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# The Tongues of Eve: The Politics of Language in Postcolonial Algerian Literature

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The Tongues of Eve:  
The Politics of Language in Postcolonial Algerian Literature

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Prerequisite for Honors in Comparative Literature

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## Introduction

Language is intuitive. As infants, we begin learning language with no formal instruction, only by interacting with the speech of those around us.

Bilingualism, and even multilingualism, are also intuitive. A child can easily become fluent in multiple languages before attending school, and with regular use, that child will be able to maintain fluency in each of those languages throughout their adult life. When they use each language depends on the circumstances: speaking with parents as opposed to talking with friends as opposed to reading and writing at school.

An entire community, such as a country, can also be bilingual or multilingual, and each language must also be maintained with regular use. In contrast to a child's usage, however, when the use of each language at a community-wide level depends on certain circumstances, that community's situation is referred to as diglossia. When the word first entered English in 1959, diglossia referred to the use of two or more varieties, or dialects, of the same language in different circumstances. Over time, the definition has expanded to the use of two or more languages or dialects based on their differing social prestige and status within the community.<sup>1</sup>

Algeria is not only a multilingual, but indeed, a complexly diglossic community. There are four major languages used regularly within the country: Algerian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, French, and Tamazight. Even this accounting is an oversimplification, as Tamazight actually refers to multiple distinct dialects that form one language group. In Algeria, each of the four major languages holds a different relational position to the others, and these positions can change drastically according to the speaker; or, in the case of this thesis, the writer.

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<sup>1</sup> "diglossia, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/52638](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/52638). Accessed 26 April 2018.

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In *The Tongue of Adam*, Moroccan author and scholar Abdelfattah Kilito writes about the search for the original language—the tongue of Adam—in a multilingual world. His inquiry is based on two premises. Firstly, there must have been an original language because mankind in its unity became too powerful and was punished with the curse of multiple languages. Secondly, there must have been an original language because Adam, the first man, must have used it to compose the first poem, an elegy to mourn Abel. In a series of essays, Kilito traces the search for this language through Arab-Islamic scholarship, exploring the nature of language and its relationship to humanity and the divine as mediated through writing.

This search, and the concept of an original language, is fundamentally related to his own experience as a writer. While most writers intuitively know which language to write in, “For Moroccan writers, or let us say, Maghrebian writers, it’s not so straightforward. Every Maghrebian writer has a story to tell about their language or languages—Arabic, French, Tamazight—a story always on the tip of their tongue, that constitutes the background of what they write, so that nothing they say can be understood without it.”<sup>2</sup> Other writers have the privilege of having a language original to their own community; writers in the Maghreb are confronted by the confusion of multiple languages every day. The story that a Maghrebian author has to tell about their language is the story of why they choose to write in that language—how this language gained its position, or status, relational to others in the writer’s life.

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<sup>2</sup> Abdelfattah Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, trans. Robyn Cresswell (New York: New Directions Paperbook, 2016), 82.

In the story of Babel, multiple languages appear as God's punishment for humanity's pride and ambition. In Algeria, multiple languages have emerged as they are today from complex, often violent, historical processes. For example, Tamazight, both despite and because of its legacy as the longest continuously spoken language in North Africa, has been constantly subordinated to the languages of other, dominant cultures so that eventually only the most remote community, the Tuaregs, had retained an alphabet through which to communicate in Tamazight in writing. As a solely oral language outside of the Sahara, the various dialects of Tamazight were seen as lesser to languages such as Arabic, the sacred language of the Qur'an, and French, the language of the dominant economic and political social group established through colonial violence. Because Tamazight is limited to certain communities, however, the language can have significant cultural value to its speakers, or represent resistance to cultural hegemony. Today, we see the story of Tamazight's subordination to dominant written languages and the need to reclaim Amazigh cultural heritage in the recent Tamazight translations of works originally written in other languages by authors of Amazigh descent, such as Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* and Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, written in Latin and French respectively.

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In this thesis I aim to explore the history and heritage that create such stories in Algeria, how Algerian authors can write those stories into their own writing, and how their texts indicate why the author chose their language to write in, when each language has a story to tell.

When planning my thesis, I chose to study and compare two texts, each written in a different Algerian language: French and Arabic. At first, I did see those two languages as the sole written competitors in a binary linguistic conflict, but I have since recognized the presence

of other languages in not only Algerian literature generally, but also the two texts that I chose to analyze. Throughout this thesis, I work to demonstrate the limitations of a simple “Arabic versus French” dichotomy, and to acknowledge Algeria’s rich, diverse, multilingual society seeped in a complex cultural reality that spans both traditions of writing and orality.

The two texts that I take up and analyze are *Vaste est la prison* by Assia Djebar and ذاكرة الجسد (*Dhakhirat al-jasad*) by Ahlam Mostaghanemi. Although I originally intended for this exploration of Algerian language dynamics to be conducted almost entirely through analysis of these two novels, I discovered that any conscientious literary analysis of contemporary Algerian novels had to be thoroughly grounded in both historical and literary context.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to a history of Algeria in which I will attempt to trace Algeria’s development as a multicultural and multilingual society. I also seek to locate and explain the various identities taken on by, or imposed upon, Algerian society: Christian, pagan, and Muslim; a nation of warriors, nomads, and barbarians; Libyan, Phoenician, Roman, Numidian, Arab, Amazigh, Ottoman, French, and Algerian. The first half of the chapter treats North African and Algerian history pre-French colonization, from the beginnings of Libyan civilization until the end of Ottoman rule. The second half of the chapter treats the period of French colonization and occupation, the War of Liberation, and Algeria post-independence. I spend a significant portion of the second half discussing Algerian politics in the early twentieth century. I deem this to be important and relevant to ground the subsequent literary and cultural analysis because this was the period during which Algerians began formulating their notions of national identity through both political participation and writing in a way that would not only inform their

post-independence politics and governance, but also their cultural production and national identity.

In Chapter 2, I will address contemporary Algerian cultural production and its formation of national identity directly in a literature review. This chapter is organized primarily into two categories of Algerian literature: literary and theoretical. I believe that Djébar and Mostaghanemi place themselves within these two categories in their writing, intentionally locating their writing in larger trends of Algerian literature. I will also touch upon the temptations of organizing literature by language, and the complex significance of pre-modern North African literature.

In Chapter 3, I will analyze Assia Djébar's novel *Vaste est la prison*, or *So Vast the Prison*. Written in French, and published in 1995 as the third book in a loosely structured trilogy that spanned ten years (1985, 1987, 1995), *Vaste est la prison* is a massive historical and literary undertaking. Djébar herself explains the history and heritage that has created the stories of Tamazight, French, and Arabic in Algeria within the novel. I will examine how she performs both postcolonial and literary theory through the novel's structure and narrative voice as she tries to answer the question of how Algerian authors can write those stories into their own texts.

In Chapter 4, I analyze Ahlam Mostaghanemi's novel *ذاكرة الجسد* (*Dhakhirat al-jasad*), or *Memory in the Flesh*. Published in 1985, ten years before *Vaste est la prison*, Mostaghanemi's debut novel radically expanded the horizons of arabophone literature in Algeria. I will demonstrate how Mostaghanemi writes her story of Arabic in Algeria into the novel through an extensive intertextuality with both classical Arabic and contemporary Algerian literature, and how she asserts Arabic as the language of Algeria's liberation by enacting the protagonist's own liberation in his ability to write, and to live, in Arabic.

As part of the theoretical section of Chapter 2, the literature review, I discuss the Moroccan sociologist and scholar, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and his concept of archeology, or self- and disciplinary-criticism, in order to decolonize knowledge and achieve a *pensée autre*. Accepting Khatibi's argument that the researcher is obligated to criticize herself and to put herself into question, I must acknowledge that I am an American student educated according to Western thought and methodologies and I am a stranger to the tradition in which Djébar and Mostaghanemi write. In addition, my knowledge of the two languages that I primarily discuss through my analyses of these novels is unequal. I studied French throughout both elementary and high school, and after graduating from high school, I lived for ten months as a Rotary Youth Exchange Student in Belgium, where I developed a level of fluency that I have largely been able to maintain while at Wellesley. I began studying Arabic, on the other hand, my first year at Wellesley, continued through my sophomore year, and studied abroad in Morocco for four months with the Middlebury Schools Abroad. My proficiency in Arabic hovers between intermediate and advanced, but I was unable to dedicate enough time to continue studying the language this year. It is important to acknowledge that I was not able to read Mostaghanemi in Arabic with the same depth and understanding with which I was able to read Djébar in French.

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A final note on Kilito and the title of this thesis: Kilito in *The Tongue of Adam* gives voice to the idea, not necessarily his own, that "In an ideal, perfectly homogeneous community, cut off from any other that uses a different tongue, the question of an original language will never come up: the language of the first man is the same as the language of that ideal

community.”<sup>3</sup> This concept of the original language ignores the heterogeneous nature of Eden by failing to acknowledge Eve, the first woman, who was able to speak with both the snake and Adam. In bringing these two works by Algerian women with such seemingly opposing arguments into dialogue, I hope to bring attention to the ability of Algerian women to envision a diverse, multicultural, and multilingual community. Rather than remaining within the confines of diglossia, these women are fighting for emancipation and equality by fully representing and giving voice to the tongues of Eve.

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<sup>3</sup> Kilito, 13-4.

The earliest known inhabitants of North Africa are believed to be the ancestors of the Amazigh<sup>4</sup> people, who the ancient Greek ethnographers and modern scholars also refer to as Libyans<sup>5</sup>. One theory posits that the Libyans migrated west from the upper Nile region and spread across North Africa, but another concludes from archaeological records that this society descended from prehistoric hominins of the region. There is evidence across the region of evolving societies and their crafts and industries, with the earliest dating as far back as 300,000 BC and lasting through the Stone Age into the first millennium BC.<sup>6</sup> By the time they appear in the written record by way of the Greeks, the Libyans had developed a semi-nomadic lifestyle and spread over the entirety of the region from the coasts all the way up into the mountains. Libyans spoke a form of Tamazight<sup>7</sup>, related to ancient Egyptian and Chadic, and would remain the dominant ethnic group of North Africa during antiquity due in large part to their complete dispersion throughout regions that other civilizations, such as the Phoenicians and the Romans, referred to as the ‘hinterlands.’

Phoenician traders and merchants arrived on the coast at the beginning of the first millennium BC and left their mark on the Mediterranean coast of Africa and parts of the Western

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<sup>4</sup> In my writing, I will avoid using the term ‘Berber’ except in hard to avoid instances such as the Berber Spring, also known as *tafsut imazighen* in the vernacular, or when citing other scholars. The origin of the term is derogatory, derived etymologically from the word ‘barbarian,’ meaning someone who does not speak in civilized language (i.e. Greek, Latin, or Arabic). The word was given as a name to the Amazigh people by the Arab armies of the seventh century, whereas the term ‘Amazigh’ is the name they use for themselves.

