closer to one another. Like no other medium, they are able to reveal the fundamental similarities of human experience. The novelists resemble political thinkers. They choose a distinctive medium to study social and political phenomena.[2] Edward Said said:

> The one place in which there's been some interesting and innovative work done in Arab intellectual life is in literary production generally, that never finds its way into studies of the Middle East. You're dealing with the raw material of Politics … You can deal with a novelist as a kind of witness to something.[3]

Here, Said hints that Arab intellectual life has been less than innovative, except in literary production where it is relatively free from external influences. As such, it is uncontaminated raw material that can be utilized to study politics. Novels can open secret doors in the houses of the Arab world and the western world. They can expose the skeletons in the closets and invite the reader to examine them. They also provide the reader with light that illuminates, otherwise invisible, problems. The Algerian writer AhlamMosteghanemi said:

> The novelist does not hesitate to open secret doors before you; the novelist dares to invite you to visit the lower floors of the house and the cellars and locked places in which dust and old furniture and memories gather and every corridor of the self where electricity is not yet installed and from where a suspicious stale smell emanates.[4]

Many intellectuals and artists, such as AhlamMosteghanemi, believed that it is their responsibility to heal their societies of their wounds, establishing healthy ones, proud of their past and looking forward to a better future[5]

In 1847, France succeeded in suppressing the revolt by initiating a campaign of pacification. It was brutal and destructive. To gain control over hostile areas, the French army destroyed villages and property. After this pacification operation, France extended its influence to the country and Algeria became a part of France.[6] This colonial system carried with it impoverishment, discrimination, and racism

against the colonized people. Algerians were treated as second-class citizens. Algerian Muslims were denied the right to pray in mosques. In 1950, over ninety percent of the Algerians were illiterate and those who were fortunate enough to go to school were forced to receive a French education, and the use of Arabic was forbidden.[7]The goal of the French government was to separate Algeria from its Arab-Islamic history and transform it into a French nation. The revolts against this system of colonization that were taking place in Arab countries, such as Lebanon and Syria encouraged Algerians to revolt against the French. In time, Algerians became convinced that only a revolution can bring them liberty. Thus, the Party of the Algerian People (PPA) started organizing demonstrations in the cities to demand independence. The French army responded to these protests by firing on largely unarmed protestors, killing thousands. To control the protests, French troops attacked several neighborhoods and villages, committing massacres.[8]

In 1957, France succeeded in quelling the uprising for a short period of time. At that time, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and Morocco had all gained their independence from French colonization and Algerians were determined to follow the neighboring countries and gain their liberty and dignity.[9] France and Algeria signed the Evian agreement on May 18, 1962. This agreement ended 132 years of occupation. After the war of independence, many French felt that a part of France had died.[10] Thus, colonization created a society lost between two identities and two civilizations. After colonization, Algeria became the illegitimate daughter of France. It carried in its heart mixed feelings of nostalgia, hate, love, and resentment. The complexity of the relationship between France and Algeria is better described by Malek Haddad, who said that France was "my exile," but also "my only arm of combat." [11] This complex relationship can also be seen by the fact that it was not until 1975 that a French head-of-state, Valerie Giscard-d'Estaing, visited Algeria on March 2, 2003, Jacques Chirac became the second French president to visit Algeria.[12] Thus, Algeria entered a major recession in the late 1980s, which led to a long civil war taking away the dream of "New Algeria".[13]

In 1993, AhlamMosteghanemi published her novel, *Memory in the Flesh*, the first to be written in Arabic by an Algerian woman, writing the novel in Arabic, then, was itself a victory against colonialism.[14]It was then translated into English by BariaAhmarSreih and later revised by Peter Clark.[15] Its journey from Arabic into English is indicative of its overall cultural ambiguity. That the novel was disseminated to a wider audience through the medium of English before it was rendered into French was not an accident. Most Algerians still feel alienated when it comes to writing in French—the language of their colonizers for more than 130 years. Thus, AhlamMosteghanemi, who comes from a French-speaking family, deliberately choosing to write in Arabic instead of French (her mother tongue) is also quite telling insofar as she wanted to reclaim a legacy, and more importantly perhaps, a *turath* (heritage) that was sullied when the French ruled Algeria from 1830 to 1962. Her choice of language, and perhaps ideology, is articulated thus: "Only language and emotions are capable of restoring and rebuilding a new Algeria."[16]

Memory in the Flesh

Thakirat al-Jasad (*Memory in the Flesh*, 1993), is dedicated to the author's militant father and to the Francophone Algerian poet and novelist, Malek Haddad (1927-78), a literary god-father of sorts to Mosteghanemi, who decided after the independence of Algeria in 1962 not to write in a foreign language any more, and ended up not writing at all. [17]Mosteghanemi became the voice of her father, the voice of Malek Haddad, and the voice of every Algerian who was forced to speak the language of the colonizer.Beginning with the dedication, the narrative consciously plays with the idea of (re)production. On the first page, Mosteghanemi discusses the fate of the writer Malek Haddad, to whom she devotes this novel:

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

page assassinated him. He died by the might of his silence to

become a martyr of the Arabic language and the first writer

ever to die silent, grieving, and passionate on its behalf. (MF, iii)

Here, the writer not only underlines her choice of writing in Arabic, but also links language and violence of the letter to national belonging As Mosteghanemistates, he chose silence over continuing to express himself in a language that had been imposed upon him, a language associated with subjugation and domination. In the newly established independence of the Algerian nation, he was free to make this choice. However Haddad's decision set up a link between creation and colonization whereby he had chosen not to contribute to the cultural production of his nation, because it would be associated with the colonizer. Although his infertility was self-imposed and symbolic, being related to the cultural regeneration of Algeria, it set the tone of the narrative.[18]Like Haddad, the main character, Khalid, fights in the independence movement. Losing a hand in battle, he is forced to spend the rest of the war in hospital, recuperating from his wounds. He then works in a publishing house after independence, but understands quickly that the new Algeria is not the ideal that had been promised by the revolutionary struggle. In her own way, Mosteghanemi articulates the drama of contemporary Algeria in the language in which Malek Haddad wanted so much to use. She settled her accounts beautifully with the white page and did justice to Haddad and all the Algerian intellectuals who were denied the use of the mother's tongue (French) in a creative way. As Ali El-Ra'i puts it: "AhlamMosteghanemi is a writer who has banished the linguistic exile into which French colonialism pushed Algerian intellectuals."[19] The novel embraces Algeria's past and present. It starts with the Algerian revolution in the1940s and ends in 1988 with its eye on the future. In her novel, Mosteghanemi takes the reader

on a trip through the ravages of colonialism and its consequences in Algeria. The complexity of her novel reflects the complexity of the Algerian experience, during and after colonization. Through her work, Mosteghanemi continues what her father started in the 1940s, namely the process of decolonization. According to Mosteghanemi, the liberation of the land was the beginning of decolonization, not the end of it; by writing in Arabic, Mosteghanemi accomplished another victory over the system of colonization; her use of Arabic language helped erase the barbarian marks of colonialism.[20]

Khalid, the narrator and Ahlam, the woman he loves, and hates, and of whom he writes, are perfectly allegorical figures as well as absorbing human characters. Khalid, a mujahid (freedom fighter) who has lost a hand in the war of liberation, refuses to buy into the logic of post-revolutionary Algeria, and lives as an artist-in-exile in Paris, painting the bridges of Constantine from a window that opens onto the Seine. He carries his memory and his dreams of Algeria literally in his wounded flesh, as well as embodying them in the creative acts of painting and writing that materialize his visions of the country's landscape, the promises of its past, and their betrayal in the present. Ahlam, the daughter of Khalid's commander, who is killed in action against the French army, is a novelist, seen by Mosteghanemi's reader through the lens of Khalid's passion for her. Hayat, named 'life' by her mother in the absence of the father whom the child will never meet, becomes in Khalid's (and Mosteghanemi's) portrayal, a figure first for Constantine, the lost loved home, but more broadly, also, for Algeria itself, an unfulfilled promise and inaccessible dream, eventually to be sold in a marriage arranged by her own uncle.[21]

