

Postcolonial Condition: Remembering to Resist or Forgetting to Persist in Ahlem Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*

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ABSTRACT

Ahlem Mosteghanemi¹'s *Dhakirat Al- jasad* (1993), *The Bridges of Constantine* (2013), is a text that artistically and profoundly tackles the rising sense of despair and disillusionment permeating the newly independent Algeria. Without a doubt, what accounts for its success is the depiction of one of the most critical chapters in the history of Algeria, for the first time written in Arabic by a woman. Mosteghanemi successfully breaks the shackles of a French language that chained Algerians novelists even after years of liberation. The story depicts the Algerians' struggle against the harsh French colonialism and its lasting manifestations. Khalid, the protagonist, is a warrior and later a painter who resorts to exile so as not to compromise and conform to the corrupt life Algerians maintain after independence. Unconventionally, Khalid leaves for France carrying with him a beautiful image of home and a lovely memory of a pristine past time. In exile, however, Khalid experiences an array of confronting emotions that leads him to a serious stage of puzzlement and emotional upset. This paper explores the theme of Nostalgia in *The Bridges of Constantine* in light of the degrading Algerian community after independence.

Keywords: Postcolonial Condition, Nostalgia, Home, Exile, Resistance, Creativity and Self-Empowerment.

Introduction

The novel has been a subject of an array of interpretations ranging from literary criticism to psychological analysis. In *Dhakirat Al-jasad (The Body's Memory): A New Outlook on Old Themes*, Aïda A. Bamia acknowledges the new dimension given to a number of exhausted themes relating to war and after war hurdles. She argues, "Just when it was believed that Algerians exhausted the topic of the war of independence as well as the major issues of the immediate post-independence years, a new novel revived the subject with virulence and frankness" (85). Ahlem then peppers her treatment of old issues with a deliberate hatred towards oppressive powers in their distinctive forms and voices what has been previously unvoiced. The translation of the text into numerous languages has been fostered by the work's success since its first publication. The early translation of the work to French language, *Mémoire de la Chair*, has been a failure. In "In a Language That Was Not His Own": On Ahlām Mustaghānāmī's "Dhakirat Al-jasad" and Its French Translation "Mémoire de la Chair", Elizabeth M. Holt notes, "This translation of *Dhakirat Al-jasad* seems able only to omit, elide, stay silent on, or render unintelligible the original novel's investment in the politics of writing in Arabic" (140). Ahlem's legacy lies in her being the first Algerian woman to write in Arabic shedding light on what has been suppressed during the years of oppression like Arabic language and Arab-Islamic tradition.

The first Arabic version of the novel has been initially accused of not being originally written by Mosteghanemi. The text has been attributed to a number of Arab male writers one of whom is the Algerian novelist Wassini al-Araj

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¹Ahlem Mosteghanemi was born in Tunis. She is the daughter of a militant in the Algerian war of liberation and an intellectual with a high-ranking position in the Algerian government whose contribution to the new free nation are undeniable. Ahlem's first achievement is a daily show "Whisper" on a national radio. "Whispers" proves the beginning of her poetic style allowing Ahlem to be later the first Algerian to write poetry collection in Arabic under the name of "To the Day's Haven" and "The Writing in a Moment of nudity". Ahlem's decision to write in Arabic comes against the backdrop of the French Language domination.

who writes similar poetic novels. The major reason for such accusation is the male perspective dominating the text. Mosteghanemi subsequently deciphered the riddle of the use of such mode of representation, which she chooses to convey her message elucidating how, as a technique, it compares to the idea of the veil. In developing such narrative strategy, Mosteghanemi breaks up both the literary and the social traditions of silencing women permeating the Algerian society before and after independence. In "Unlocking the Female in Ahlām Mustaghānamī", Ellen McLarney argues, "Dhakirat Al-jasad is not only a reflection on, but a reflection of the modes of representation have come to dominate the field of contemporary Algerian literature, dominated by male writers" (25). In this vein, Mosteghanemi herself explains that the issue relates to a mere patriarchal conspiracy the purpose of which is inferiorizing women achievements contending that,