<sup>5</sup> In this first paragraph, I use the term ‘Libyan’ because Amazigh culture and society that we can trace to that of the Amazigh people of today did not begin to develop in a clearly identifiable way until the formation of Numidia, at which point I begin to use the term ‘Amazigh.’

<sup>6</sup> Kate Wong, “Ancient Fossils from Morocco Mess Up Modern Human Origins,” *Scientific American*, last modified June 8, 2017,

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ancient-fossils-from-morocco-mess-up-modern-human-origins/>.

<sup>7</sup> While there are many different dialects spoken by Amazigh people—such as Tarifit, Kabyle, Tamazight, Tamahaq, and the Tashelhit group—Tamazight means “language of the Amazigh,” and is most commonly used to refer to the entire family of languages spoken by the Amazigh people.

Atlantic coast of today's Morocco. During approximately eight hundred years of their settlement and the development of their empire along the North African coast, the Phoenicians remained primarily coastal and urban. While there was substantial intermarriage with Amazigh peoples in rural regions around cities, resulting in a certain influence of Punic culture, the pre-desert and the mountains were minimally affected. Inland, the culture of the Amazigh tribes of the plains in northeast Algeria and western Tunisia was developing into a society known as Numidia. The kingdom truly coalesced under the leadership of Masinissa, who ruled from 208 to 148 BC from Cirta, and who led the renowned Numidian cavalry in the Second Punic War (218-201 BC), at first against Rome, and then allied with Rome against Carthage.

Upon Masinissa's death in 148 BC, the Romans divided Numidia to be ruled amongst his sons. With the destruction of Carthage two years later, Roman conquest truly began and spread throughout North Africa, even reaching as far as the Garamantes of the Sahara by the first century CE. For the most part, the Romans maintained the status quo as they found it: while there were militarized zones on the frontiers, the Roman soldiers kept separate from the local population, and almost all of the major cities were of Punic or Amazigh origin, such as Lepcis Magna and Cirta. These were recognized by Rome as self-governing through local city magistrates and tribes were preserved, largely in order to supply Amazigh cavalry to the Romans.<sup>8</sup> Most of the land was not only arable, but agriculturally bountiful, and in order to sustain the Roman tax burden the land underwent intensive farming practices during Roman rule. The high agricultural yield that the region became known for<sup>9</sup> was due in large part to indigenous, cooperative irrigation techniques: "The need for small-scale cooperation to build

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<sup>8</sup> Leslie Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010), 20. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.wellesley.edu/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pn5x0.8>.

<sup>9</sup> North Africa was commonly referred to as the breadbasket of Rome.

such irrigation systems helps explain why from an early period the village was the dominant form of social organization in much of North Africa.”<sup>10</sup> Combined with a tenant system that didn’t necessarily encourage wealth, but did encourage familial stability, the indigenous population was highly localized.

There were attempts from time to time to reunite the kingdom of Numidia, but only one had any sort of long-lasting impact: that of a Numidian king named Jugurtha. A grandson of Masinissa, his rule began in 118 BC and lasted peacefully for six years until he incited the anger of the Romans when he put several Roman merchants to death in Cirta. For the next seven years, he was able to resist Roman retribution and invasion until he was taken captive in 105 BC. Jugurtha and his revolt became legend and have been taken up by modern Algerian writers, such as Kateb Yacine and Assia Djebar, who reference these historical figures of the pre-Islamic era in order to include them in the discourse aimed at shaping and strengthening a national identity and a shared Algerian history. Two other major historical figures from Roman North Africa are Apuleius and Saint Augustine, both born in Numidia to families of mixed Roman and Amazigh heritage. Apuleius was a Platonic scholar of the second century CE who wrote several philosophical treatises in addition to his literary works, most notably *Metamorphoses* (or *The Golden Ass*).<sup>11</sup> Over the fourth and fifth centuries, the region underwent a transition from classical to Christian civilization, which produced theological scholars like Augustine, the author

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<sup>10</sup> Dossey, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Recently, translations of *The Golden Ass* from Latin to Tamazight have been published in Morocco and Algeria, led by the efforts of Amazigh intellectuals and cultural organizations to reclaim and increase access to Amazigh historical and cultural figures by returning their works to the language, and thereby the communities, in which they were born.

of *Confessions* and *City of God*,<sup>12</sup> and highly organized religious communities in both the city and the countryside.

Roman rule came to an end in the fifth century with the invasion of the Vandals, an alliance of Germanic peoples who had been occupying Spain for around twenty years. The structures of life remained fundamentally Roman, as the incoming population of the Vandals was restricted to an ethnically distinct ruling elite, but as Dossey notes in areas outside of direct Vandal rule, “The expected consequences ensued—settlement nucleation around defensible sites and a contraction, though not an abandonment, of cities. Mediterranean trade declined, though there was perhaps a compensating increase in new regional trade networks, trans-Saharan in the African case.”<sup>13</sup> The power of Romano-Amazigh tribal leaders grew in areas less directly ruled by the Vandals, and internal economy and diversity in trade improved without the focused burden of Roman trade and taxes.

With the Byzantine invasion and occupation in the sixth century BC, however, Romano-Amazigh culture truly began to fragment as Byzantine leaders suppressed local traditions and industries. While under the autonomy engendered by Vandal rule “North African literati continued to produce poetry, epics, histories, theological tracts, grammatical works, and saints’ lives,”<sup>14</sup> under Byzantine control “The North African literary tradition that had produced Apuleius and Augustine of Hippo now faded away. What literature that continued to exist shifted its focus from local concerns to Constantinople.”<sup>15</sup> In their attempt to force yet another culture

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<sup>12</sup> “*Confessions*, the world’s first autobiography, and *City of God*, in which he outlined the argument that humanity lives in one of two cities: the city of God, symbolized by Jerusalem, or the earthly city, symbolized by Babylon,” from Martin Evans and John Phillips, “Dissident Landscape,” in *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*. (New Haven: Yale University, 2007), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Dossey, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Dossey, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Dossey, 26.

and society upon the local population, the Byzantine rulers succeeded only in furthering the decline of Roman culture and the dissolution of large-scale social structures.

Although fragmented and excluded from larger cities, in response to the invasion by Arab and Muslim armies in the seventh century, the indigenous population came together to unite under a resistance movement led primarily by a local Jewish queen named Dihya or Kahina. She united pagan, Jewish, and Christian Amazigh tribes and led over twelve thousand horsemen against the Muslim invaders until her death, at which point her two sons, as rulers of the tribes, led them in conversion to Islam. Evans writes, “For this reason the Kahina story, as told down the centuries, assumed a prophetic status. By concluding with her sons’ conversion, it came to symbolize the inevitable triumph of Islam, thereby demonstrating the key to the Arabs’ final success: the universal doctrine of Islam as a religion.”<sup>16</sup>

Sporadic dissent and armed uprisings continue, of course, and it took about a century for Arabs to secure their rule, but by the eighth century Amazigh dissent was being expressed within Islam itself through adoption of the Kharijite sect.<sup>17</sup> Many of these dissident movements managed to establish strongholds in rural regions of what is today’s Algeria and Morocco and were able to maintain periods of self rule outside the reach of the central governments in place. One such community was the Ibadis الإباضية centered around the city of Ghardaia in the M’Zab valley,<sup>18</sup> a region that would be known into modernity for its distinctive culture and identity. A

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<sup>16</sup> Evans, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Kharijism was a religio-political sect of Islam born from a debate over the source of the Caliphate’s legitimacy: Kharijites held that judgment of the Caliphate belonged to God alone, and that the will of God could only be expressed through the voice of the entire Muslim community. They also believed that the Muslim community could elect anyone, regardless of ethnicity or race, to be caliph as long as they possessed the qualifications required by the Qur’an such as piety and moral purity. This interpretation of Islam was attractive to non-Arab North Africans because it both included their voice within the religion, and gave that voice an outlet to express dissent and to be heard.

<sup>18</sup> “Ghardaia, Algeria,” *Organization of World Heritage Cities*, last accessed April 26, 2018, <https://www.ovpm.org/en/algeria/ghardaia>.

separation developed between the urban centers, fully taxed and under government control and rural areas, outside central control, that became established in North Africa. The Arabs formalized the distinction between the plains and the mountains, referring to them as *Bled el Makhzen*, ‘the lands of the government’, and *Bled es Siba*, ‘the lands of dissidence,’<sup>19</sup> respectively, a divide that has long been interpreted as one between Amazigh and Arab, corresponding to mountain and plain. This ethnic distinction, however, ignores the continuous association between the two cultures through trade and intermarriage. For four hundred years after the initial invasion, North Africa continued to change and adapt to the newly introduced Arab and Muslim cultures until the invasion of the Banu Hilal, a nomadic Syrian tribe that destroyed agricultural land and finalized the dissolution of the Roman-era infrastructure of major cities and roads.<sup>20</sup>

The disorder resulting from the Banu Hilal provided an opportunity for the emergence of the two medieval Muslim Amazigh dynasties, which together lasted from approximately 1054 to 1212 CE: the Almoravids المرابطون and the Almohads الموحدون. Their conquest and rule of a region spanning across Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, and Muslim Spain was motivated by religious beliefs, in addition to the desire to reclaim historically Amazigh land from Arab rule.<sup>21</sup>

The Almohads in particular sought to purify the corrupted version of Islam that Andalusian Muslims in particular were practicing, such as consumption of wine, marriage to more than four wives, and playing of irreverent music. The religious motivation of both

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<sup>19</sup> Evans, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Khaldun devotes a substantial section of his book, the *Muqaddimah* مقدمة ابن خلدون to the Banu Hilal and understanding their impact on North African towns and villages.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Khaldun also identifies this as ‘*asabiyya*, or group solidarity, in the Introduction of *Kitab al-'Ibar*, and he argues that a combination of ‘*asabiyya* and religious zeal is what has historically allowed one group to dominate others.

dynasties intensified the divide between Islam and Christianity in the region and deepened the Islamization of the Amazigh community, particularly by establishing Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, as the language of prestige, academically and economically. Evans remarks that "Collectively Arabic and Islam cultures became a cement that transcended tribes and fostered a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim community: the umma. Even so, within North Africa different strands of Islamic practices developed. On the one hand was orthodox Islam, which was essentially urban-based and placed great stress on scripture and learning. On the other was rural Islam, which fused Muslim beliefs with local practices such as the evil eye and the belief in the divinity of nature."<sup>22</sup> Not only did both dynasties cultivate a community of faith, they also set a precedent for resistance to perceived corruption and heresy within this community that would far outlast their life spans.