Memory in the Flesh rekindles the past from a new perspective; it seems to have sprung from one of the poems in Mosteghanemi's second collection. The poem, entitled "Su'alun fi Hudud al-Thakirah," is almost a summary of the love theme that serves as the backbone of the novel's action, as if years later Mosteghanemi felt the urge to fill in the blanks and relate in detail her earlier thoughts. While the love for the woman-country serves as a background for Mosteghanemi's novel, the author's primary aim is to assess the Algerian revolution, three decades into its postcolonial age. [22]*Memory in the Flesh* is a book that encompasses most of the issues raised in post-independence literature, both in prose and in poetry, in Arabic and in French. Yet, it is a non-binary look at the past and the present, for it does not refer, at least not directly, to colonial policy, dealing solely with the war years, their impact on the people, and the ensuing policies of the governments in power.[23]

A Setback into the Body

The novel starts out as a love-letter to a woman, it slowly unravels the idealization of the Arab homeland and forces the narrator to reconstruct what it means to be an Arab and Algerian. As the love between Khalid and Ahlam proves treacherous, so does the Algerian city of Constantine emerge. No longer does it live in the beautiful signs, as the mother's bangle or the bridges crossing the city alone, but in corruption, poverty, and jail. As a symbol for the Arab homeland, Constantine does not allow for compromises or beautifications, but demands to be understood in its

complexity. It is in this sense that it cannot be captured, whether in literature or art. In the end, it remains aloof and without compassion. This relationship to the city becomes an emblem of the characters' search for national identity, both at home and abroad. Judith Butler deconstructs the relation between the body and identity, saying:

> What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter , not as site or surface, but as a person of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.[24]

For Butler, the body constitutes the boundaries of the self that needs to be shaped and explored forever. Here, identity is not fixed, but needs to be reinvented. Its creation and imagining via the physical human body expands to include the symbolic body of literature. As poetry and country are her primary cause, Mosteghanemi translates the needs of her physical body onto the page; the text becomes an expression of desire, and indeed an extension of the body in the way Roland Barthes views it:

> Apparently Arab scholars, when speaking of the text, use this admirable expression: the certain body. What body? We have several of them: the body of the anatomists and physiologists, the one science sees and discusses: this is the text of grammarians, critics, commentators, philologists (the phenol-text). But we also have a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body: it is another contour, another nomination; thus with the text: it is no more than the open list of the languages. … Does the text have human forms, a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of the erotic body. The pleasure of the text is irreducible to physiological needs.[25]

Here, the erotic body seems to flow between the desire to know oneself, the desire for the body, and the desire of creating and enjoying the written body. The concept of desire brings together physical attraction and becoming between the body and the text. This idea chimes with the title of the novel: *Memory in theFlesh*. The body literally becomes the meeting ground between two cultures and ideologies; it also bears the fruits or scars of these unions. Only through these corporeal experiences with the other can the body find its place and identity.[26]

Mosteghanemi employs the body in order to explore the relationship to one's country and culture in a variety of ways. She introduces the body as object of desire, as an allegory for the nation, and a symbol for the physical connections to, and responsibility for, one's country and its people. The most unconditional and contradictory role of the body in the novel—and in contemporary Arab-western relations—is that of the sacrifice for the nation; the martyr, Ziad, the Palestinian poet in the novel, who epitomizes the artist and revolutionary, who makes the

liberation of Palestine his absolute priority. Palestine's future becomes Ziad's main personal, political, and artistic goal and makes him a martyr right from the beginning:

> Such men as Ziad were born in different Arab cities, belonged to different generations and different political ideologies, but all were somehow related to your father, to his steadfastness, his pride, and his Arab feeling. They all died or were to die for the Arab nation. (MF, 101)

His martyrdom and cultural belonging are inscribed on his body when he dies. Ziad's homeland is the Arab nation as a whole and not one country, or his native Palestine, in particular. Throughout the narrative, it is not the belonging to one country in particular that emerges as the desired goal, but one's place in the Arab homeland. The various struggles for independence and the creation of the state of "Israel" contributed to a pervasive fear that the Arab world is under attack, and Ziad decides to fight back by becoming a militant.[27]

Only by dedicating his life—and death—to the cause of the liberation of the whole Arab homeland can Ziad hope to achieve change. His relationship to his native city, for example, highlights his absolute belonging and commitment. To him Gaza is a dream worth dying for. While he wanders from city to city, "[Ziad] was never at ease where he was, as if cities were only railway stations where he was waiting for a train." (MF, 128) And only Gaza has been pursuing him, "to the extent that it plucked [him] out of all other cities." (MF, 139) He leaves his fiancée in Algeria in order to join the PLO, and also renounces Ahlam, the woman of the love triangle, for his martyrdom. Love for Ziad stands exclusively for his homeland; no woman can take that place in his heart. In fact, the homeland is both woman and home, which makes "Palestine…his only mother"(MF, 163). By claiming a physical and bodily connection to his homeland, he fills the void left by his real mother, who is buried in an anonymous mass grave.

The commitment to and longing for an Arab homeland then becomes a new body in the poem, mirroring the body of poems that will live on after Ziad's death. Even when the author is dead, her/ his poems regenerate and produce new ideas. And yet, while they carry the seeds of immortality, these ideas cause Ziad's death. He is a resistance fighter, and his opposition to powerful countries and organizations makes him a target and a martyr. The paradox then is that while he gives birth to new ideas and inspires generations of Arabs, the body he produces is his death sentence. Mosteghanemi warns against the very real threat in and of written words and she seems to find the final validation of writing in martyrdom, for all the dangers she encounters and ideas she expresses through her writing are not worth remembering and do not equal one drop of blood of any of the martyrs to Algerian writing. Martyrdom, and not only national belonging, therefore, can encompass the written word.[28]

The novel decolonizes on two levels: it re-appropriates Algerian history and presents the ravages of colonialism from the point of view of its victims; and, also, written in the language of the victims with passion and mastery. But the novel is not only about the Algerian struggle against foreign domination; it is also about the complex post-independence problems facing the emerging nation. Mosteghanemi exposes, with a postcolonial awareness, the disappointments, deviations, and displacements of the revolutionary ideals. However, she did not dwell on these social and political predicaments directly; she used them as a narrative framework for the passionate affair between Khalid, the militant middle-aged Algerian, who turns to painting after losing his left hand in the struggle, and Ahlam, the fiction writer and the young daughter of his friend, the mujahid Si Tahir.[29]

Building a nation proves to be not an easy task after 130 years of settler colonialism, which undermined the native social structure. Disappointed intellectuals, like Khalid, look beyond national borders to make a niche for themselves abroad and thus gradually the dream of Algeria becomes a nightmare. Against this background, personal passions cannot be dissociated from national dramas; Ahlam personifies an Algeria that is driven away from revolutionary glory to mundane concerns, and yet Mosteghanemi brilliantly shows that beneath the formal breakdown the revolutionary spark is alive, symbolized in the unfulfilled love between Khalid and Ahlam. The writer herself explains her reluctance to represent a consummation in her work as an expression of her fascination with desire (raghba), not pleasure (mut'a).