The matter is not that of Dhakirat Al-jasad and the issue is not that of Ahlem Mosteghanemi; it is rather the fact of belonging to a patriarchal community which despises the female and marginalizes women that whenever an Arab female writer or poet appears, there comes who says that a man writes for her. (16)²

The reader of the trilogy³ may easily notice how she gradually recovers the female voice and empowers women. All the writers, who are believed to be the owners of the work, later have spoken up denying their legitimate parenthood to it praising Mosteghanemi as phenomenon worthy of attention. Moreover, Most of the critics' positive response focuses upon the high sense of fidelity in evoking the Algerian spirit and milieu, which are hard for a foreigner to know about⁴. Hafiz Sabri attributes the novel's success to the profound impact it has on readers⁵.

Those who condemn the work on the basis of its abundant sexual imagery fail to grasp the essence of its use. Yet there are no pornographic scenes; the only sexual image in the text is that of the kiss in Khalid's house in Paris. In the "the Impossibility of Telling: of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh", Tanja Stampfl maintains that Mosteghanemi "introduces the body as object of desire, as an allegory for the nation, and a symbol for the physical connection to and the responsibility of one's country and its people".⁶ Stampfl does not deny the implementation of sexual allusions in the text showing how it is not the focal point, which the work stresses. A few critics do actually grapple with the issue of Nostalgia in the text reducing it to a mere love story and a desire for the other. The title of the book (Dhakirat Al-jasad) is oftentimes misleading as it induces a sexual connotation relating to the body. The latter in the title tells a whole history of resistance of a people who wanted to be free. The wounds in their flesh now are eternal reminders of their heroic endeavors and unprecedented endurance. McLarney, one of the voices who grappled with the subject of

² My own translation. The quote in Arabic is: "المسألة ليست مسألة ذاكرة الجسد و لا القضية قضية احلام مستغانمي و انما كوننا ننتمي الي مجتمع ذكوري (فريال غزول 167) as cited in

³ Dhakirat Al-jasad is a prequel to other two novels: "Fawda el Hawas" (The Chaos of Senses) published in 1997 and "Aber Sareer" (Bed Hopper) published in 2003. Each part of the trilogy, now a classic, is a bestseller in its own right throughout the Arab world (Wikipedia).

⁴ Ferial Ghazoul, in "Desire and Memory", praises Ahlem's noteworthy ability to embrace convincingly a male voice who forges this exceptional tale of passion. Ghazoul quotes Abdel-Moneim Tallima comment saying, "Ahlem Mosteghanemi goes beyond the common notions of the masculine and the feminine to present a humane horizon." The two critics refer to one of the other reasons why Mosteghanemi has adopted such mode, which is to cover episodes in the political history of Algeria in which men were provocateurs.

⁵ As it is cited in Ghazoul, Ferial J. "ذاكرة(د)ب في ذاكرة الجسد". Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics. No. 24, (2004), pp. 166-181.

⁶ Tanja Stampfl builds her idea on the theories of Judith Butler and Reda Bensmaia in particular. His essay traces "the quest for the Arab homeland in the love triangle between three artists: the writer Ahlem, the painter Khalid, and the poet [Ziyad]". The three characters use their art of telling and each other to construct a place--a home of sorts. Stampfl's reading of Mosteghanemi's novel aims to "answer larger questions concerning the importance of national identity in a globalized world and the role of art in (re)creating a fragmented nation".

nostalgia, explains how Khalid has fallen in the trap of idealizing the past, which he cannot forget and constantly longs for. She notes, "The temporal framework of the text is the most succinctly expressed through Khalid's body itself, wounded and disfigured in the present, leading [him] to nostalgically romanticize the past as a time of wholeness and harmony" (29). Khalid's sense of lack of a part of him enhances his feeling of dissatisfaction with the present and prefers the past during which he enjoyed his wholeness.