With the decline of the Almohad dynasty, the status of North Africa as a more or less unified territory as well as a distinct region from the rest of the Islamic world began to dissolve, with multiple dynasties emerging and disappearing throughout the region. Stabilization in what are now Morocco and Tunisia occurred with the gradual emergence of more long-lasting dynasties, most notably the Hafsids in Tunisia and the Alaouites in Morocco. It was not until Ottoman rule that the borders and structures that would come to define Algeria as a state were created.<sup>23</sup> Not only did the Ottomans' arrival in Algeria have a significant impact on Algerian society, their failure to capture Morocco and reach the Atlantic plains strengthened the distinction between Algeria and Morocco both geographically and culturally.

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<sup>22</sup> Evans, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Evans, 24.

The image of Algeria around the start of Ottoman rule is often that of violence: this period of history is primarily defined by the intense, violent power struggles between individual rulers, their supporting groups, and the cities they controlled. Various contemporary societies, whether Mediterranean, French, or Algerian, have romanticized these struggles, characterizing early Algeria either as anarchic and immoral, or as the birthplace of warriors of the people and the faith. Two historical figures in particular have been subject to this romanticization, Aruj and Khayr al-Din Barbarossa. Their surname, meaning simply ‘red beard,’ is consistently associated throughout Western cultures with not only pirates, but also outlaws, violence, and greed more broadly. In reality, these two brothers began their careers as Ottoman privateers whom Algerian elites could call upon for defense from the Spanish, then from opposing factions, and who eventually navigated the turbulent power dynamics to become the first rulers of Ottoman Algeria. These power struggles, however, were limited to the ruling urban elite, and did not represent what the overwhelming majority of the Algerian population had become over the course of centuries of cyclical dynastic rule: a rural society with an economy based primarily in agriculture and artisanal industries.

By the end of this period of over three hundred years of Ottoman rule in 1830, nuanced economic and social structures had become integral aspects of Algerian society. The east, for example, which supported around half of Algeria’s total population through its cereal production, relied on a multi-tiered system of land ownership that, at each level, was highly subjected to community rules and regulations, but ultimately encouraged an emphasis on the nuclear family.<sup>24</sup> While creating a high degree of social stratification, systems like this helped to ensure a

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<sup>24</sup> James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 19.

relatively stable life for Algerians living in an already fragile ecological system, much like the forms of social organization that had developed during Roman rule. Some of this social stratification was based on race, but not necessarily along the lines of Arab and Amazigh ethnic identity:

Arabs and Berbers were less strictly defined ethnic groups than they were language communities, and language practice was often multilingual in contact zones between mountains and plains, at markets or in cities. It also shifted across generations, as Berber-speakers assimilated to Arabic-speaking society and (particularly in the Aures) vice versa.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, ancestry was traditionally thought of in terms of both genealogy and geography, as the population of a certain village or region claimed descent from a common ancestor, typically an early Muslim hero or warrior of either Arab or Amazigh identity. Racial stratification was found to a greater extent in cities, where populations were more diverse due to immigration and slavery. While both white Europeans and black sub-Saharan Africans were subject to slavery in Ottoman Algeria, white Europeans were often treated with more dignity and were given more opportunities to earn or receive their freedom.

Although the distinction between a city and a village was often a blurred one in terms of numbers and size, cities were distinguishable through their unique cultures and traditions, such as religious education and centers for the formal transfer of knowledge, and cultural products like music and art. As administrative centers, the ability to govern from urban centers out to rural communities was typically tenuous: “The effectiveness of tax-raising declined with the friction of topography as well as that of distance from the centres of government.”<sup>26</sup> What was often

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<sup>25</sup> McDougall, 44.

<sup>26</sup> McDougall, 40.

much more important was the presence of a local shrine, or *zawiya*,<sup>27</sup> near the city. *Zawiyas* were considered as sacred as the great mosques of the major Arab cities, and engendered localized ways of practicing Islam that provided immediacy of faith while also connecting common people to the universality of the religion. In this way, religion, much like language and heritage, simultaneously unified and divided Algerians.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Algerian political systems and economic structures began to suffer from conflict and instability in Europe. The dependence on stable and profitable trade with Europe that had developed in the eighteenth century meant that the effects of European instability would quickly spread to Algeria. With the addition of natural challenges such as plague and famine, internal conflict in Algeria manifested itself through rural rebellion and political volatility.

In 1827, an argument over a debt between Algeria and France resulted in a diplomatic affront that escalated into a declaration of war. After three years of an ineffective French blockade of Algiers, the French invaded Algeria in 1830. This invasion, facilitated by sheer numbers, military force, and the unresolved internal conflict in Algerian society and government, resulted in an unplanned and chaotic occupation that was pursued primarily as a point of pride and reputation. For the next forty-one years, until the last large-scale uprising in 1871, there were constant “wars of conquest” against Algerian rebellions, which justified in French eyes the direct military rule strongly advocated by French generals and leaders.

Leaders of the revolts such as Bu Ma’za, and on a much larger scale Abd al-Qadir (the emir Abdelkader), would go on to become immortalized either as warriors of the faith and of the

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<sup>27</sup> Today, there is a renewed interest in *zawiyas* as Algerians increasingly seek out more traditionally Algerian forms of Islam.

nation, or as the last stand of the old guard of an underdeveloped and dying society. More importantly, however, these wars killed hundreds of thousands of Algerians and dispossessed their survivors of millions of hectares of land. Combined with excessive taxation and exploitative wages, the majority of Algerians were ultimately reduced to extreme poverty in a completely foreign and violent system.

Once the French government and policy had caught up to the activity of the military, the mission was framed as agricultural, but the settlers<sup>28</sup> were generally unsuccessful at small-scale agricultural production in Algeria. Most of them instead settled in urban centers, exacerbating the subtle and nuanced divisions between the countryside and the cities. European settlers aggressively advocated for democratic governance for themselves reflecting the ideals and practices in which they would otherwise participate in France, and quickly established European-dominated civilian government in the cities. In the majority Algerian countryside, on the other hand, military government lasted much longer through the *bureaux arabes* whose rule, according to McDougall, enforced “a routinised infliction of low-intensity warfare” through the criminalization of everyday activities and the gradual yet continual reduction of rights and property. These *bureaux* upheld and enforced the *indigénat* system, which segregated Algerians from Europeans under the law through the *statut personnel*, a codification of Muslim identity, practices, and traditions. One could argue that within the Algeria of that time, the two ages of

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<sup>28</sup> Settlement policy was highly unorganized for the first two decades of the French conquest and was subject to multiple competing visions of colonization. While local authorities in France sought to send petty criminals and other troublemakers to the new colony, the French government sought settlers of high moral standing and self-sufficiency, and military leadership advocated for militarised colonization led by the settlement of soldiers. As McDougall notes, “All such schemes, however, had in common one preoccupation: the constitution of private property as the essential foundation on which colonial society must be built,” resulting in a mass legal dispossession of land occurring simultaneously with that of the military conquest. McDougall, 94.

democratisation and empire, typically thought of as geographically separated between Europe and its colonies, respectively, were playing out side by side.

By the time of the First World War, European settlement had slowed, the native Algerian population had rapidly grown, and colonial administration and practices had been firmly established. Sons and grandsons of old, prominent Algerian families educated according to standards recognized by French society began to form a young, native Algerian intellectual elite. These new intellectuals believed in the ideals of reason, progress, and civilization that were propounded by French philosophy and ideology, and they were exchanging ideas on Arab nationalism and Muslim solidarity with Arab intellectuals also educated in the French and English systems in Cairo, Tunis, and Damascus. Meanwhile, in the countryside community cohesion was being maintained through acts of resistance such as conscription evasion and the persistence of traditional local forms of government. Economically, however, the community was being split along ever more unequal lines due to the cost of productive land. McDougall writes, “The increasingly overworked marginal land onto which Algerian agriculture had been pushed provided ever-diminishing returns . . . But perhaps between a fifth and a quarter of all Algerian proprietors, with landholdings of between 10 and 50 hectares, managed to maintain themselves and even to increase both in number and in their overall share of rural property.”<sup>29</sup> The social norms that maintained ecological and economic stability during Ottoman rule had long since been destroyed, and any ability to reinstate them was being systematically undermined.

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<sup>29</sup> McDougall, 142.

In the city, to which more people were being drawn by the promise of a more stable existence, a large working class was being formed. This nascent urban public was ready to consume the media and entertainment that the new intellectual elite were beginning to provide through periodical press in both French and Arabic, the popular music of *sha'abi*, and theater. All three played two crucial roles: while often criticizing French rule and social conditions, they also gave voice to a specifically Algerian identity and culture. In addition, these forms of media and entertainment brought awareness to people throughout the country about issues of social and political reform that Algerian intellectuals were pursuing through both publications and petitions. Conscription was the issue that brought groups to Paris to protest this request of Algerians without “the concomitant extension of civil and political rights,”<sup>30</sup> namely the vote, education, and citizenship. One group, representing the “Young Algerians”, submitted a petition outlining these demands and more to the President of the Council of Ministers in 1912. This petition was supported by a group of older, more traditional intellectuals. With the emergence of these two groups, the rifts between certain intellectual positions became more apparent: in trying to navigate civil and political rights, the difference between *naturalisés* and citizenship *dans le statut* was brought to the forefront. Civil and political rights seen by the intellectuals as natural and self-evident were only accessible through naturalization, which was fundamentally tied to being French, and the loss of the *statut personnel*, the Muslim identity. In this way, “Defence of the ‘Muslim personality’, ironically centred on the colonial codification of ‘personal status’ more than on any other aspect of Islamic practice or belief, came to mean defence of all that defined Algerian religion, culture, language and history - and history, language, culture and religion thus

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<sup>30</sup> McDougall, 149.

became battlegrounds.”<sup>31</sup> The idea of a unitary Muslim personality was, as McDougall implies here, a French creation that was appropriated by Algerians as both a political and cultural identity.

Despite the lack of resolution to this internal conflict, reform politics continued to gain ground. In 1919, the ‘Jonnart Law’ was signed in France, which allowed for continued development of Algerian civil rights; while it did have many restrictions, “it did greatly extend the franchise for Algerians without citizenship, giving the right to vote in municipal council and *jama’a* elections to ... some 43 per cent of the male population over 25 years of age. ... At the same time, non-citizen Algerians were declared admissible to most public offices.”<sup>32</sup> This expansion of political rights created, in the interwar period, a large group of new political actors who were much more accessible, and tuned in, to the general population, especially the urban working class. One of the first actors to mobilize this potential political audience was Emir Khaled, the grandson of Abd al-Qadir. He began running for local public office in 1919 and won on his platform of reforms “against the *indigenat*, for equality before the law and parliamentary representation, for the expansion of education and public works, against social ills like poverty, alcohol and gambling,”<sup>33</sup> but most importantly, his position for citizenship *dans le statut*. He won his first election, and although the results were annulled by the French administration, he continued to campaign and win elections for the following three years until he was pressured into leaving Algeria in 1923. Although he never advocated for independence, the French administration accused Emir Khaled of promoting Islamic nationalism simply for his platform of full citizenship regardless of ethnicity or religion.