The subterranean erotic longings echo the underground political aspirations of revolutionary Algerians. Mosteghanemi's legitimacy of madness finds its best expression in the secret terrain of banned liberation movements and the dialectics of an impossible affair, where the beloved evokes both a daughter figure and an actual mother.[30]The love for the mother mirrors the connection to the motherland and mother-tongue, cultural and national signifiers that establish and acknowledge belonging. While the fatherland traditionally implies national pride and strength, the motherland equals roots and unconditional love. One fights for the fatherland, but sacrifices everything for the motherland, for while the first is strong and active, the latter implies weakness and helplessness. The specific idea of motherland thus coincides with the idea of the vulnerable Arab world in the late 1960s, both of which demanded absolute and unquestioning loyalty. As a child owes life to her or his mother, so love for the mother is always presupposed and innate.[31]

The loss of the mother signifies not only an emotional loss, but the loss of one's origins, raising questions about one's identity and belonging as a whole; if the physical mother is dead, then a new allegiance need to be formed, an even stronger bond with the motherland, in order to matter and to mean, to belong. For Khalid, the loss of the mother results in an identification of the homeland with motherhood; the motherland becomes a substitute for the mother's love.His mother's death inspires him to join the revolutionary forces, which explains in part the strong emotional and almost physical bond between him and his homeland. He is willing to give his life for Algeria's independence, to distinguish himself as a son of Constantine. This is

nowhere better articulated than in the loss of his hand during the war of liberation. By now Algeria has inscribed itself on his body indefinitely. The missing hand becomes his main mark of identity. It is in this sense, Khalid's diversion from his person is twofold. He might be ashamed of his handicap, but since he is exhibiting his art in France, his body is also abject because it is Arab. His mark is double. The second mark is clearly negative, since it ostracizes and alienates him from other French citizens, especially considering the low social standards of North Africans in Paris. Moreover, the mark of the martyr has become a site of contestation.[32]

The moment when Khalid enters national history as a martyr, he is also expelled from it, since Algeria cannot offer the appropriate health care he badly needs. Moreover, his alienation from post-colonial Algeria and its self-important and corrupt ministers signify another break from his homeland. More importantly, the country he has looked to for belonging does not exist anymore. The free and independent Algeria existed in the minds of the mujahidin and in Khalid's paintings, but has not become a historical reality. Differently, Algeria, the broken dream, mocks and invalidates Khalid's broken body. The body of the martyr remains a spectacular bill board that various groups use to their advantage, a means to another end, a signified but never a signifier. It is in this sense that the constant national connotations of the missing arm deny Khalid his own personal identity, because they reduce him to a symbol of the nation and its ideals.[33]

Khalid symbolizes Algeria and his amputated arm represents the mutilation of the country by colonialism. His ambiguous reaction to his scar—humiliation or pride—also symbolizes the psychological plight of post-colonial Algeria, liberated but in hopeless drift. Ahlam meets Khalid in Paris in his self-imposed exile from a culturally and politically corrupted Algeria. In her, he sees the landscape of his native city but also a kind of scar—in her soul, for she seems truly alienated from the tradition. In a sense, she has been programmed by the colonial experience to accept a kind of inferiority. She, too, is in exile.[34]

It seems that martyrs can survive only in words in order to make their actions meaningful. As the streets in Constantine are named after martyrs, reminding modern Algerians of the national sacrifices, so will Ziad's poems inspire new fighters and immortalize a fate that inevitably leads to death. His creative body outlives his destroyed physical body.[35]Khalid says: "Art is everything that touches us, and not necessarily just anything we understand." (MF, 30) Indeed, this is what one experiences when reading Mosteghanemi's novel. Her art vigorously shakes the feelings and makes the mind wonder without break. One feels and sympathizes with the characters of the story before coming to understand their secrets. To illustrate the complexity of colonization and decolonization, Mosteghanemi created complex characters that embody within themselves many contradictions. The characters resemble Algeria with its wounds, pain, and dilemmas. Like Algeria, the characters of the story are caught between the Arab-Islamic civilization and the French and western ones. Like Algeria, the characters have psychological and physical deformities. Mosteghanemi shows the reader how amputating his left arm doesn't solve his problems. The physical amputation of his arm resolves his immediate

physical problem, namely the risk of death by infection. Likewise, the expulsion of the French troops from the country resolved the immediate physical presence of the colonizer and halted the erasure of Algerian identity and its replacement by French identity[36]. The injury does not stop there; Khalid's scar is a physical deformity, as well as a psychological one with which he has to live for the rest of his life. Throughout the novel, Mosteghanemi goes on to reveal the effects of this psychological scar on Khalid and Algeria. She captures the impact of colonization on a country using the impact of an amputation on an individual. In this way, Mosteghanemi allows the reader to visualize and capture the reality of decolonization more clearly. After creating Khalid as a main character in her novel, she gives him the authority to show the reader sketches of his psychological suffering as a handicapped person.[37]

The inferiority that Khalid feels when he interacts with individuals is similar to the feelings of the formerly colonized when they interact with the colonizer. Khalid describes his feeling as follows: "I am therefore often ashamed of this arm that accompanies me to the Metro, to the restaurant, to the café, to the airplane and every party to which I go." (MF, 44) Thus, Khalid resembles the colonized who, feel inferior to the colonizer. Khalid's French girlfriend, Catherine, resembles the colonizer who feels superior, "She did not like to appear with me in public. She was probably embarrassed lest some of her acquaintances see her with an Arab, ten years older and one arm missing." (MF, 43) The power relationship remains after colonization. This is evident in unfair business dealings that continue between the former colonizers and the formerly colonized. The power dynamics implanted by orientalist discourse, into the minds of both, the colonizer and the colonized, the orientalist and the oriental, appears to transcend the colonial era and remains in the heart of both.[38]

Like the colonized who still hold the painful memory of colonization, Khalid still holds his memory in his flesh, "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…" (MF, 43) Khalid describes his feelings about his scar as an amalgam of pride, anger, and hopelessness. Likewise, the expulsion of the French undoubtedly generated these same feelings in the Algerian population. They were proud of achieving their freedom, angry at the realization of the scars of the war and hopeless about the future of a country in ruins. The memory in the flesh, remains in both scars. It becomes a part of their identity. Khalid's identity in Algeria is highly related to his scar. The liberation from the French is and always will be a part of Algerian identity with all of its associations including the discourse that defines the orientalist, and the oriental, the colonizer and the colonized, and the former colonizer and the formerly colonized.[39]

In the years following the end of the war, the Algerian government attempted to portray the struggle for independence as a mythical period in which the Algerian people fought together against the French colonies. Focusing on the war period's more painful or embarrassing aspects such as the consequences of sexual torture would therefore deviate from the official version of the war. Within the novel, the

issue of sexual torture appears as Khalid attempts to physically rediscover and reconnect with Constantine. Although the exact time period of the novel is not clear, it appears that he is returning to Algeria in the 1980s before the outbreak of civil violence. Walking through the streets, he begins to remember some of the personal stories associated with buildings, more specifically the prison where both he and his friends have been incarcerated. [40]

Throughout the novel, the author keeps the reader puzzled by Khalid's character. Is he proud of his scar or is he embarrassed by it? Mosteghanemi presents Khalid with his contradictory feelings about his scar and his country. This makes it difficult for the reader to understand Khalid. However, it also allows the reader to share Khalid's authentic dilemmas. Khalid's contradictory feelings toward his amputated hand come from the varied reactions he receives about his disability. In Algeria, his scar makes him a hero, while in France, it bears no meaning. France recognizes Khalid as an individual and respects his talent, while in Algeria the individual has no value. These conflicting feelings about his scar are transformed into feelings about France and Algeria, later in the novel.[41]