Nostalgia is what characterizes a great deal of the postmodern fiction. As a concept, it owes origin to the Greek word--*nostos*, meaning, "To return home" and *algos*, meaning "pain". Despite the fact that the term is originally Greek, its use is relatively new. It was coined in 1688 by a Nineteen-year-old Swiss student in his medical dissertation as a softer way to diagnose a literally fatal kind of severe homesickness. Recovery from it simply necessitates the return to home, or sometimes merely the promise of it. Historically, the outbursts of nostalgia have always followed critical times of revolution and development. For example, the Romantics use of the word manifests a dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the nineteenth century British industrial revolution. The Romantics immediately started to long for the old lifestyle mostly associated with nature. The remarkable improvement of means of transportation around the globe further exacerbated the phenomenon as it allowed for movements far from home and thus longing for turning back. In "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern", Linda Hutcheon identifies nostalgia as "a key component of contemporary culture today" grappling with it in political terms. She elucidates how the longing does not only occur at the spatial level, but shifts to the temporal one. Returning home, as a place, is no longer a means for recovery as the temporal dimension is never the same. Hutcheon maintains that nostalgia

May depend precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power--for both conservatives and radicals alike.

The past remembered is generally idealized and only imagined and thus it becomes a mere reaction to the displeasure and the discontent with the present. After the decolonization movements in the globe, the movements between home and exile led to the rise of nostalgic propensities that manifest themselves in fiction. Postcolonial critics shed light on nostalgic instants in the history of the colonized to mourn a lost time of cohesion and order. This manifests itself in phases of renaissance, revival of tradition and cultural heritage. Postcolonial writers highly concern themselves with voicing their remembered pasts majorly shaped by the experience of colonialism. In his *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory*, Dennis Walder argues,

Exploring Nostalgia can and should open up a negotiation between the present and the past, leading to a fuller understanding of the past and how it has shaped the present, for good or bad, and how it has shaped the self in connection with others a task that may bring pain as well as pleasure. (9)

Nostalgia is historically significant; the rejection of today culture urges a defensive retreat to the past. Svetlana Boym has the same view of nostalgia having a temporal aspect as Hutcheon. In her "Nostalgia and Its Discontents", she contends that "the past of nostalgia, to paraphrase William Faulkner is not even past. It could be merely a better time" (2). Boym simply sees Nostalgia as a way to go back to periods that suffuse people with pride and optimism in order fill in the void of the unpleasant present. In like vein, she notes, "the modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return" (6).

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Ahlem Mostaghanemi portrays a dilemma of the group of Algerians in the post-war independence through the character of Khalid, the protagonist of the story. The latter, as a way to save an undistorted image of homeland, takes exile as a refuge refusing to be a witness of its distortion. In exile, Khalid buries deep the memory of homeland, which he oftentimes revives in painting. What Khalid yearns for is not only Constantine as

entity, but also for a past time of wholeness and pride lived in it. The allegiant warriors and the great Algerian women who are bearers of a whole tradition best represent the time of grandeur that Khalid reveres. The sight of Hayat Abdul Mula is the spark that ignites strong feelings of nostalgia as she best incarnates the time to which Khalid belong. She is the daughter of one of the ideal heroes of the Algerian war, the symbol of motherhood, and thus of a tradition. What accounts for that is her clothing and comportment; the *Miqyas*, the burgundy *Kandura* and the use of a Constantinian dialect. Khalid's tragedy is not the loss of his arm in war, but the loss of the cause for which he has lost it. Disappointment and despair become colonial legacies pestering generations that resist them differently. Khalid's nostalgia becomes a site of resistance and creativity making him an icon of self-empowerment.