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<sup>31</sup> McDougall, 161.

<sup>32</sup> McDougall, 152.

<sup>33</sup> McDougall, 153.

The successors to Khaled's political momentum were two distinct intellectual groups: the *'ulama*, the religious leaders educated in Qur'anic schools and religious centers abroad, led by Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, and the *'elus*, those political leaders educated in French public schools and the University of Algiers and elected to local public office, led by Ferhat Abbas and Dr. Mohamed-Salah Bendjelloul. All three leaders, and both groups, did in fact have similar short-term goals, namely the improvement of their community through better education, economic opportunities, and fair systems of governance. The difference between the two groups was found instead in their long-term vision of the leaders and the principles that would shape Algeria's future. This difference never truly manifested as a cause for conflict during their own era, but instead divided future generations of activists, politicians, and writers in the decades to come as the short-term goals were achieved. For example, with the *'ulama*'s continued defense of the Muslim personality, the language and culture around religion were viewed through a public and performative lens, increasingly subject to the dictates of reformist religious leaders like Ben Badis.

Gradually, however, a form of populist politics was increasing in strength and magnitude. Messali Hadj, born in 1898 of modest background, would be the charismatic leader of this proletarian movement that rarely had a strict, or even consistently defined, ideology. Instead, the movement had radical and unflinching demands for a freely elected parliament, and not just representation in Paris. Hadj and his followers envisaged a sovereign Algeria under French dominion and protection, and their vision began to take the shape of an Algerian nationalism and national consciousness. Under his leadership,

An Algerian nation was indeed being imagined and practised into being by the politics that were transforming the Algerian Muslim community from a community of culture, excluded by that criterion from political rights ... into a political community in its own

right, seeing itself as already existing in its own history, language and religion, and as having a right to self-determination as such.<sup>34</sup>

As popular political engagement continued to increase, Algeria suffered immensely under the Vichy regime during World War II. By the end of the war, a combination of food shortages, economic stagnation, and a decrease in French prestige had significantly heightened tensions. When French police were needlessly violent against Algerian paraders in May, there was an eruption of violent revolts that lasted for the entire month. The French army brutally repressed the rebellion, but Algerians' resistance inspired a young Kateb Yacine, witness to protestors whose "lives were charged with poetry," as well as a cult of martyrdom that lasted throughout the fight for independence and long after.

New laws in 1946 and 1947 allowed for a minimal expansion of Algerian political rights which, while protested as not enough, Algerians seized and took advantage of as best they could. Faced with constant structural repression, however, many Algerian intellectuals and politicians fell to political infighting and the population gradually developed a jaded view of politics over the course of a decade. Such factionalism came to light in 1948, when a well-known nationalist song written in the Kabyle dialect of Amazigh, *Ekker a miss U-Mazigh* ('Stand, Amazigh son') was taken off the program of one of the political parties' fundraising gala. Political division was so prevalent that the ideas of nationalism and unity, including those of language, were being simplified because there was no actual unity with which to address such questions. One populist party in particular, the PPA,<sup>35</sup> was moving towards an anti-intellectualism that would further implicate language, ethnicity, and location in political division:

Thanks in part to colonial ethnographic misconceptions that held berberophone Kabyles (though not other Berber groups) to be irreducibly distinct from and opposed to Arabs,

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<sup>34</sup> McDougall, 177.

<sup>35</sup> *Parti du peuple algérien*, or the Algerian People's Party.

and simultaneously more ‘Mediterranean’ ... and thus more receptive to French tutelage, than other Algerians, schools had opened earlier and in greater numbers in Kabylia than elsewhere. ... Messali wrote of ‘the Berberists’ as a ‘virus’ and later claimed that they constituted ‘a colonialist creation’ intended ‘to destroy Arabism.’<sup>36</sup>

These ‘Berberists’ were young Amazigh progressives with an idea of “an historically evolving, culturally plural community,”<sup>37</sup> which was threatening to leaders such as Messali whose authority and ideology often stemmed from their experience with Arab nationalism. As pressures increased and the need for organized action became imminent, however, these cultural divisions became subordinate to the more pragmatic issues of political versus military authority, and legal versus clandestine activities. By the start of the war in November 1954, the six leaders of the armed resistance were of both Arab and Amazigh/Kabyle origins, but more importantly they were all former militants. Military leadership would continue to set the tone for the rest of the revolution, as well as independence.

Despite the unification behind military leadership, the factionalism that had arisen in politics also became affected military organization. The country was divided into zones, or *wilayas*, each of which had a different leader and unit of command, with differing tactical approaches depending on the topography and demography of the region. Additionally, the sections of the military outside of the country, located in Morocco and Tunisia to coordinate intelligence and training, each had their own leaders and hierarchy of command. In his history of Algeria, McDougall focuses primarily on the conflicts between these leaders and the attacks against them, the source of which was at times competing factions, but much more often the French military. Most actual fighting took place in the countryside, especially as the urban guerilla warfare—best known for the ‘Battle of Algiers’ from September 1956 to October

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<sup>36</sup> McDougall, 190-1.

<sup>37</sup> McDougall, 191.

1957—was “defeated by a ruthless campaign of repression” carried out by the French military that involved murder, torture, and bomb attacks.<sup>38</sup> Torture, in fact, was a tool regularly used by the French military throughout the eight years of war, often leading to imprisonment, death, or disappearance.<sup>39</sup> By the time the war ended in July 1962, McDougall estimates that between 250,000 to 300,000 Algerians had lost their lives,<sup>40</sup> and Algeria was both physically and mentally traumatized by the inter- and intracommunal violence it had suffered.

Frequently whitewashed from the post-war historical narrative, women played significant roles in the revolution and looked forward to officially recognized equality and liberation post-independence. The French effort to modernize and liberate Algerian women during colonial rule had often made women who had the choice more likely to put the veil or traditional dress back on, as the Martiniquais anti-colonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon observed.<sup>41</sup> By the time the war began, many urban, educated Algerian women felt free to either choose to wear the veil or not, and some of these women would also take part in urban guerilla warfare, although they have generally been characterized as notable exceptions to typical female participation in the war. Djamila Boupacha, Zohra Drif, Samia Lakhdari, Baya Hocien and Hassiba Bent Bouali have been characterized as such for their significant leadership and work within the FLN, namely in planting bombs in European districts of Algiers.<sup>42</sup> There were, however, armed women participating in the resistance known as *mujahidat*, and many women in the countryside participated by clandestinely supporting the maquisards. They provided shelter, food, medical care, facilitated communication between groups, and acted as watchmen, for which their

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<sup>38</sup> McDougall, 214.

<sup>39</sup> McDougall, 215.

<sup>40</sup> McDougall, 232.

<sup>41</sup> McDougall, 220.

<sup>42</sup> McDougall, 221.

property and often livelihoods were burned and destroyed by French soldiers. As Mouloud Feraoun wrote, “All in all, women take the weight of the war hard, they get hit like men, tortured, killed, put in prison.”<sup>43</sup> Both armed and unarmed, Algerian women resisted, fought, and suffered alongside their male compatriots.

After the war, there was a powerful sense of need for a cohesive national identity, and a recognition that its formulation would take place through cultural production such as writing and music. The war had catalyzed the transformation of “long-standing codes and structures of social solidarity into a new, assertive, militant sense of political community,”<sup>44</sup> which at one point the government hoped to express through a children’s anthem. The call for anthem submissions, advertised nationally, used vocabulary that would eventually compose government slogans: “the past and victory over obscurantist forces; love of the Nation and the promise to the martyrs; socialist engagement, the duty to learn and develop one’s physical strength; solidarity and international friendship; the joy of living through socialism.”<sup>45</sup> Many intellectuals, on the other hand, paused in response to this national pressure: in the realm of literature, for example, there was a lack of publication of serious fiction in the first two years of independence as authors like Kateb Yacine and Malek Haddad grappled with the question of how the new nation’s literature should take shape.

Simultaneously, political leaders were grappling with the question of what the new nation’s political philosophy would be. After eight years of desperate guerilla warfare, any unified political direction for the country had been lost in the crossfire. Additionally, the surviving leadership “represented a diverse political spectrum from former liberal-professional,

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<sup>43</sup> Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal*, 292 (entry for 26 April 1959), as quoted and cited in McDougall, 221.

<sup>44</sup> McDougall, 223.

<sup>45</sup> McDougall, 236.

progressive but anti-Marxist *UDMistes* Abbas ... through socialist-inclined intellectuals like Ait Ahmed, the *etatiste* praetorians around Boumediene, and the romantically Arabo-Muslim populist Ben Bella, to the Islamist maquisard Colonel ‘Si Nacer’, Mohammedi Said.”<sup>46</sup> To further complicate matters, these leaders had each developed some sort of cult of personality, whether among the public or within the military. Over the course of intense infighting during the first three years post-independence, Ben Bella emerged as the first to lead the newly independent country, following a model of international socialism and Arabo-Muslim social policies.<sup>47</sup> His moderate stance on both frustrated many of his opponents and critics, and required an informal policy of continuous co-optation of the religious right’s desires and agenda in order to placate their frustration with, or fears of, the emerging socialist, urbanizing state. To do so, the regime began endorsing the strict observance of Islam in state-sponsored programming, mandating policies of Arabization, and codifying conservative social norms, most notably in the Family Code of 1984. This moderate, indecisive, and often reactive political philosophy would be maintained first by Ben Bella’s charisma, then by Boumediene’s political skill and authority,<sup>48</sup> but eventually disintegrated under Chadli’s regime with the emergence and then political victory in December 1991 of the FIS.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> McDougall, 241.

<sup>47</sup> During this infighting, ethnic-cultural divides were exacerbated as the Kabylie opposition leader Ait Ahmed was targeted by Ben Bella and Boumediene’s faction: “The Kabyle maquis [led by Ait Ahmed] was put down by the ANP under Boumediene, now Minister of Defence, with a violence that would live long in the region’s memory, such that five decades later women in the mountains could recount, matter-of-factly, that ‘after the war with the French, there was the war with the Arabs.’” McDougall, 246.

<sup>48</sup> “Farida Abu-Haidar dates the beginnings of repressive Arabization and Amazigh resistance to the Boumediene era (1965-78),” from Shaden Tageldin, “Which Qalam For Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djébar’s *L’amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghanimi’s *Dhakirat al-jasad*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 46, no. 3, 2009: 488.

<sup>49</sup> *Front islamique du salut*, or the Islamic Salvation Front: “A broad coalition of Islamist groups that came together in February 1989, the FIS included international radicals calling for the implementation of a fundamentalist interpretation of *shari’a* law in a purified ‘Islamic republic’ alongside so-called ‘Jaza’irists’ (‘Algerianists’), inspired more by the Islamic dimensions of Algeria’s own nationalist and revolutionary history.” McDougall, 286-7.