Khalid wants to liberate the Algerian mind, to throw out all the remains of colonialism and create a new identity. Khalid's nostalgia for Si Tahir and for the ideals of the revolution is intertwined with his nostalgia for his mother and childhood. Childhood, with the mother at its head, becomes the symbol of perfection in the past and it is this period that is the root of Khalid's nostalgia. He tries to graft the view from his childhood home and the image of his mother, into Ahlam, a vision she ultimately rejects.[42]

Khalid chooses exile. He chooses to live away from his country rather than compromise his values and play a part in the corruption. He decides to bury his past with its dreams and leave to France, where he becomes a distinguished painter. However, in meeting Ahlam in Paris, Khalid rediscovers his lost dreams. Ahlam with her Algerian features forces Khalid to remember the past he wants to forget. She brings back all of the past with its pain. In her eyes, he sees his city, Constantine, and decides not to abandon her this time.[43]

Mosteghanemi creates a landscape, upon which she begins a dialogue between the old Algerian generation, represented by Khalid, and new Algerian generation represented by Ahlam. However, to Khalid, Ahlam is not only a representative of the new Algerian generation, but is Algeria itself. The dialogue allows them to discover their need for each other. "We were silently discovering that we complemented each other in an alarming way. I was the past that you did not know, and you were the present that had no memory …" (MF, 64) According to Khalid, Ahlam is not an individual but a reflection of people he loves and a homeland he abandons. He frequently refers to her as his homeland, "Bashful and confused, homeland sat by me." (MF, 53) For Khalid, Ahlam is similar to his city, Constantine. Constantine carries it as one of its streets and Ahlam as her last name.[44]To Khalid, even Constantine's curves and bends look like Ahlam's body. Thus, Khalid believes that by placing Ahlam in his path, fate has given him another

chance to reclaim all that he has lost. Ahlam on the other hand, sees in Khalid her father, who has been stolen from her during her first years. She is searching for a past taken from her with the death of her father. Like Khalid, she is a victim of colonialism.ThroughAhlam's character, Mosteghanemi affirms that colonialism didn't only deform the old generations, but that its fire had reached the new generation and caused a deep scar. The new Algerian generation was indirectly affected by the system of colonialism. They were orphans of the past. They were detached from their past and their roots, leading to identity confusion, westernization, and being lulled by the comforts of materialism. This is illustrated in Ahlam's name. Khalid breaks down her name into four letter acronym, A for "*alam*" or pain, H for "*hurqa*" or burning, la for "*la*" or no, and M for "*mut'a*" or pleasure. Her name exactly describes the transitions that take place in the book. It begins with the pain of colonialism, moves to the burning of the revolution, then onto the "no" of warning against westernization and finally to the pleasure of the bourgeois life.[45]

By joining the first and last letters of Ahlam's name, Mosteghanemi forms the word umm (mother, source, origin, foundation, essence, original version), recalling Khalid's association of Ahlam to his mother.ee [46]

By idealizing the mother and associating her with Ahlam, Khalid strives for a complete union with a woman, like that of child with mother, and through this image, a return to childhood and a return to the womb. However, Khalid's images of unity, permanence, and stability contain within them their own fault lines, their own process of dissolution. Through these cracks, Mosteghanemi dismantles these idealized, perfected images of women, and it is through these fissures that her own vision, however subtle, shines in the text. She shows that the natural progression is not of return to the mother and the womb, but of separation. This separation is not just of child from mother, but of the present from the past. For women, this means liberation from the roles of mothers, individuation, and independence.[47]

Rather than exploring and trying to understand her as a woman. Khalid conflates Ahlam with his homeland and bodily desires. By becoming obsessed with her, Khalid allegorizes Ahlam and transforms her body into a blank canvas that represents Algeria. While this is a fatherly act when Ahlam is in an infant, Khalid names her again, as lover does, when he meets her years later in Paris; he calls her Constantine and Algeria, but refuses to use her official name. He wants to make her his own, to make her his motherland, where he matters and belongs.[48]

As he compares Ahlam to his homeland, Khalid has to use his body to imagine and experience her. Since his body is permanently linked to the nation, his connection to Ahlam has to be physical as well.This clearly emphasizes the role of the body in constructing and shaping national belonging in the other person. Khalid's art is not enough in capturing his homeland; he must construct Ahlam and Constantine with his fingers and his one hand, his marker of Algerian identity. Khalid hopes that their mutual fragmented memories and identities will match and fill in the missing pieces. Only by recognizing and becoming two in one can the self become whole

again. By affirming Khalid's body and national identity, Ahlam is meant to fill up the emptiness and make him fully Algerian Arab again. In turning her into his homeland, however, Khalid needs to adapt and conform to her ideas and personality. In his longing for Algeria that exists only in his mind and artistic expression, Ahlam becomes the substitute for his homeland; she is the sight of his dreams of Algeria. By naming her and making Ahlam his homeland, Khalid hopes to establish his place in Algerian history once again.[49]

The naming practices and projections onto Ahlam, however, become problematic. Khalid resurrects Ahlam out of his memory for a specific purpose: "Let me admit to you at this moment I hate you and that I had to write this book to kill you" (MF, 28) Here, the narrative aims to undo the visual images of the paintings; Khalid actively and consciously (de)constructs Ahlam. [50]

The irony of what unfolds in *Memory in the Flesh*, is unrecognizable to Ahlam. She performs to the expectation that he ends up having her. Moments before Khalid is able to piece together exactly who she is, she reveals her political position, which he fully ignores:

> It makes me very happy ..to see an Algerian artist reaching such a pinnacle of excellence and creativity … Actually I don't understand much about painting … We need something new with a contemporary Algerian flavor like this. (MF, 31)

Here, Ahlam discloses her aesthetic middle-ground; Khalid remains blind to this at the start and his initial reaction to her is based on ideals that she cannot fulfill, not so much because he is willingly forbidding her a subjectivity as because her presence cannot be burdened with past histories and nostalgic hauntings that she wishes to escape, blind to the principles she might find there. Reminding her of her father's sacrifices, Khalid attempts to instill pride and honor into her vision of Algeria:

> Carry this name of yours with greater pride, not necessarily with arrogance but with the deep awareness that you are more than just a woman. You are the consciousness of a nation. Do you understand? Symbols are not supposed to shatter. These are ignoble times. If we are not biased to values, we'll find ourselves on a rubbish tip. Be biased only to principles. Consider only your conscience, because in the end it's the only thing you live with. (MF, 249)

Here, though Khalid overburdens her with metaphorical and actual responsibilities beyond those which an individual can remain loyal to, he nevertheless instills a blueprint for a life lived justly and with a recognition of the sacrifices of the past; for example, on meeting each other, the question of whether to speak French or Arabic arises "I am the man you are meeting for the first time whom you are addressing as a stranger, using the *vous* form" (MF, 39), assuring the reader that

political and cultural choices are never far from the scene of encounters in this postcolonial setting and that the consequences of the struggles of the past are forever imprinted in decisions made in the present, even in the most miniscule details of greetings "*Mais, comment allez-vous, mademoiselle*?" (MF, 39) Khalid's subsequent narration enacts the frustration of holding onto his attempts at both viewing Ahlam erotically whilst simultaneously struggling against the urge to grant her a worth that connects her to his values and beliefs.[51]