Khalid takes refuge in exile to circumvent his deception of the present state of the nation for which more than a million and a half have fought to liberate. After independence, Algerian community faced serious cultural decadence and denigration⁷ leading to an array of problems like the erasure of the native language, religion and tradition, power abuse and the race to power. Khalid heroically resists the temptations and facilities of the new, corrupt government. He refuses to get a high-ranking political post, which everyone else has been chasing at the time, dreaming of a simpler position through which he may effectuate change. Khalid soon becomes responsible for a publishing house in Algeria. Pleased of getting such job, he perfects his Arabic liberating himself from the complex of being an Algerian fluent only in French. Khalid's prime aim is to alter mindsets and values prevailing the newly independent nation. At an early time, Khalid could realize that Algeria needs more than an industrial revolution; it rather requires an intellectual, cultural one. To his disappointment, the material he reads for publication is so naïve that it does not aspire to the level of culture he himself aspires to spread. Khalid hates the fact of being "responsible for dumbing down the population" spoon-feeding them lies (108). Ziyad Al-Khalili's meeting with Khalid has been a turning point in his carrier and life alike. Ziyad simply teaches Khalid a lesson to never trade manhood for a job; a sensitive post, as that with aims like those need men of courage. Despite the fact that Khalid has chosen exile as a way out from post war chaos, it is still in a way forced as he has no other or a better alternative. Khalid leaves his country with pain for its present state and for the Algerians' bruised memories preserving a perfect image of home.

Khalid survives the cold and discomfoting exile nostalgically filtering it through the lens of home. Khalid ceaselessly treats and compares every aspect of life in Paris to that of Constantine, the North Eastern Algeria. While he wants to paint the Pont Mirabeau, which stretches along the view from Khalid's window, he finds himself drawing the viaduct of Sidi Rachid and Wadi Rummal instead. Khalid comes to realize that "in the end we don't paint where we live, but what lives in us" (117). Moreover, he now understands that he can never fall for Catherine, because she is simply the opposite of the Algerian woman. The traditional Algerian woman that Khalid idealizes expresses her love through cooking; she spends hours preparing meals with love to share with the beloved. Khalid sees that he can never love a woman whose only banquet is her body and who lives on cold, ready-made sandwiches. Khalid cherishes Hayat for she fits in the portrait of the woman he has in mind. Unlike Catherine, Hayat embodies home in its perfect shape. In an initial act of confession, Khalid confirms that to Hayat saying, "My problem is I never forget" (59). This means that he is conscious of the fact that memory torments him and his presence in Paris is the anesthesia injection that eases his pain for a nation bleeding but no one empathizes with its gripe. Hayat's appearance awakes the sleeping Genie of homeland in Khalid's heart and mind bringing it back to life again. Khalid notes, "The day you entered this exhibition hall, you brought Constantine with you" (83). Hayat wears *miqyas*, a symbol of motherhood, that extremely overwhelms Khalid upon the mere vision of it. Khalid comments on Hayat's wearing of that precious piece of Algerian tradition saying, "If you hadn't [worn it], all feelings it aroused would still be lying dormant in the labyrinth of forgetting" (85). What triggers Khalid's sudden obsession is not Hayat but what she simply represents. Khalid's growing nostalgic feelings turns Hayat to a city, his beloved Constantine with its glorious history and tradition. When Hayat sees her twin, *Nostalgia*, the painting, she asks, "So, that's me!" Khalid replies, "Perhaps it [isn't] you ...but the

⁷Tiffin, Hellen. "Postcolonial Literatures and counter-discourse" as cited in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*.

way I see you” (120). What unites Khalid and Hayat is a shared memory of *Si Tahir* and the fact of being both war victims; war has taken Khalid’s arm and Hayat’s father. Khalid’s nostalgia reaches a certain stage of madness where he unconsciously tries to relive with Hayat the great past time in the present which is impossible. He admits, “A febrile madness I was turning you from a young woman into a city” (85). He adds, “I sentenced you to be Constantine ... [and] sentenced myself to madness” (58). Affinities between Hayat and Constantine are countless; every part of the land is echoed in her character, body and behavior; “[she has] something of the contours of that city, the curvature of her bridges, her pride, dangers, caves, and valleys, the foaming river that splits her body, her femininity, her secret seductiveness, her vertigo” (120).⁸