With the dissolution of Chadli's regime into military rule in reaction to the FIS political victory, a state of emergency began that would last officially and unofficially for the entire decade. In the first half of 1992, Mohamed Boudiaf's return to Algeria to lead the country at the behest of the military government brought some hope for stability, but his assassination in June 1992 resulted in a return to military rule and the start of what many would term 'The Terror.'<sup>50</sup> After the FIS had been banned in March of that same year, militant Islamist groups began to emerge in retaliation, eventually coalescing under the umbrella organization known as the GIA.<sup>51</sup> The GIA's decentralized structure masked the identity of perpetrators of the violence and murders that had, in the first half of the decade, been primarily anti-intellectual, and which escalated by the second half to mass civilian massacres. In between these periods of violence, in 1994, Liamine Zeroual was appointed to lead the government. His efforts to create a national dialogue that would open discussion around the political re-entry of opposition parties, extending even to the FIS, were rejected by both those inside and outside the regime, and have been cited by some as the cause of the re-escalation in violence in the second half of the decade.<sup>52</sup> After Zeroual's resignation in 1998, Abdelaziz Bouteflika was chosen as the regime's candidate, and was then elected to the presidency.

In the last twenty years that Bouteflika has been president, he has largely maintained the status quo of the post-independence FLN regime. By 2000, the vast majority of insurgents had either officially or unofficially declared an end to the violence and terror of the previous decade and Bouteflika was able to introduce a reconciliation policy in 2005 that many argue has quelled

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<sup>50</sup> McDougall, 304.

<sup>51</sup> *Jama'a al-islamiyya 'l-musallaha*, or Islamic Armed Group.

<sup>52</sup> McDougall, 317.

any possibility of a national discussion about the ‘Black Decade.’<sup>53</sup> He also, however, introduced reforms to the Family Code that expanded certain women’s rights, and after more than twenty years of work by the Amazigh cultural movement that emerged from the Berber Spring of 1980, Tamazight was recognized as a ‘national’ language in 2002, and finally as an official language in 2016. Today, while the future of Algeria’s government is unclear, Algerians continue to adapt to the realities of the world around them and seek to more fully understand and embrace their long and complex history.

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<sup>53</sup> McDougall, 325.

The two literary texts that this thesis explores are products of Algeria as a modern nation state. As such, they are part of a larger corpus of texts we refer to as contemporary or modern Algerian literature. To simply categorize these works as modern, however, would be a mistake, as they both form a part of and make reference to Algeria's complex, ancient history. In her survey of the role of women in Algerian literature, Ahlam Mostaghanemi cites Malek Haddad's definition of the Algerian writer as a product of history, as they inevitably draw upon and incorporate elements of Algerian history and culture in their writing.<sup>54</sup> She is, however, less explicit in addressing Algerian authors' roles in the creation of history as well as in forming a national understanding of that history through decisions around genre, language, style, and subject matter.

In a review of Algerian literature, language is often a tempting category by which to organize, and which might seem appropriate since the two novels under study in this thesis are separated primarily by language. As Mostaghanemi acknowledges, however, Algerian Arabophone literature did not emerge as such until the 1970s when the independence generation had begun to come of age and so the timeline and the quantity of works between the two written languages of Algeria are disproportionate.<sup>55</sup> While this thesis is cognizant of the importance of this linguistic issue, it also looks at ways to underline the limitations of this Arabic versus French dichotomy and its inability to account for a rich, diverse, multilingual society seeped in a complex cultural reality that spans both traditions of writing and orality. Instead of reproducing

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<sup>54</sup> Ahlam Mostaghanemi, *Algérie: femme et écritures* (Paris: Harmattan, 1985), 90.

<sup>55</sup> Although my thesis focuses on Arabic and French as the two main languages at play in these texts, I am very conscious of the fact that the Algerian linguistic landscape is a much more complex one and that Tamazight with its various regional varieties (Chaoui, Kabyle, and Tamasheq mainly), and Algerian Arabic *Darija/Dardja* are also crucial parts of this larger puzzle and I hope to touch on their importance in my analysis of Assia Djébar's text.

the same binary interplay, I will organize this review according to the two categories of writing that I see Ahlam Mostaghanemi and Assia Djebar place themselves within: literary and theoretical, respectively.

Before continuing, I would like to offer a very brief survey of pre-modern literature as related to Algerian history and national identity. As a part of larger North Africa, Algeria claims heritage to the cultural products of Numidian (Amazigh), Phoenician, Punic, Roman, Islamic, Arabic, Ottoman, and Francophone North Africa. Perhaps two of the most important cultural figures of early Algerian history were Apuleius and Saint Augustine. Born under Roman rule in towns located in what is now present-day Algeria, the two scholars' bodies of writing include works now considered literary masterpieces. Augustine's *Confessions* constitutes the world's first autobiography, while Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (or *The Golden Ass*) provides one of the earliest examples of what would come to be known as a picaresque novel, preceding *Don Quixote* by more than a thousand years.

As a part of the Arab conquest and the Islamic world, Algeria claims heritage as well to Classical Arabic literary and cultural heritage. This vast corpus of texts encompasses a wide range of genres from the Qur'an and the Hadith to Sufi poetry, from biographies of scholars and notable figures to folklore such as the tales of Juha and masterpieces like *The Thousand and One Nights*. Pre-modern Arab-Amazigh North Africa produced two notable author-scholars, the travel historian Ibn Battuta and the social historian Ibn Khaldun, both of whom are traditionally included in Arabic literary and cultural heritage.

In modern Algerian literature, and Algerian culture more generally, there has been difficulty in confronting and reconciling these two literary heritages. Neither belong solely to

Algerians, and there is even a sense of antagonism related to Roman North African literature due to its association with Western culture and civilization, particularly French colonialism. In fact, these intellectuals from Saint Augustine to Ibn Khaldun force us to acknowledge how recently Algeria developed as a national entity. Algeria and other countries of the Maghreb and the wider Mediterranean basin area are often viewed today within their historical context of belonging to larger cultural, political, and military entities such as the Roman empire, the wider Mauritania territories of the Arab-Amazigh dynasties, the Islamic West, the Ottoman empire, etc. In response, many modern Algerian authors choose to emphasize their Arabic literary ancestry through references to classical poetry and *The Thousand and One Nights*, although francophone authors are increasingly calling attention to the Roman era as proof of Algerians writing in the Other's language in order to write and communicate. Both choices, however, risk erasing the other in search of an origin myth that also serves a political agenda, rather than acknowledging the complex multiplicity of their cultural heritage.

In the novel *Dhakirat al-jasad* ذاكرة الجسد, Ahlam Mostaghanemi intentionally places herself within the evolution of Algerian literary writing by simultaneously inhabiting, parodying, and redirecting the trends of that evolution. As several critics have referenced in their analyses of her writing, Mostaghanemi published her doctoral thesis on the presence of women in Algerian literature in 1985, several years before the publication of *Dhakirat al-jasad*.<sup>56</sup> While the focus of her thesis was the role of women, as opposed to language, the issue of language choice appears frequently throughout the book and further proves to me the importance of the language issue to

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<sup>56</sup> Ellen McLarney, "Unlocking the Female in Aḥlām Mustaghānamī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33, no. 1, 2002, 24–44.

Shaden M. Tageldin, "Which Qalam For Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghanimi's *Dhakirat al-jasad*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46, no. 3, 2009, 467–497.

her literature. Although I do not intend to trace the presence of women throughout Algerian literature, the role of women in her own novel is intertwined with that of language and national identity. In order to analyze and discuss her choice and use of language, I intend to identify some of the clichés and literary devices of the traditionally masculine Algerian literature that she critiques in her thesis, which are then parodied in *Dhakirat al-jasad*, and place them in their wider context.

Many critics, especially from the West, locate the beginning of a modern Algerian literature around the time of the publication of Kateb Yacine's novel *Nedjma*, 1956, but Mostaghanemi goes further back to the nineteenth century poetry of Emir Abdelkader.<sup>57</sup> Although justified by her own work, as the Emir's poetry was unique for its time due to its direct acknowledgement and admiration of women, her identification of the Emir as the earliest figure of modern Algerian literature is symbolic in its parallelism to his more traditional identity as the earliest figure of modern Algerian resistance and independence. Mostaghanemi's choice to celebrate the poetry of a national leader such as Emir Abdelkader as the starting point of modern Algerian literature defines the literary as strictly limited to the written word, highlighting and strengthening the relationship between the literary and the language of authority. In the Emir's poetry, Algerian Arabic (also known as *darija/dardja*) and Tamazight (in its different regional varieties of Kabyle, Chaoui and Tamasheq) are left on the margins of this relationship in order to emphasize written, classical, formal Arabic as the voice of a nation resisting both the French army and the French language.

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<sup>57</sup> Also known as Abd al-Qadir, the emir was the leader of the most organized and extended revolt against French conquest, lasting from 1832 to 1846 and covering a large expanse of Algeria.

The centuries long period of Ottoman rule and its lack of emphasis on education and the development of schools had further solidified an already rampant illiteracy. When the French invaded in the 19th century, formal education was limited to mosques, Qur'anic schools, and a few Hebraic institutions and only a minimal fraction of the population had any access at all. The cultural landscape in the field of the written word was limited in such a way that even up to 1945, most literature whether in Arabic or in French was limited primarily to poetry, religious commentary and other related works, as well as press in the form of newspapers and periodicals.

In the early twentieth century, the presence of the Association des Oulemas, led especially by Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, in the bilingual periodical press brought debates over education, language, and national identity as defined by the 'Muslim personality' to the public through the written word. Some minor novels also appeared, such as such as Abdelkader Hadj Hamou's *Zohra, la femme du mineur* in French and Mohamed El Abed El Djilali's three short novels published in monthly installments in the arabophone newspaper *Ach-Chihab*. In francophone novels of the early twentieth century such as Hamou's, Mostaghanemi notes that while writing in French and using the tropes and stereotypes of a colonial novel, these authors are clearly invested in an Arab-Muslim Algerian identity. She argues that

[Ce discours à double niveau] semble vouloir démontrer que mimétisme pro-colonial et affirmation d'une identité algérienne centrée sur l'Islam ne sont pas nécessairement des pôles contradictoires, mais deux aspects complémentaires d'une même attitude faite de soumission politique à la domination coloniale et de maintien d'une autonomie culturelle

[This doubled discourse] seems to want to demonstrate that pro-colonial mimetism and the affirmation of an Algerian identity centered around Islam are not necessarily contradictory poles, but two complementary aspects of the same attitude formed by political submission to colonial domination and the sustainment of a cultural autonomy.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 35. My own translation.