When Ahlam visits Khalid's studio to see his portrait of her, she is disappointed, denying that this image has any relation to her. She says, "You're dreaming," evoking the name Ahlam, as a utopia or unreality. She asks, "How can you make a comparison between me and that bridge?" (MF, 109) Khalid's dreamscape clashes harshly with the reality presented by her. Her rejection is the most powerful assertion of her voice, a rejection that is a refusal of Khalid himself, as she begins to turn away from him. By drawing this contrast between reality and unreality, realism and romanticism, Mosteghanemi evokes a central debate in contemporary Arabic literature.[52]

The early impetus for innovation drew on romanticism as a poetic doctrine, especially in its elevated depictions of women. However, in the early 1950s, this romantic attitude was deemed inappropriate in the face of the political upheaval in the Middle East, the establishment of 'Israel', the revolution in Egypt, and the struggle for independence in the Maghreb.[53]

Khalid associates the realistic depiction of ordinary women with compromised honor. The symbolization of women is thus a means of elevating and protecting them from their inherently base nature. It also has the effect of concealing their bodies and sexuality. Mosteghanemi notes that only foreign women are depicted realistically by male Algerian authors and only the foreign woman is able to evolve in Algerian literature.[54]

Like Khalid, Ziad intimately links the motherland and the loss of the mother with his love for Ahlam. She becomes the object of desire for the two of them, but also a major inspiration for their art, the bridge between their bodies and the nation. This notion of the motherland, alas, is treacherous, for the idea of motherhood is intricately linked with sacrifice when her child first colonizes her body. From prenatal nourishment to the giving of life, the mother's body gives and sacrifices, but never expects anything in return. In this sense, Khalid's gendered nation and especially the memories of his own mother render his idealizations of Ahlam problematic, because while he is fascinated by her strong will and creativity, her main attractions are her culture and ancestry. Their very first encounter in Paris is symptomatic of his narrow perspective.[55]

Khalid reducesAhlam to the bangle, a symbol of Constantine, which strips her of her individuality and actual presence. Since the bangle was worn by every woman in Constantine, it constitutes a cultural rather than an individual marker.Thebangleconnotes women's sacrifice for the nation in general and their

tacit and subdued participation in the liberation struggle.Khalid's comparison between the bangle and his missing hand as signifiers of identity glosses over the individual differences in their persons and perceptions. His empty sleeve is a public and personal marker while the bangle seems to melt into the general image of Algerian women.[56]

This attitude not only sheds light on Khalid's idealized and simplified image of the nation, but also immediately invokes a common and problematic trope in post-colonial literature: women as metaphors for the nation and women's bodies as sites of national struggle. One of the most famous examples is probably the concept of Mother India (Bharat Mata), which depicts India as the figure of the suffering mother. Conversely, the ideal woman suffers and sacrifices herself for the nation and her son.[57]

Woman *Identity and National Identity*

Women often equal culture, because they are the traditional keepers of the family and embody cultural authenticity. This common depiction has its roots in the colonial occupation of Algeria when France was using Algerian women to frenchify Algeria and, ironically, was further propagated by traditional and locally rooted revolutionary groups like FLN and religious movements, and the 1984 Family Code was an expression of women's identifying with a culture perceived to be in danger in its transformation towards an abstract western model. It is the woman's burden to defend traditional values against any outside contamination; the conservation of native culture is her highest goal.[58]By focusing exclusively on their common nationality and culture, Khalid reduces Ahlam to his images of the nation and subjects her to his notions of woman and motherhood. Ahlam may be Si Tahir's daughter, but she is also a young, westernized woman living in Paris, who goes to the university and has her own aspiration and dreams. In his initial fascination by her, Khalid overlooks all these attributes, happy to have reconnected with his past, family, and nation. This simplistic reduction emerges most clearly when Khalid paints Ahlam in the form of Constantine bridges and she does not recognize herself in them. "As I painted those bridges, I thought I was painting you. But in fact, I was only painting myself. The bridge was simply an expression of my situation that is forever in suspense. I was unconsciously reflecting onto it my worries, my fears, my turmoil." (MF, 137) His reflections onto the canvas mirror his projections of nostalgia onto Ahlam. Khalid is suspended between two lives, in Paris and in Constantine. Khalid's paintings of bridges are used as a metaphor for his and Ahlam's suspension in between worlds. Khalid's painting of bridges is a subconscious expression of his suspension. His turmoil is to be a boil and surfaces from his subconscious after seeing and falling in love with Ahlam. He begins to paint more and more bridges.[59]

This projection becomes even more problematic if one views it from an objective point of view. Khalid hopes Ahlam would become like his mother, a very subjective and selfish wish—as if voiced by a child. For Khalid's mother, while being a source of stability and unquestioning love for her sons, has had a life equally determined

by men. She has died young and humiliated. Again, it is only in the last part of the novel, when Khalid physically returns to Constantine and revisits his past without nostalgia, that he confronts his mother's unhappiness. He wanders through the streets of Constantine and finds himself in front of brothels, which triggers family memories:

> That was where my father spent his fortune and his manhood. . . . I tried not to look at a place that was for years the reason for my mother's private pain and anguish: probably one of the sorrows that killed her. . . . My father was no longer there to inhibit me from entering. He was gone, but he had left an excellent history behind those walls, like any other respected prosperous Constantine man of his times. … Father embroidered his adventures with scars and bruises on Mother's body. (MF, 204)

The memory of his mother is not only that of a goodhearted woman, but a woman who has sacrificed and suffered. She gives her body to her children and her husband, who use it only to beat her before he buried her. If the country then is an extension of the family, then the woman is supposed to protect and uphold it. As Khalid remembers his mother's pain, the thought of the women inside the brothel also carries a spark of sympathy. "It was behind those walls that presentable but wretched women disappeared, only to reemerge old and ugly, spending their money on orphans and the poor in a final bout of repentance". (MF, 204) It seems that the only people who escape these hidden places unscathed are the men, who can embroider their shoulders with their manliness only by trampling over women's bodies. While Khalid can, to a certain degree, feel some empathy for these women, he is no longer able to find a connection between them and Ahlam. If she represents Algeria and Arab women, then, where among the places he has visited so far is her place in Algeria? Khalid only sees two types of women: the ones outside the brothel, victims like his mother, and the ones behind the forbidden doors, who take advantage of what life gives them and feel no pain.[60]

When Khalid realizes that Ahlam is not a woman like his mother, he has doubts about her sexual deviance. He suspects she had an affair with Ziad and can only think of her as treacherous and manipulative. He gives his book this title to kill her off, to cut her out of his memory and his heart. Khalid's decision to write the love letter comes about when Ahlam's latest novel is published. She is his inspiration to write long after their love for each other has vanished: "Before you, I never wrote anything worth mentioning. Because of you, I put pen to paper." (MF, 2) And, yet, this inspiration is immediately based on the construction of Ahlam and their story together; Khalid's version: "It is my right now to choose the way in which my tale is told. . . . How is it that the white surface of these transformed pages is from the huge black canvasses still leaning against a studio wall that was once mine?" (MF, 2) His writing and painting complement each other in achieving the same purpose: to construct Ahlam according to his own wishes, to recreate her in a way that fits his own portrait of her. Even more importantly, the specific inspiration to write this

letter lies in the publication of her novel. He writes to counter her narrative. It seems that Khalid is scared by the idea that Ahlam is reclaiming her body in her writing. She has given her body in marriage to Si X, a member of the new Algerian elite, but her past and identity are hidden in her novels. Since the female body has been historically the ground for struggles, only the creative body, her writing, can restore Ahlam's full identity. She is telling her story and refuses to be a blank surface. Khalid aims to ensure control over her, one last time by countering her novel with his letter.[61]