Khalid’s Nostalgia is a defense mechanism and an unconscious attempt to save his memory. Khalid’s friend, Roger Naqqash, who has been once infatuated with Constantine too, refuses to revisit it in an attempt to save the pristine memory of it. Addressing Khalid, Roger admits, “the hardest thing is for memory to confront a reality that contradicts it” (96). What illustrates that is the sudden need to modify *Nostalgia*, Khalid’s first portrait. Subsequently He realizes that “the painting would have no historical value if I added or removed something... It would become the rootless painting of a falsified memory” (97). What accounts for Khalid’s obsession with Hayat and his extra fear of losing her is the fact that she represents all what he aspires to save. Hayat is the mother, the neglected tradition, and the future. She is the future, which Khalid fails to embrace with one hand when he has first seen her as a baby. The high sense of alienation that overwhelms Khalid in Ahlem’s marriage shows how the past is a separate entity that stands aside as mere witness of the present. The subsequent need of *Si Sharif* of Khalid’s presence for the blessings means that the past is, in a way, present and respected; it just needs to be given more care. The revival of the heroic past is one of Mosteghanemi’s aims, which manifests itself in her frequent allusions to real names of martyrs while keeping anonymous some of the new bourgeois men. Khalid addressing Hayat wonders, “You are a homeland. Don’t you care about the verdict of history?” Hayat desperately responds, “History no longer records anything. It only erases” (204). Mosteghanemi defies the new prevailing idea of history through writing a version of history that should never be forgotten in her own way, using her own means. This means the failure of the post-war generation to carry out the mission of liberation carelessly ignoring the heroic deeds of afore-generations to free the land and the people. Khalid miserably declares, “We’ve disintegrated together” to mean that the past and the future, which he and Hayat represent, witness a remarkable degeneration and a complete eradication (207).

Khalid transcends the sense of alienation, which exile evokes in him, longing for a time of wholeness. Hayat’s announcement of her departure for holidays triggers intermingled feelings of nostalgia, fear of loss and uncertainty of the unknown that foster his urgent need of reconnection to home. Such urgent need manifests itself in a passionate kiss to which Hayat surrenders. Hayat’s reaction shows that she herself has been in need of reconnection to the past which is part of and unfortunately apart from. Khalid’s lack of maternal affection and the absence of the paternal ones for Hayat compelled the two to achieve wholeness in passionate unplanned kiss. The idea of wholeness further manifests itself in Khalid’s one hand attempt to embrace Hayat transforming “the two into one piece” (124). “On your lips I gathered my life’s dispersion,” confesses Khalid (124). Khalid’s metaphorical reunion with home gives him some sense of order. The lips are the land on which Khalid releases the burden of missing he has ever carried within him. Khalid further resists the present selfishness predominating postcolonial Algerian community through his trial to revive the kind of love the war generation had for the nation. During the war, the former warriors have loved the country more than anything else in life; to liberate it, they have paid really high prices. After independence, however, their actions spoke less loud than words. The unconditional love for the country unfortunately no longer turns into sacrifices and becomes a mere object of idealization. Instead of actively engaging in a continuous struggle to end power-abuse that has taken over the newly freed nation; a whole generation has fallen in the trap of fantasy. Additionally, Khalid sadly

⁸Mosteghanemi sheds light on more similarities between her female protagonist and the city of Constantine noting, “She was like you. She had two names like you, and a number of birthdays. She emerged from history with two names, one familiar and one in memoriam. Once she was called Cirta. She was victorious like a feminine city” (215).

mourns the lost love and owe Algerians had for the nation and its tradition. In Hayat's marriage, he becomes emotionally upset feeling sorry for the burgundy *Kandoura*⁹ that will be taken off "as though it were not our memory, our homeland" (272). What can be said is that Khalid's nostalgia as a means of resistance manifests itself in his constant unconscious evocation of past memories to withstand and endure the unbearable, corrupt present. Apart from being a site of resistance, Khalid's nostalgia is a source of creativity and self-empowerment.