This formation of an attitude formed by both political submission and cultural independence recalls the tension identified by McDougall in the debate over citizenship *dans le statut* and *naturalisation*. By the mid-1930s, the roles that Islam and Arabic language versus French language and culture should play in forming Algerian national identity were being regularly, visibly debated and played out in literature.<sup>59</sup>

During the interwar period, social mores and gender entered the conversation around national identity taking place in literature. Early on, as francophone authors navigated their commitment to an Arab-Muslim Algerian identity while using the language, structures, and style of the colonizer, Algerian francophone novels often expressed conservative social perspectives and ideology. Arabophone authors, on the other hand, according to Mostaghanemi, continued to push the status quo and question certain societal norms ranging from language choice to arranged marriage, with Redha Houhou writing about truly progressive positions in his novels and essays published just after World War II. As Mostaghanemi remarks, however, post-World War II a trend began towards “conformity and conservatism” among arabophone Algerian writers that would strengthen into the fifties and sixties, with the notable exception of Houhou.

The appearance of female Algerian authors such as Djamila Debèche did not lead to a unified feminine front on the subject; Mostaghanemi, in fact, identifies two strongly opposed poles in early feminine Algerian writing, exemplified through two authors. Zhour Ouanissi, writing in Arabic in the fifties, put forward conservative viewpoints that condemned “mixed”

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<sup>59</sup> Benedict Anderson discusses this role of language in national identity in *Imagined Communities*, which Elizabeth Holt cites in her writing on Mostaghanemi: “As Anderson notes, many anticolonial and postcolonial nationalist leaders would come to consider language as one more in a list of ‘*emblems* of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk-dances, and the rest.’ The novel or newspaper in form helped enable the imagining of the national community: ‘there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests... The image: unisonance.’” Elizabeth M. Holt, “‘In a Language That Was Not His Own’: On Aḥlām Mustaghānamī’s ‘Dhākīrat Al-Jasad’ and Its French Translation ‘Mémoires De La Chair,’” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39, no. 1, 2008: 129.

marriage between Algerians and the French, while Fadila M'Rabet, writing in French in the sixties, advocated a radically feminist viewpoint that was both anti-Algerian men and conservative cultural traditions. Most of this spirited dialogue and literary social debate was glossed over and almost erased, however, during the second half of the twentieth century through a parallel whitewashing of women from both historical and literary narratives, due to a post-independence refusal to acknowledge the radical changes in gender norms that had taken place during the War of Liberation.

Simplistic and exclusive formulations of Algerian national identity were also further complicated by the ubiquitous, and increasingly vocal, presence of Amazigh peoples and the Tamazight languages, which began to make its presence known through literature during the interwar and postwar periods as well. As Algerian scholars, authors, and politicians discussed and debated the various aspects of Algerian identity, some Amazigh intellectuals, particularly from the Kabyle region, began to explore an Algerian identity that was simultaneously and fundamentally Amazigh.

Jean and Taos Amrouche were a brother and sister who worked extensively in Tamazight and French: Jean wrote poems and essays in French, while Taos sang music in Tamazight and wrote several novels in French, and both translated poems, proverbs, and lyrics from Tamazight into French. One common complaint voiced by other Algerian intellectuals was the regionalism they felt was inherent in these expressions of Amazigh culture, as opposed to the nationalism they felt was necessary to rid the country of French colonialism. Many intellectuals also voiced their resistance over the expression of this culture through the French language.

By the time of the start of French colonization, most of Algeria had long since lost a written form of Tamazight.<sup>60</sup> One of the policies of French colonization was education of the Amazigh people, who the French believed, based on colonial histories and ethnographies, were more European than Algerians of Arab descent. Two particularly notable Kabylie authors who were products of this French education, Mouloud Feraoun and Mouloud Mammeri, began writing and publishing after World War II. Feraoun's novels did center around the Kabylie region and culture, and Mammeri became famous in 1980 when the cancellation of his lecture on Amazigh poetry at the University of Tizi Ouzou ignited riots and an Amazigh cultural movement that would later be called the Berber/Amazigh Spring. Their works, however, had significant literary merit and a subversiveness that extended beyond their search for recognition of Amazigh identity. Feraoun's writing on the reality of rural life in the mountains and the economic need for emigration to urban centers in both Algeria and France confronted the violent realities brought on by French colonialism, while Mammeri's novels explored the crisis faced by Algerian youth in the post-World War II era and the causes of intellectual alienation in Algeria.<sup>61</sup>

Strikingly, in her analysis of Algerian literature, Mostaghanemi identifies the texts of two prominent francophone writers, Kateb Yacine and Rachid Boudjedra, as the main site of resistance and dissent.<sup>62</sup> Yacine's *Nedjma* and Boudjedra's *La repudiation*, published in 1956 and 1969 respectively, bookend the War of Liberation. Both novels received critical acclaim not only for their piercing social commentary, but also for their powerful and revolutionary use

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<sup>60</sup> The sole exception was the Tuareg, speakers of the Tamasheq variety of Tamazight, who maintained the Tifinagh alphabet used in their written form of Tamazight. Assia Djebar traces this alphabet and language in *So Vast the Prison* to the fourth century Tuareg leader and queen, Tin Hinan.

<sup>61</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 43.

<sup>62</sup> Mostaghanemi has a tendency in both *Algérie: femme et écritures* and *Dhakirat al-jasad* to avoid exploration and analysis of the role that Amazigh culture and identity plays in the formation of Algerian national identity.

of the French language. Elizabeth Holt writes that, “In his first novel *La repudiation*, which was banned in Algeria because of its social critique, Boudjedra (Abu Jadra)’s use of grammar, particularly his occasional placement of the verb first in a phrase, as well as his longer sentence style, evoke an affinity with the Arabic language and its literature, as does the novel’s intertextuality with texts such as *A Thousand and One Nights* as well as authors such as al-Tawhidi, Ibn Battuta, and Ibn al-’Arabi.”<sup>63</sup> She characterizes such manipulations of French as “atomizing, pulverizing” in its effort to decolonize French in order to voice a uniquely Algerian perspective.<sup>64</sup> In their writing, Yacine and Boudjedra revolutionized the boundaries of both content and form in Algerian literature, and both are acknowledged by Mostaghanemi in references woven into the narrative of *Dhakirat al-jasad*.

Another francophone author, Malek Haddad, had a clear and significant impact on Mostaghanemi’s perspective on writing, language, and national identity. He and her father are the only two people acknowledged in the dedication of *Dhakirat al-jasad*, which will be analyzed further in Chapter Four. Located chronologically between Yacine and Boudjedra, Haddad published four novels over the course of four years, from 1958 to 1961 and his work can be categorized along with theirs as “literature of combat”<sup>65</sup> in which the Revolution and Algeria’s emergence as an independent nation are central themes. Additionally, his first and last novels, *La dernière impression* and *Le quai aux fleurs ne répond plus*, treat the theme of connection through the motif of bridges and the theme of exile in Paris, respectively, both of which reappear in *Dhakirat al-jasad*. After Algerian independence in 1962, however, he vowed

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<sup>63</sup> Holt, 127.

<sup>64</sup> Holt, 136.

<sup>65</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 43 and 175.

to not write in a foreign language, an Other's language, and chose therefore to stop writing because of his lack of fluency in Arabic.

While their works transformed the use of French in Algerian literature and expanded conceptions of Algerian national identity, all five of these male francophone authors—Feraoun, Mammeri, Yacine, Boudjedra, and Haddad—fall short in their treatment of gender and the representation of women. In *Algerie*, Mostaghanemi critiques Feraoun, Mammeri, and Boudjedra for their reliance on the mother trope, which she classifies as:

... pas seulement due à l'absence de l'épouse et du couple mais aussi à l'absence du père qui engendre fatalement la recherche d'une paternité perdue ... la mère se présente toujours comme le seul refuge contre l'hostilité du monde paternel de l'enfance et contre les 'déceptions' conjugales du monde adulte.

... not only due to the absence of the wife and of the couple, but also due to the absence of the father, which inevitably engenders the search for a lost paternity ... the mother is always presented as the only refuge from the hostility of the paternal world in childhood and from the conjugal 'deceptions' of the adult world.<sup>66</sup>

For Feraoun, the mother takes the form of a widowed French mother, the orphaned protagonist's only refuge from his competing sets of uncles. For Boudjedra, the mother is the repudiated wife, raising her son in the harem of women of the household, searching constantly for the husband's approval and acceptance into his bed. Haddad and Yacine, on the other hand, both fall into the two tropes of woman as nation, and the sexualised foreign woman: "la femme-Algérie ou la mère-Algérie opposée à la France-maîtresse ou la France-marâtre."<sup>67</sup> These tropes rely on extensive symbolism in an effort to represent the woman through imagery,<sup>68</sup> but result in a

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<sup>66</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 90.

<sup>68</sup> "Haddad's work is characterized by symbolic representations of women, as emblems of nation, city, land, or the revolution." McLarney, 27.

veiling of the woman, ironically reminiscent of the tradition of classical Arabic literature despite their expression in French.

Contemporaneous with Haddad, Assia Djébar emerged onto the scene of Algerian literature in 1957 with the publication of her first novel, *La soif*. Despite the small number of female authors who preceded her, the first half of Djébar's career—from 1957 to 1969—already marked a second generation of female Algerian writers. McLarney explains this phenomenon by referencing Joseph Zeidan:

Joseph Zeidan remarks in *Arab Women Novelists* that conformity to the male literary tradition characterized the early pioneers of women's literature in the Mashriq. Because women writers had no predecessors, they worked within the parameters of the extant literary tradition, going through a period of conformity and imitation. Only later did they move toward a more particular expression of their social experience, focusing in closely on the self and the body.<sup>6970</sup>

In *Algerie*, Mostaghanemi cites Djamila Debeche as a member of the first generation, working within the limits of conformity and tradition.<sup>71</sup> Djébar, by contrast, is revolutionary in her portrayals of Algerian women caught between their traditional existence and the appeals of Western culture, of positive male figures, and of the connection between social oppression and sexual violence.<sup>72</sup> Writing in French like her male compatriots, Djébar provides a much richer and more nuanced picture of the Algerian woman.

In the realm of arabophone literature, resistance to existing social norms reappeared in the 1970s in the work of 'Abd al-Hamid Ben Hadouga and Tahar Ouettar. Although Ouettar relied heavily upon problematic clichés of women in his writing, such as the Tunisian woman as

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<sup>69</sup> McLarney, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Susan Gilbert also theorized this about Western female authors in the chapter "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" of *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, drawing from and expanding upon Bloom's anxiety of influence.

<sup>71</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 195.