The return to Constantine signals the break with nostalgia and idealization. Ahlam invites Khalid to come to Constantine to celebrate her wedding. The first break signaled by this invitation occurs on an emotional level, as Khalid is still in love with her. The wedding closes the door to any possibility of a future for the two of them. The wedding also brings about an ideological break: Ahlam sells out to the new elite, marrying a rich and influential man because her uncle and the legacy of her father demand it. The return to Constantine proves a great disillusionment, but also brings a sort of liberation as it constitutes the last destination in his search for national belonging. Rather than a romantic celebration, the wedding is a political marketplace where new titles and positions are being sold to the highest bidder under the devious cover of love. For Khalid, it is a brutal awakening, but an awakening nevertheless:

> Oh Constantine! … Here was only homeland fully before me. Was this really home? … I sat and looked at them and heard their complaints and their mutterings. Not one of them, it seemed, was happy. Was it not ironic too that they complain and criticize and curse the nation? Extraordinary! They have all crawled into high positions. Are they not part and parcel of the corruption?(MF, 232-33)

Even though the brutal collision of his constructed homeland with its incompatible reality shocks and pains him, he resolves to stand his ground and not to give in to power and its witcheries: " I defy them all—the pot bellies, the bearded ones, the bald ones, those with countless stars on their shoulders, those to whom I have given much and for return they have raped you before my very eyes." (MF, 236) He realizes that his defiance from a distance was useless; he can only change the fortune of his country by taking an active role in its struggle to decolonize the minds it has nurtured for millennia.[62]Khalid cannot find his Constantine at the wedding, but he wanders around the city in search of his homeland by looking "at every stone with love. I greet every bridge, one by one. I ask news of families, of the saints, and of their menfolk, one by one." (MF, 237) . Khalid is no longer passive and removed, but the object of his desire is right in front of his eyes, and he realizes that he needs to learn to love Constantine and the Arab homeland with all its complexity, and not as a victim that has been invaded and used by others. He has given his arm for the country once, but she now demands his whole being with all her contradictions. His wanderings through Constantine go beyond his struggle with the nation of Algeria to his search for his greater Arab homeland. Khalid has been

removed from his homeland and, in many ways, from his identity. He lives in exile, approaches his homeland through art and women, but never confronts it directly, and selectively remembers his past in his native city. His main memories of Constantine in Paris center on his mother and Si Tahir, two idols in his life, who stand for suffering and the nation. In their own right, they are both martyrs. Khalid carries other memories of Constantine in the flesh, though; memories that will not idealize either the nation or suffering and that only emerge when he physically confronts his past, such as his observation of the brothels. Rather than a personal experience, his mother's suffering and the underlying currents of sexuality Khalid encounters are symptomatic of his homeland. While he remembers the country's mothers most often while he is in Paris, he encounters mainly debased lust and illicit desire in Constantine. "Such inherited baseness is everywhere, in the eyes of most women who are hungry for any man, and in the nervousness of men who piled up their lust until they burst out with the first woman they meet. I had to resist my animal desires that day and not quite the city that was gradually pulling me down." (MF, 218) While his earlier memories focus on the holy and motherly woman, Khalid can only see whores and adulterers in the streets of Constantine. This change in attitude certainly mirrors his ambivalent feelings toward Ahlam, whose body has been sold for political reasons, but it also hints at the complexity of the homeland. Obviously, Khalid needs to overcome the dichotomy of good and bad women in order to grasp the idea of the real woman. Only late in the novel does a truly human woman emerge: Atiqa, Hassan's wife. Khalid refrains from idealizing her; she is neither goddess nor demon, but a hardworking loyal woman, whose greatest ambition is to live in a more modern home and own a refrigerator. The Algerian woman is not the bearer of Arab culture or the scapegoat of patriarchal nature, but a human being who has to struggle to put food at the table everyday. Women are perceived as passive and protected, but they are in fact the main providers and in general see themselves as the stronger sex.

Mosteghanemi increasingly plays on the association between a feminized Algeria and violence. In contrast to the traditional image of the victimized or subjugated Algerian woman, who is powerless before male authority, both Ahlam and the Algerian nation are portrayed in the novel as strong and active figures. Also, within the context of the novel, Ahlam/Algeria is represented as being responsible for Khalid's symbolic impotence. For example, Khalid discusses how Ahlam's/Algeria's allegiance to the new and corruptive system renders her almost unrecognizable to him:

> Has marriage really changed your expressions and your childlike laugh? Has it also changed your memory and the taste of your lips and the gypsy hue of your skin? (MF, 7-8)

Within this description, Khalid imagines Ahlam to have turned her back on her past, betraying her origins and even leading Khalid to question whether it hasn't changed her physical appearance. Given the platonic and non-physical nature of their relationship, it is telling that he focuses on her outward appearance such as her eyes and her lips. Her marriage is the last in a series of events that psychologically and

geographically distances Ahlam from Khalid. The result is that he remains infertile in both a symbolic and literal sense, unable to write, but also unable to sustain a relationship. Additionally, his lineage is troubled in another way. Incapable of maintaining a link to Ahlam, on a symbolic level, he is also distanced from both his mother and his homeland. Therefore, the novel offers the reader an image of the postcolonial Algerian nation, whose lineage and development is interrupted with regard to both previous and future generations.[63]As his image of the nation/woman has become more complex, Khalid starts to find his place in Constantine. He begins to embrace his body when he refuses to give in to seductive invitations, and stops being "ashamed of [his] right hand that day. I had a feeling of restlessness when I realized that, after all that had happened to me I still respected my body." (MF, 218) Even though he is unable to make love to Ahlam, Khalid will not throw away his scarred body and his life. He understands that there are no simple solutions, an awareness that leads him to embrace his body, because he finally starts to accept the complexity of his multiple self. Not only is the formation of identity a continuous process, but also Algeria and the Arab homeland have not completed their formation or recovery from colonization. It is not the finished product that counts, but the understanding of difference in the search. Culture cannot be translated or pinned down, but can only be experienced gradually by breaking down dichotomies and allegories; by living it in the flesh and blood. The physical contact and wanderings through the city, together with the thoughts the novel traces, showcase the struggle with the incomprehensibility of culture. Constantine cannot be painted, but writing can trace her contours and lead the reader into the myriad of contradictory sensations and images that is the city.[64]

Mosteghanemi's novel addresses the impact of exile on the nation. She depicts the corruption and difficulties faced by those whose goal is to invest in the people of the next generation.[65] Khalid describes Algeria in the aftermath of the expulsion of the French, there "I was distressed to discover that not only were we lagging behind France and Europe, we were lagging behind where we had been half a century earlier under colonialism." (MF, 196) She uses Khalid as an example of a war hero who chooses to escape to the capital city of his former colonizer, rather than face the difficulties required to build a nation. In this depiction of exile, Mosteghanemi urges those in exile to return to their land in order to nourish the development of the coming generations, many of whom are amputated from their past. This is vividly shown by Khalid's realization at the end of the novel when he states "We take the homeland as furniture for our exile. We forget when the homeland puts us down at its door, when, unaffected by our tears, it closes its heart against us without so much as a nod at our suitcases. We forget to ask who will take our place after we go." (MF, 185)