Khalid's nostalgia arouses the painter and the writer in him helping him to discover himself and transcend his trauma. When Khalid's first leaves Algeria for Tunisia and upon his tragedy of arm amputation, he first draws a bridge of Constantine. Khalid draws the bridge in its simplest forms as if his focus is solely on a part of a whole. Khalid's lost hand destabilizes his sense of wholeness pushing him to care about parts that stand for the whole. Such first painting is mainly fostered by a conscious need to compromise and reintegrate, as an incomplete individual, into life. The other bridge, which Khalid draws after the numerous meetings with Hayat, contains more details, which he never cared about before. Khalid confesses on the day of painting such bridge that "[he is] no longer worried about proving anything to anyone, [he] just want[s] to live his secret dreams" (98). One of Khalid's secret dreams is the dream of wholeness. During Hayat's presence in Constantine, the pressing necessity to be in Constantine again vigorously triggers the painter in Khalid; his yearning for his city manifest itself in eleven portraits. In conversation addressing Hayat, Ziyad admits, "He painted eleven pictures in six weeks. He hasn't done anything else" (145). Overwhelmed with fear of being a subject of Khalid's rising emotions, Hayat asks about what he has painted. "He painted Constantine. Nothing but Constantine. And lots of bridges," Ziyad replies. Khalid's hallucinations over Hayat's absence are actually confused feelings of yearning to his city, which Hayat revives in him during her presence there. As painter, Khalid paints what lives in him and what is really close to his heart; if his obsession was truly Hayat, he could have resurrected her in a painting. What fills Khalid is not a sexual desire, as he himself believes; it is merely a desire of reconnection; a desire to create. What renders the latter more romantic¹⁰ is the fear of not returning. "Desire is all in the mind, the exercise of the imagination, that's all. It is an illusion we create at a moment of madness. We become slaves to one person whom we judge in total awe for a mysterious reason outside of logic," realizes Khalid (290). The emptiness and the coldness of Paris worsens Khalid's feelings of monotony that he gives up on painting for two successive months. Khalid's source of sadness is not the absence of Hayat, but the feeling, which her absence triggers in him. After an allusive possibility to relieve the past, Hayat departs and her departure "ha[s] the same taste as [his] first tragedy" (129). An abrupt call from Hayat fills him with life and inspires him to paint. Worth noting, Hayat's voice is not a real reason to Khalid's surge of painting; "a voice coming from over there to rouse that city within me" (138). In fact, the call from that particular city is what resurrects it within him urging him to paint more bridges. The array of bridges that Khalid has painted throughout his life as a painter stand for his wish to reconnect with the lost. In the last portrait of Khalid's new collection, there is "only a distant shadow of the bridge" and everything around it has disappeared leaving it as "a question mark suspended in the sky" (151). After many attempts at connection, Khalid ends up literally disconnecting himself lost in his despair and melancholy.

When returning to Constantine, Khalid no longer yearns for the city, but for its genteel past. Reunion with his beloved Constantine overwhelms him with "[a] desire to paint, a raging hunger for color that almost matched the violence and intensity of [his] sexual desire" (252). Khalid reaches a climatic point of *la petite mort*¹¹ where he purges out the energy that fills his body to ultimately feel unburdened and relaxed. Such an act of lovemaking is an act of death and rebirth at the same time during which Khalid kills the dreamer, nostalgic in him and gives birth to a more indifferent, healed individual. Khalid have always believed that in painting he doesn't empty himself, he rather

⁹The word *Kandoura* is the Algerian naming for 'a garment'. It is the traditional Algerian clothing for women with a special tissue and design.

¹⁰ "romantic" here means the impossible; a Romantic conception of the word.

¹¹Sharon Klayman Farber defines "La petite mort", in French, or "the little death" as a metaphor for ecstasy, sometimes used to refer to losing consciousness after orgasm" (91).

“become[s] fuller... [And] grow[s] more attached to his memories (132). Nevertheless, he ironically puts an end to his suffering in painting. Khalid admits, “I wanted to paint and paint until I became completely empty and fell down dead or unconscious in exhaustion and ecstasy (253). Khalid uses the same weapon that drowned him to go back to the surface. After such healing moment, Khalid no longer needs a woman and recovers his body. Khalid’s recovery from homesickness has automatically terminated his illusive attachment to Hayat. Khalid becomes more conscious of what he paints; he now knows that he paints what lives in him, his memory, and his self. In Paris, what Khalid paints is only Constantine and her bridges. When revisiting Constantine, however, he gives up on painting bridges. In this vein, Khalid says, “most likely I wouldn’t paint bridges or viaducts. I might paint women in black shawls with white kerchiefs over their faces and lying eyes promising a certain joy” (253). The women in the imaginary portrait stand for the traditional Algerian mother who, in turn, represents a distinguished time of integrity and greatness¹².

The writer in Khalid appears in a late stage. The idea of Creative writing in the novel is not a mere outcome of nostalgia as it is for painting. Mostaghanemi takes the act of writing a step further to make it more ideological. The last time in which Khalid has drawn a bridge is the time when he has painted eleven of them during summer holidays. In Granada, Khalid starts writing letters because painting has failed as a means of reconnection. The last bridge that Khalid paints is unconnected, fading one. The failure of connection in painting urges him to adopt another weapon to achieve a sort of contact. When Khalid fails in both painting and writing, he adapts his means to meet his new ends. Writing becomes a decolonization act. The date of starting to write this book is the first of November, the onset of the Algerian struggle for decolonization and thus Khalid’s beginning of struggle. The act of writing is a war launching act in which Khalid resists, kills and finally frees himself. He ends up his book saying, “Chapter headings, headings for dreams”¹³ to mean that he has become free conducting a life full of deferred dreams. Khalid prefers the shift to words instead of colors for being tired of calling without having an answer back. When Khalid paints, he does not wait for an answer; communication stops at the level of the self. He uses the means of Hayat to make sure that he will be heard and understood. What he aspires for now is not the need to tell but to be comprehended. This idea again falls under the same hut of the idea of wholeness, which Khalid is sick to achieve.

Khalid’s writing transcends the personal and takes a more political shape. He chooses to write, as Hayat, to kill those whose existence have become a burden. Khalid first writes confessional pieces as an eventual attempt for reconnection. Later on, however, Khalid’s book becomes the cemetery in which he buries the victims of his metaphorical extermination of oppressors of any sort. When Khalid chooses to write, he resorts to the standard Arabic, which has been obliterated during colonialism. Writing then becomes not merely a site of creativity, but also of resistance. Mosteghanemi herself uses the Arabic subverting the prevalent assumption of Algerians fluency only in French. The idea of writing being prompted by nostalgia is further developed through the character of Ziyad who writes for he is never cured of his memories of his home. Similarly, his writings do not overlook ideological clashes in the world; Ziyad writes against authoritarians and ferociously refuses to have his writings amputated. Ziyad is simply Mosteghanemi’s mouthpiece. Mosteghanemi adopts the view of the outsider to distantly transmit her personal views concerning national and international issues.

The locus of power in the novel is Khalid as he could successfully transcend his trauma. His self-empowerment is rooted in a number of life incidents and experiences that helped in achieving his individuation. Despite the fact that Khalid takes exile as a sanctuary escaping the post-war chaos in Algeria, he fails to fill in the void which distance has on him. His journey towards selfhood entails three main movements that correspond to metaphorical forward movements towards the found self. Exile in Paris, the trip to Granada, and the return to homeland. In Paris, Khalid’s early nostalgic feelings just focus on the physical aspect of the city mostly shown in the bunch of the bridges he draws. In Granada, he delves more into the spiritual side of it shedding light on its Arab-Islamic and Andalusian culture. In

¹² The jacket to the Bloomsbury edition entails the idea that Khalid imagines.

¹³ The word dream is so telling here as it refers to the other name of the Hayat, which her father has selected for her gathering all of his life dreams and thus the dreams of a whole generation.

Constantine, he deciphers the riddle of his love and madness in an actual confrontation with the city, its past and his errors. What Khalid succeeds in is putting an end to his fantasy, freeing himself from the shackles of illusions. Moreover, his retrospective narration entails a productive power as it constructively criticizes some of both of the old the new habits. In Constantine, Khalid discovers that there is no room in the present for the past to inhabit. He successfully transcends the trauma of home and of Hayat as an epitome of it through painting and writing. Khalid empties himself from the love of his city when he offers Nostalgia to Hayat as a wedding gift and kills the latter through writing this book in an ultimate act of freedom. In the final scenes, Khalid mentions the idea of dancing as a means of resistance at least three times. Dancing is a form of Carnival¹⁴, which Khalid uses as a way to transcend his oppressive, painful present at all levels.