As the novel closes, Khalid is back in Constantine for good. It is in this place that he traces and reconstructs his thoughts about Ahlam, Ziad, and Algeria. It is not enough to fantasize and idealize culture; one must actively enter its history. In a way, Khalid gives back his whole body and soul to his motherland when he returns. Al-Kudya prison stands for the continued violence and the unnamed martyrs, who

have died a solitary and brutal death within its walls. This prison and the people who have perished in it are part of Constantine and its history as much as is Si Tahir, but in a bit darker and less glorious way. While his missing arm still marks him as a son of Algeria, many scars that were inflicted in the name of the nation remain invisible and buried.[66]Ahlam and Khalid are esteemed members of the new Algeria, but their success at home seems to be measured by their success in France. Khalid, who lives in a martyrs artist's loft in Paris, has no responsibilities, and ostensibly has enough money from his art. In Constantine, Khalid would not have enjoyed these luxuries.[67]

Ahlam, on the other hand, lives in Paris under the care of her uncle, the ambassador and her French education seems to improve her status as an Algerian bride. The memories that Khalid has carried in his flesh flow onto the page and the canvas only to prove futile. He cannot paint and imagine Algeria, but he needs to collide head-on with its reality. What remains are more broken bodies that represent the broken dreams of a country, but also inspire hope as they are fragments that might lead to a new whole.[68]The young Algerian generation was left hanging without a connection to its roots. All that was left of its past were streets with the names of heroes. This can be applied to all Arab countries after colonialism. Riyad Al Sulh in Lebanon, Saleh al Ali in Syria, and Ahmed Orabi in Egypt are all streets, named after revolutionary leaders who fought against colonialism. Arab regimes used the names of the leaders and forgot to use their ideas. They built streets with their names and forgot to create schools to teach their philosophies. Thus, like most of the young Arab generation today, Ahlam is suspended between ghosts of heroes from the past and corrupt regimes of the present. She is suspended between the glory of the past embodied by her father's name and the viciousness of the present-day. Therefore, she has no examples to follow; all she inherits from the past are names and slogans. [69]She resented her father:

> The fact that father left me a big name doesn't mean a thing to me, because I've inherited misery with the weight of that name … I'd have preferred an ordinary childhood and an ordinary life to have had a father and a family like anybody else…(MF, 66-7)

Ahlam blames her father for choosing to be the father of Algeria and forgetting that children are like the land, needing fathers to grow and build their identities. Ahlam grows up with a conflicting identity, like everything around her. She is proud of her Arabic identity, "Arabic is the language of my heart … We write in the language in which we feel." (MF, 56) Ahlam is also proud of her Islamic identity, "Of course I fast. It's my way of defying this city, my way of communicating with my homeland and my past." (MF, 157) In addition to this pride about her past and her roots, one discovers another part of Ahlam'sidentity, that is detached from the past and is more western. Unlike Khalid, Ahlam is incapable of seeing the features of her country in herself. She perceives herself as an individual only, unaware that she carries with her all of Algeria. Ahlam fails to understand how Khalid has seen her and painted her as Constantine. She is even offended by this description of her, "You've got some of the crooked line of this city, the shape of its bridges, its pride, its dangers,

its caves…"(MF, 109) Her reaction is "You're dreaming… How can you make a comparison between me and that bridge?" (MF, 109) Individualism has reached Ahlam's spirit and prevented her from seeing herself except as an individual. Ahlam resembles her country with its identity crises that swing between the west and the east. This identity confusion is a remnant of the impact of colonialism on the minds of individuals, which programmed the colonized to believe that western culture is superior to theirs. Therefore, colonialism turned Arabs themselves into orientalists, applying and propagating an inferiority complex and many aspects of orientalist discourse. Like many in her generation, Ahlam has the tendency to take off her Arabic-Islamic identity and assume a western one. This is illustrated by Khalid's accusation: "What you wanted was, in the end, just to become another copy of Catherine, to become an ordinary painting with an obvious mood, and a face with lots of makeup that looked like her face…" (MF, 110) The identity confusion present in the young generation is pervasive, diverse, and for the most part, a subconscious phenomenon. Khalid's criticisms of Ahlam and her generation illustrate these points. The diversity of this identity confusion is illustrated in the fact that it applies to the way people dress, the influence on schools and school texts, and the influence on memory. Ahlam and her generation are cut off from their past. They carry some characteristics of their history and memory, but like someone with dementia, there are many holes and the loss is pervasive. The holes occupy seemingly random portions of their memory and more importantly those who are disconnected from their memory lack the insight to be aware of their loss. Ahlam and her generation go along innocently unaware of their disconnection from the past. Khalid's solution for discovering one's memory is to live it rather than looking at a picture or a painting. He argues that understanding the traditions and adhering to them is necessary for the understanding anything about our past. This statement implies a process of thinking about everything you do and why you do it. It does not preclude the inclusion of new western ideas and practices but prescribes the understanding of one's traditions and practicing them prior to embracing blindly simpler, more comfortable actions. While preaching to Ahlam about memory, history, and the importance of living with Constantine and its traditions, Khalid has already escaped his past, and is hiding in exile.[70]

Therefore, Khalid and Ahlam are similar. They are both victims of colonialism, and both have unfulfilled dreams. The masculine experience of sexual torture transforms the victim's relationship to society and their own sexual identity. Castrated by the colonizer, the victim feels unable to contribute both creatively and physically to the new Algerian nation. Not only does the victim's relationship to the nation become distorted but the development of the nation is hindered.[71] Khalid says, "I hated absolute colors," (MF, 30) and "the color black usually meant dishonesty just like white." (MF, 220) Whereas art is rich in the unique mixture of colors, ideology is shallow with its black and white colors.[72]

Memory in the Flesh de-constructs the notion of a unified, finished country, and highlights instead the process of a nation in-becoming and a people in-between. That is at bottom a cause worth fighting for, because it gives a chance to

Mosteghanemi to reclaim a legacy, and in doing so, she sets her energy free. Working by this technique also enabled her to represent the world of her native Algeria as it struggled to strike a fine balance between a sordid past and a painful present. Such a way of telling stands for the plight of a national voice struggling to narrate the story—a story marred by disillusion and despair, but also looking forward to leaving an imprint in a world where from within everything is turned upside down. It is in this sense that the story of Algeria makes the whole novel seem finally to throw itself away through lack of self-conviction.[73] In her novel, Mosteghanemi reveals the impact of colonization on Algerians and stresses the need for Arab intellectuals to come back from their exile to participate in decolonizing the Arab mind and societies from their state of decay. She believed that one of the causes of Algeria's present problems is the neglect after the revolution of the emotional and psychological make-up of people and the preoccupation with industry and an exemplary economy, and this can be true across the Arab world and not just Algeria.[74]Mosteghanemi makes it her primary goal to examine the emotional and psychological difficulties faced by characters, representing members of the society. She demonstrates a commitment to nurturing the sociopolitical health of members of the societies as a means of building healthy ones. In this way, she seems to adhere to Plato's notion that "Society is man writ large."[75] Healthy Arab societies are societies of healthy Arabs.The novel is ambitious in its scope, negotiating a consideration of aesthetics, passion, desire, and fear that coalesce when issues of nationhood and belonging come to the fore. Not primarily interested in setting up oppositions, the novel stages the intersections between dreams and reality, between idealism and realism. The difficulties of adjusting to a certain narrative in the present about the past are explored. While Ahlam and Khalid seem equally unable to distance themselves from the past, this past is configured in such distinct ways as to make it almost impossible for them to find common ground in the present. The incongruous nature of memory, coupled with a will to idealism and romanticism produced in the text, results in an overwhelmingly dream-like narrative where crucial issues of home and love fuse until the meaning of one threatens to suffocate the other.[76]Khalid writes his narrative in order to, among other things, cleanse himself of the effect of his beloved. He justifies his love for Ahlam through his bestowing of nationalist signifiers. It is the meeting with her that enables him to fully express his love for his home, mother and country. Thus, Ahlam serves no small purpose, in fact, she embodies purpose and comes to define herself against this expectation that she carry a nation's consciousness. In *Memory in the Flesh*, love, or being in love, opens the possibility for a less obvious negotiation between cause and effect. Khalid is able to clearly formulate his distaste for other Algerians who he believes have betrayed the cause, though he cannot do the same with Ahlam.[77]

It seems that one is privy to the painful results of anti-colonial struggle, both physically, such as Khalid's lost arm, and Ahlam's lost father, and psychologically. The encounter with Ahlam brings about a realization of the disappointing vacuum between anti-colonial struggle and the post-colonial cultural understanding of that struggle effaced as it is through the more current local revolutionary Algerian

ideals. Khalid is painfully aware of this paradox. It is the love for Algeria, as mediated through Ahlam, that is the real love. Equally, the real love that Ahlam gains from Khalid is a different love for a country that can never mean to her what it means to him, the unpredictability of the other that cannot be contained even if this other is the past itself.[78] Once Khalid examines his connections to his homeland more critically and experiences Constantine on his own skin, he can find a sense of belonging and home.The merit of the novel is its courage to turn some as yet unturned stones and evaluate the postcolonial period, within the periphery of the postmodernist discourse. This approach allows it to engage in a more enlightened process of self-assessment. The inward look and the shifting of the blame heretofore placed on the coloniser constitute liberation from the language of the colonized that continued in use, long after independence. Because Algeria provides one of the best examples of the success of France's mission, it is the nation best suited to measure the fate of the colonized mentality. The 130 years of colonial rule and the combined policy of assimilation and destruction of the local cultural traditions have, undoubtedly, resulted in the infiltration of the French culture into the fabric of the Algerian society.[79]Consequently, the process of mental purification for Algerians would be unusually slow, since a painful period of search for identity would have to precede their full understanding of their condition.

Conclusion

AhlamMosteghanemi is able to represent more than four decades of Algerian history as they interweave with the character's trajectories and memories, from the revolt of 1945 in East Algeria to 1988, when Khalid, the protagonist-narrator is writing a memoir of his in the form of the novel Memory in the Flesh. She sets out to write an Algerian novel in Arabic rather than in French, and, in fact, she is the first Algerian woman to accomplish this. Therefore, her entire literary endeavor is an organic one in which the struggle for Algerian independence is enacted in the poetic texture of the work. Her choice to turn away from the French audience and to direct her voice towards her own people is an important context in which to read this work. The novel's inventive form and language present a troubling and confrontational alternative to the social and political norms in the Arab world.

In Memory in the Flesh, the claims of the national struggle, with its rhetoric of collectivity, impel the use of a poetic language, while the individual journey in the self invites realistic analysis. In this novel, the association between the land, the nation, and the beloved is stressed in line with an Arab ideology since the 'Awakening'. Memory in the Flesh remains much more than a love story; it is an allegory about the tortured fate of Algeria and perhaps the whole Arab world in its struggle for freedom. But as in all tales of repression and unfulfilled passion, erotic longing is transformed into an endless desire, the desire to unleash the liberating forces that lie just below the surface of every unjust arrangement.

Memory in the Flesh has the merit of presenting a rare glimpse of the feelings of the progeny of the martyrs. Long neglected by literature, they are now taking the stand to tell their own story.

Notes

1- SamahElhajibrahim, "Exposing the Ravages of Colonialism: A Political Analysis of Memory in the Flesh." University of Pennsylvania. Toronto, Canada, Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September, 2009, 1.
2- Ibid.,
3- Ibid., 3.
4- Quoted in Elhajibrahim, 2.
5- Elhajibrahim, 3.
6- David C. Gordon, The Passing of French Algeria, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) 15.
7- Gordon, 51.
8- Gordon, 53.
9- Ibid.,
10- Elhajibrahim, 9-10.
11- Gordon, 53.
12- Elhajibrahim, 10.
13- Ibid., 11.
14- Eric Voegelin Society Meeting 2009, "Algeria and French Colonialism," Louisiana State University, 2.
15- TanjaStampfl, "The (Im)possibility of Telling: of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh," Unpublished Dissertation, Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Mechanical College, 2009. 130.
16- Ibid., 131.
17- Ferial Ghazoul, "Memory and Desire" Al-Ahram Weekly, No.409, December, 1998.
18- Lucie G Knight, "Violent Legacies: Family and Nation in post 1999s AlgerianLiterature" Unpublished Dissertation, Emory University, 2009. Electronic Thesesand Dissertations. 39-40.
19- Ghazoul, "Memory and Desire".
20- Elhajibrahim, 11.
21- James McDougall, "Social Memories 'In the Flesh': War and Exile in Algerian Self-Writing", Academic Journal Article fromAlif: Journal ofComparative Poetics, No.30. 2010.
22- Aida A. Bamia," Dhakirat al-jasad (The Body's Memory): a new outlook on old themes." (Arabic Writing in Africa) Research in African Literature, September 22, 1997. 1-2.
23- Ibid., 2.
24- Judith Butler, Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France(New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 10. Cited in Stampfl, 131.
25- Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text. Trans. Richard Miller. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 16-17. Cited in Stampfl, 132.
26- Ibid., 132-33.

27- Stampfl, 133.
28- Ibid., 146-7.
29- Ghazoul, "Memory and Desire".
30- Ibid.,
31- Stampfl, 134-5.
32- The double mark as an individual and as a foreigner seems to counteract the double meaning of nationalism. Nationalism is the death of subjectivity, but it also implies sacrifice. While nationalism diminishes the individual, Khalid's missing arm becomes a marker that makes him stand out and recreates rather than destroys him.
33- Stampfl, 136-7.
34- Eric Voegelin Society Meeting 2009, "Algeria and French Colonialism" Louisiana State University, 2.
35- Stampfl, 145.
36- Elhajibrahim, 13.
37- Ibid., 13-4.
38- Ibid., 15.
39- Ibid., 16.
40- Knight, 35-6.
41- Elhajibrahim, 16-7.
42- Ellen McLarney, "Unlocking the Female in AhlamMosteghanemi", Journal of Arabic literature, Vol.33, No.1 (2002), Brill. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183445. Accessed: 10/03/2012 07:01. 31.
43- Elhajibrahim, 18.
44- Ibid., 19.
45- Ibid., 20.
46- Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic. Ed. J. Milton Cowen (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1976) 25. Cited in McLarney, 32.
47- McLarney, 32-3
48- Stampfl, 138.
49- Ibid.,, 139.

50- Ibid.,
51- AnstasiaValassopoulos, Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Experience in Context (London: Routledge, 2007) 123.
52- McLarney, 34.
53- Ibid.,
54- Ibid., 35.
55- Stampfl, 140.
56- Stampfl, 140-1.
57- Stampfl, 141.
58- Ibid.,
59- Ibid., 142.
60- Helene Cixous explains the function of the body in writing as a response to history: "In body—More than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body. More body, hence more writing……" (1980, 257). Cited in Stampfl, 144.

61- Stampfl, 144.
62- Ibid., 149.
63- Knight, 45.
64- Stampfl, 151.
65- Elhajibrahim, 25.
66- Stampfl, 152.
67- Ibid., 152-3.
68- Ibid., 153.
69- Elhajibrahim, 20.
70- Ibid., 23.
71- Knight, 45-6.
72- Elhajibrahim, 24-5.
73- Stampfl, 154.
74- Elhajibrahim, 26.
75- Ibid.,
76- Valassopoulos, 114.
77- Ibid., 123.
78- Ibid., 46-7.
79- Bamia, 3-4.

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