To resist the yearning for the memory of his dead mother, Khalid opts for the love of Constantine and the ones in whom he sees it. When Hayat has worn the *miqyas* and the burgundy *kandoura*, speaking the dialect of Constantine, she has resembled the city so much that she could revive its spirit in Khalid's heart and mind. After her holidays in Constantine, Hayat comes to convey a sense of antagonism towards the city, which no longer looks the same, urging Khalid to revisit it so to be healed. At such particular moment, Hayat ceases to be the epitome of home. In their last meeting after the marriage, Khalid offers *Nostalgia* to Hayat as a symbol of a supposedly unspoiled past, which she should normally embrace to open the doors for a better future. When Hayat no longer stands for home in Khalid's view, Constantine becomes incarnated in Hassan rather. "I felt that Constantine had suddenly assumed his features and had finally came to welcome me," Khalid says (211). He adds that Hassan becomes "the only solid ground in my upheaval" (211). Khalid even uses her weapon to kill her. Khalid's shifting perception proves that all he needs is an anchor amidst his qualm of an eternally lost mother.

All in all, As a result of the rising corrupt atmosphere that overtook Algeria during the decades following independence, there has emerged a strong desire to use memory to reconnect with the past times from which some Algerians have felt cut off and disconnected. Memory becomes a means through which Algerians can resist their unbearable present. Accordingly, Khalid Ben-Tubal goes through waves of nostalgia that suspends the normal course of his emotional life, but which he ironically uses to cope with his dreadful present. Throughout time, he comes to realize that he has to give up on being stuck in memory and willingly embrace his present. Like a warrior, Khalid continuously adapts his weapons to overcome his trauma; he becomes a painter, then a writer, and ends a prophet-like instructor whose empowerment heralds the empowerment of his community.

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¹⁴ The Russian philosopher M.M. Bakhtin defines carnivalesque as the literary manifestation of the spirit of the carnival. The spirit of carnival is majorly subversive and makes the impossible possible temporarily. The idea of dancing is so central to the carnival through which the oppressed people could express their resistance of the religious shackles.

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ظروف ما بعد الاستعمار: ذاكرة المقاومة ونسيان العزيمة في "جسور قسنطينية" لأحلام مستغانمي

هنا بوغريه*

ملخص

ذاكرة الجسد (1993)، جسور قسنطينية (2013)، لأحلام مستغانمي هو نص فني يعالج بعمق شعور اليأس وخيبة الأمل الذي لحق بالجزائر المستقلة فترة ما بعد الاستعمار. يعتبر السبب الرئيس لنجاح هذا العمل، بلا شك، هو أنّ عنصر نسوي قام بتصوير فترة حرجة من تاريخ الجزائر وباللغة العربية حيث قامت بهذه الخطوة بكسر حاجز اللغة الفرنسية الذي قيّد الروائيين الجزائريين بالرغم من تحقيق الاستقلال. تصور القصة مقاومة الجزائريين للاستعمار الفرنسي وتبعاته. يقرر خالد بطل القصة، والذي يعمل رسام بعد أن كان محارباً، أن يلجأ للهجرة بدلاً من التأقلم مع حياة الجزائريين التي أفسدها الاستعمار، حتى بعد الاستقلال. يهاجر خالد إلى فرنسا حاملاً معه صورة جميلة للوطن والماضي لكنه يمر بمرحلة من التيه والصدمة العاطفية نتيجة تجارب مختلفة. تستعرض هذه الدراسة موضوع الحنين كما طرح في هذه القصة في ضوء أزمة المجتمع الجزائري بعد الاستقلال.

الكلمات الدالة: ظروف ما بعد الاستعمار، الحنين، الوطن، المنفى، الحنين، المقاومة، الإبداع وتمكين الذات.

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