<sup>72</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 190-1 and 199-200.

an alternative to the untouchable Algerian woman,<sup>73</sup> his writing explores themes of gender, revolution, and exile in a modern way previously unseen in arabophone Algerian literature. The commitment and ability of authors like Hadouga and Ouettar to write in Arabic almost certainly influenced Boudjedra's decision to begin writing in Arabic in the early 1980s, along with significant national pressure. With this choice, translation became integral to Boudjedra's writing, as he was well-known for being heavily involved in the translation of his works into French, and even suspected of actually first writing his novels in French and then having them translated into Arabic, of which the latter would be published first. Despite the fact that Boudjedra returned to writing solely in French again beginning in the 1990s, both he and Ouettar remained outspoken about the importance of language choice in Algerian literature, with Boudjedra's strong critique particularly of younger francophone authors continuing to this day.<sup>74</sup>

Amid the drama of Boudjedra's language crisis in the 1980s, Ahlam Mostaghanemi entered the stage of Algerian literature with the publication of *Dhakirat al-jasad* in 1985. The national importance at the time of writing in Arabic was clear from the reception of the novel: former Algerian president Ben Bella said of Mostaghanemi that, "... she has raised Algerian literature to a stature worthy of the history of our struggle."<sup>75</sup> As an arabophone female Algerian author, her writing was completely new, yet thoroughly grounded in Algerian literary tradition.

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<sup>73</sup> Mostaghanemi identifies this metaphor almost exclusively in the writing of arabophone Algerian authors such as Hadouga and Ouettar; she explains that, because women were thought of as the guardians of Algerian honor, there was a pressure to represent Algerian women in literature as pure, sacred figures. In order to write a conceivable relationship, then, arabophone literature often relied on the Tunisian woman as a freer, more attainable alternative to the Algerian woman, and as a less taboo and unpatriotic alternative to the French woman. Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 79.

<sup>74</sup> "Algérie: Kamel Daoud porte plainte pour diffamation contre Rachid Boudjedra," *Jeune Afrique*, last modified October 9, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/481464/societe/algerie-kamel-daoud-porte-plainte-pour-diffamation-contre-rachid-boudjedra/>.

<sup>75</sup> Holt, 125.

Ten years later, the publication of the novel *Vaste est la prison* further revolutionized modern Algerian literature. The third of a trilogy, *Vaste est la prison*, is unquestionably a novel, but its structure and Djébar's style of writing are different from a traditional novel to the point of being a theoretical experiment: a performance of historical and representational theory through storytelling and fiction. To create such a performance, Djébar draws from a body of theoretical writing that is composed of North African, French, Algerian, and postcolonial works, all of which speak in some way to the Algerian experience; these theories must be explored and outlined in order to be able to better locate them within her writing. Two theories that are fundamental to Djébar's work are Jacques Derrida's *différance* and Abdelkebir Khatibi's *archeology* and *pensée autre*. These theoretical tropes are present in many of Assia Djébar's texts, but are especially key to any reading of *Vaste est la Prison*.

In his pivotal speech, *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida explains Lévi-Strauss's *bricolage* saying, "It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself."<sup>76</sup> He goes on to discuss how *bricolage* allows the second interpretation of interpretation of which Derrida writes:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign ... The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism ...<sup>77</sup>

The two interpretations are separated by an irreducible difference, which Derrida calls *la différence*.<sup>78</sup> In literary theory, this argument has been understood as deconstruction, a method of

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<sup>76</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, Routledge, 1978: 356-7.

<sup>77</sup> Derrida, 369-70.

<sup>78</sup> Derrida, 370.

analysis in which the scholar identifies a hierarchy, or a structure, of the values in a text while simultaneously identifying the way in which the text deconstructs this hierarchy, in which the text affirms play.

Khatibi takes Derrida's ideas further in his application of them to the postcolonial situation of Arab countries, in particular North Africa and the Maghreb. The chapter "Double critique" from his book *Maghreb pluriel* outlines a *pensée autre* (a different thought, a thought of difference) that would be outside the structures of knowledge, totally decentered, in contrast to both institutional thought and critical thought. Khatibi's concept of *pensée autre* emerges from a socio-cultural and political context that was obsessed with essentialism, and mythologies or fictions of origin and authenticity: as countries in the Maghreb during the 1970s and 80s grappled with the reality of post-independence political and economic stagnation, citizens and intellectuals alike sought to locate a cohesive national identity in both historical and fictional narratives. By formulating the idea of a *pensée autre* that cannot exist within any existing knowledge structure, Khatibi seeks to explode the artificial comfort of the competing binary in this search for a unitary narrative.

According to Khatibi, intellectuals have not yet been able to arrive at this *pensée autre* in large part because the social sciences, particularly sociology, have not been decolonized. In order to do so, intellectuals must undertake an archeology of knowledge. This archeology would examine all the stratifications of not only Western structures of thought, but also Arab structures: "C'est de strate à strate qu'une dé-constitution du savoir à critiquer et à déporter vers une pensée autre que l'édifice d'une épistémè se désigne infiniment à ses origines en s'en éloignant."<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>79</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, "Double critique," *Maghreb pluriel*, Denoël, 1983: 49-50.

researcher will only be able to understand the thought in which he/she works when he/she examines all the aspects of this thought and their relationships. In addition, the role of the researcher itself in this archeology is subject to investigation, which Khatibi describes when he writes, “Le chercheur est l’être double, dédoublé de cet éloignement, de cet arrachement, tant qu’il se maintient dans cette exigence de se critiquer en s’effaçant dans l’objet d’analyse à déconstituer [The researcher is a double being, split from this distancing, this uprooting, as long as they maintain this requirement to criticize themselves by including themselves in the object of analysis to deconstruct].”<sup>80</sup> The researcher can never completely be separated from the structures of knowledge because every aspect of his/her life is formed by these structures, such as the patriarchy, the theology of Islam, and the West’s imperialism. Ultimately, Khatibi links his archeology and the obligation of self-criticism to language: “C’est la notion même de langue qu’il faudrait renverser, rendre étrangère à elle-même [It’s the notion of language itself that it is necessary to turn inside out, to render strange to itself].”<sup>81</sup> Once language is rendered a stranger to itself, power in speech, the power of the word, will be destroyed and a complete decentralization of reason, both Western and Arab, will be achieved.

In his novel *Amour bilingue*, published the same year as *Maghreb pluriel*, Khatibi attempts to put his theory into performance. This novel is one of Djébar’s closest predecessors in terms of a theoretical experiment through the form of fiction, especially within the world of North African literature. Centered around the love story of a North African man and a French woman, Khatibi attempts to render language a stranger to itself through symbolism, the direct discussion of language, and the constant questioning of the narrator.

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<sup>80</sup> Khatibi, 50. My own translation.

<sup>81</sup> Khatibi, 58. My own translation.

Fredric Jameson argues in his controversial speech *Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism* that texts from the Third World, such as Khatibi's *Amour Bilingue*, require a certain kind of reading from Western intellectuals, Americans in particular. In a generalization that he admits as such, Jameson says that Third World texts must be read as national allegories due to the necessarily situational and materialistic nature of Third World authors, which is in direct opposition to the individualism and psychologism of the American tradition.<sup>82</sup> Jameson's idea is that if Western scholars understand the situation of authors as political intellectuals who inevitably represent the collective experience of their nation by way of an individual experience, Western scholars will not compare their quality or value directly to canonical Western literature. Jameson attempts, in fact, to save the integrity of texts that he fears becoming lost in the comparison implicit in the field of world literature.

The reader, however, should be able to recognize simultaneously the allegorical nature of a text and the text's literary integrity. Réda Bensmaïa works to accomplish this reading in his book *Experimental Nations*, and he examines Jameson's argument in the chapter "Postcolonial Nations : Political or Poetic Allegories (On Tahar Djaout's *L'invention du désert*).” He finds that Jameson does not identify the true source of the disconnect between the text and the reader when Jameson says, “We sense, between ourselves and this alien text, the presence of another reader, of the Other reader, for whom a narrative, which strikes us as conventional or naive, has a freshness of information and a social interest that we cannot share.”<sup>83</sup> Bensmaïa is not satisfied by this relegation of the blame on the Other for the unease of the Western reader. He argues that

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<sup>82</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text*, no. 15, 1986: 85.

<sup>83</sup> Jameson, 66.

there is never a simple Other in the audience of a text because the question of language challenges the existence of a universal Other:

...when dealing with so-called postcolonial literatures, Jameson's thesis is rendered problematic not so much by the idea that the allegorical exists in postcolonial texts as by the absence of any reference to or problematizing of the matter of the languages concerned. ...For if there is a single important political, cultural, theoretical, and even moral question faced by postcolonial writers, it is that of the language in which they will give form to what they wish to express to their readers.<sup>84</sup>

Here, Bensmaïa raises the problem of the form of language, the structure formed by language. In addition to the literary tradition that an author draws upon and the style of writing, the choice of the language of the text determines the audience and the manner in which a text is read. This problematic differentiates these authors and their texts within the same culture, as is often the case in North Africa. Rather than try to identify themselves with a society that resists homogenization, Bensmaïa posits that Maghrebi authors explore difference in their writing: "Not having inherited a preordained history, or perhaps because they inherited a history that a certain rationality has always already allegorized, these writers placed themselves almost instinctively on the side of a writing of difference rather than on the side of a history of identity/sameness."<sup>85</sup> This writing of difference does not limit Maghrebi authors to an existence as political intellectuals engaged only with the representation of their country and culture, as it resists the simplification of history and reality into one national allegory. In place of allegory, writing of difference (or even of *différance*) allows for the exploration of multiple histories, cultures, and identities.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Réda Bensmaïa, "Postcolonial Nations: Political or Poetic Allegories? (On Tahar Djaout's *L'invention du désert*)," *Experimental Nations: or, the Invention of the Maghreb*, translated by Alyson Waters, Princeton, 2003: 69.

<sup>85</sup> Bensmaïa, 79-80.

<sup>86</sup> Pascale Casanova has a similar theory to this writing of difference, but frames it instead as a strategy of complex equations in *The World Republic of Letters*: "The strategies of such authors ... can therefore be described as sorts of

These three theories—deconstruction, the archeology of knowledge, and national allegory—neglect the question of the representation of oppressed peoples in their discussions of representation, a critically important question in postcolonial studies. Khatibi approaches the question in his description of the researcher as a double being who is obligated “de se critiquer en s’effaçant dans l’objet d’analyse à déconstituer [to criticize himself by including himself in the object of analysis to be deconstructed],”<sup>87</sup> but this idea is only part of the response demanded by the questions posed by Alcoff and Spivak. Alcoff asks from the position of privileged intellectuals in her writing:

As social theorists, we are authorized by virtue of our academic positions to develop theories that express and encompass the ideas, needs, and goals of others. However, we must begin to ask ourselves whether this is ever a legitimate authority, and if so, what are the criteria for legitimacy? In particular, is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than me?<sup>88</sup>

While these questions are important for self-critique, they do not offer a path for the intellectual to go further than the self. Alcoff does not seek a response from the voices that she attempts to defend, turning instead in circles of theory. Spivak, on the other hand, argues that the principal intellectuals of poststructuralism like Foucault et Deleuze, who criticize imperialist structures and who try to find a way to represent the subaltern, are incapable of recognizing their own implication in such structures. Spivak leads a historical study anchored in Marxist theory to discover if the subaltern is able to self-represent: if the subaltern can speak. She concludes no, saying at the end of the paper, “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry

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very complex equations, containing two, three, or four unknowns, that take into account simultaneously the literariness of their own language, their political situation, their degree of involvement in a national struggle, their determination to achieve recognition in the literary centers, the ethnocentrism and blindness of these same centers, and the necessity of making them aware of the difference of authors on the periphery.”

Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004: 259.

<sup>87</sup> Khatibi, 50. My own translation.

<sup>88</sup> Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 20, 1991: 7.

lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish."<sup>89</sup> Despite the fact that the subaltern cannot speak, Spivak puts forward that representation has not vanished and female intellectuals must take up the challenge of listening to and reading the voice of the female subaltern. The representation of the subaltern's voice in a text must simultaneously take the form of a self-criticism, an investigation of oppressive structures, the voice of the subaltern, and a reading of this voice as a rewriting.

In Djébar's effort to represent the subaltern's voice, she also draws upon French feminist theory, in particular the work of Helene Cixous. Cixous herself builds upon Derrida's trope of *différance* in formulating her theory of *une écriture féminine*, a language of writing unique to women free of patriarchal structure and vocabulary. By combining this quest for an *écriture féminine* with actual historical research for the lost written form of an ancient oral language, Djébar puts Cixous and Spivak into a theoretical and fictional dialogue that informs the entirety of *Vaste est la prison*.

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<sup>89</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia, 1994: 107.

The back cover of the French Albin Michel paperback edition of *Vaste est la prison* describes the novel as a “Roman-quête des origines, chronique féminine qui couvre tout un siècle” [Novel-quest for origins, feminine chronicle covering the entirety of a century].<sup>90</sup> This concise summary alludes to critical aspects of the text while glossing over their complexity, thereby exemplifying the ambiguity that Djébar manipulates and celebrates in her writing. *Vaste est la prison* is unquestionably a novel, a form of storytelling categorized as such by its author, but the hyphenation of “novel-quest” implies either that “novel” as a category is not enough to encompass what the this text aims to accomplish, or that the book does not fully meet the requirements of novels. It is worth acknowledging that the form and style implied by the term “novel” are defined by Western standards, and some would therefore consider “novel” inherently incapable of categorizing a non-Western story. Instead, the categorization of “novel” must be supplemented by the phrase “a quest for origins,” but who is embarking on this quest, and for which origins? The person embarking on this quest at this point could be the author, the narrator, the protagonist, or the larger subject-consciousness of the novel. The origins could be genealogical, linguistic, cultural, or historical, among others. The second half of the summary provides more context: not only is the book a novel and a quest, but it is also a chronicle, a historical document. This particular text is specified as a feminine history because history is written by and for men. The three categories of novel, quest, and chronicle imply that by writing, Djébar is simultaneously recording, storytelling, and searching from a feminine perspective. She embraces this process of writing in French, the language of the colonizers and their violent

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<sup>90</sup> Assia Djébar, *Vaste est la prison*, Albin Michel, 1995. My own translation.

histories of subjugation, as an opportunity to appropriate the language for herself, to acknowledge Algeria's linguistic situation as a multilingual country, and to counter Arabic and its violent, patriarchal dimensions, but must continuously problematize her interactions with French, Arabic, and other languages by performing methodologies informed by literary and postcolonial theory.

*Vaste est la prison* is the third volume of a trilogy that Djébar began writing after a ten-year absence from the world of written literature, during which she created cinema in Algerian Arabic. In order to return to writing, she had to return to French, a language from which Algeria officially separated itself at independence. Many critics and scholars argue that her use of French is one of the great strengths of Djébar's writing. Samia Mehrez goes so far as to claim that translating the novel into any other language would diminish the book's nuance and significance: "As Djébar transcribes and translates, she creates a text that is at once a resister and liberator whose existence in French is undoubtedly the prime reason for its power and importance"<sup>91</sup>. In her use of French, Djébar confronts the irreversible, ugly effects of French colonialism on Algerian culture and society, as well as the virulently politicized reality of official Arabic in Algeria; Shaden Tageldin sees this confrontation manifested in the female characters of Djébar's novels, writing that "Djébar's women, stubbornly rooted in the dirty colonial realities of modern Algerian history, cannot help but be divorced from "standard" Arabic and official Islam. They are irrevocably mediated through French ... defiantly 'contaminated.'"<sup>92</sup> While Djébar problematizes French's position as a colonial language, particularly its "dispossession of

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<sup>91</sup> "Any translation of this text into yet another language is bound to dissolve and mask these crucial confrontations." Samia Mehrez, "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: the Francophone North African Text," *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, New York: Routledge, 1992: 127.

<sup>92</sup> Tageldin, 477.

Algeria's languages as a great crime of French colonialism,"<sup>93</sup> she embraces writing in it as an opportunity to appropriate the language for herself and to counter the oppressive weight of patriarchal Arabic.

At the time of writing *Vaste est la prison* in the early 1990s, Djébar faced an Arabic rendered violent in its usage enforced by both government policies and increasingly by radically militant religious and cultural groups, led by the FIS. Tageldin cites a speech given by Djébar in 2006 in which "Djébar calls on her audience to acknowledge that Algeria first experienced the French language in and as colonial violence ... [but] Arabic for Djébar is now the colonial executioner and French the wounded tongue. Indeed, she tacitly accuses the FIS of reopening the colonial wound of language by capturing the Algerian electorate and unleashing massacre on all who speak French"<sup>94</sup>. As Arabic increasingly became the language of power, religion, and the national culture of post-independence, it increasingly became "too male, too Muslim, and thus too 'alien' to Algerian origins."<sup>95</sup> These arguments, however, often risk erasing the fact that despite any potential complications to writing in Arabic, Djébar is constrained to write in French because she cannot write in Arabic. Her father, a French school teacher, mandated that her education took place in French primary and secondary schools, and as she frequently references in her novels, acted as her interlocutor with the language in complex ways: "In Djébar's novel, then, the twin powers of French colonialism and Algerian patriarchy collude as often as they collide ... The father's loving encouragement of French and violent interception thereof--selective affection, selective repudiation--epitomize the vexed relation of the

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<sup>93</sup> Tageldin, 471.

<sup>94</sup> Tageldin, 471.

<sup>95</sup> "Only in Djébar's scar-French can Algeria heal from the wounds of history, French and otherwise; only here can all Algeria's languages--except, perhaps, literary Arabic, which Djébar ultimately figures as too male, too Muslim, and thus too 'alien' to Algerian origins--survive." Tageldin, 473.

francophone Algerian writer to the French language...’’<sup>96</sup>. Djebbar was kept separate from Arabic in a manner typical of the painful linguistic dispossession brought on by French colonialism, which forced her to be dependent upon the French language as the access point to her own culture and history. French provides access to the archives for both the author and the subject, in a way that both makes the subject visible through the writing of the archives, while at the same time highlighting its objectification in the Other’s language. The author, by reading and writing about this subject in the Other’s language, becomes complicit in this objectification. In order to acknowledge this *problematique*, Djebbar continuously problematizes her interactions with French throughout the novel by utilizing several different methodologies such as deconstruction, suspension of her consciousness, and manipulation of the novel’s structure.

Through the structure of *Vaste est la prison*, Assia Djebbar undertakes an archeology of Algerian history which does not seek to identify an origin, but which seeks to affirm the numerous and complex relationships between history, language, writing, gender, and culture in society. The book is divided into four sections, and each section has its own history and type of exploration in which Djebbar manipulates the two senses of *histoire* in French, both story and history. Women narrate each layer of this structural archeology in different ways to achieve full representation in history and in the story, applying a methodology that follows Spivak’s theory:

The historian, transforming ‘insurgency’ into ‘text for knowledge’, is only one ‘receiver’ of any collectively intended social act. With no possibility of nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her own consciousness (or consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary training), so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness, does not freeze into an ‘object of investigation’, or, worse yet, a model for imitation.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Tageldin, 473-5.

<sup>97</sup> Spivak, 82.

By writing such a novel, Djébar undertakes an elaboration of an insurgency; in this case, the female Algerian insurgency. The traditional form of the novel is inadequate to the task, however, and so she reworks the structure in order to both suspend her own consciousness-effect as a historian author while formulating the insurgent-consciousness of the Algerian woman. A preface begins the novel by immediately problematizing two concepts: the role of the author, and the role of language. The first section establishes and then deconstructs the parallel oppositions of French and Arabic, and men and women. The second section examines and rewrites history, which is then followed by a third section in which women's voices telling their individual stories, the subaltern, become the narrators of history. The fourth and final section is the author's reflection on her historian's journey, the process of writing itself, and a contextualization of the project in her, and Algeria's, present.

As a historian, Djébar inevitably puts her own work as an author into question in this novel. The novel begins with her understanding of writing itself: "Longtemps, j'ai cru qu'écrire c'était mourir, mourir lentement. Déplier à tâtons un linceul de sable ou de soie sur ce que l'on a connu piaffant, palpitant. L'éclat de rire – gelé. Le début de sanglot – pétrifié."<sup>98</sup> Using similar vocabulary to Spivak's, she acknowledges the power, both beautiful and sinister, of writing in its ability to freeze life into an object rather than a subject. Having warned the reader, Djébar continues to write and starts to problematize the role of language. She does this not by directly problematizing French, as she does in her previous novel, *L'amour, la fantasia*, but by questioning Arabic:

Ce mot, *l'e'dou*, que je reçus ainsi dans la moiteur de ce vestibule d'où, y débouchant presque nues, les femmes sortaient enveloppés de pied en cap, ce mot d'« ennemi », proféré dans cette chaleur émolliente, entra en moi, torpille étrange ... En vérité, ce

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<sup>98</sup> Djébar, 11.

simple vocable, acerbe dans sa chair arabe, vrilla indéfiniment le fond de mon âme, et donc la source de mon écriture...<sup>99</sup>

The hammam is an important part of the traditional world of Algerian women, unique and significant to women for its sanctioning of vulnerability in contrast to their experience of the outside world. The word, *l'e'dou*, is set apart, isolated and put in sharp contrast to the warmth, familiarity and intimacy of the women's public bath house. If the aggressive nature of the word itself was not enough, its flesh also becomes bitter in this space because it is Arabic, a language which gives voice to the patriarchy and to the *différance* between men and women. This moment in the hammam is an example of powerful interactions between social spaces and language that twist and change the source and course of Djébar's writing.

Once the preface has acknowledged issues of authorship and language, the novel begins with the story of a contemporary Algerian woman written in the first person. Part One addresses conflicts between language and gender, seemingly by putting French and Arabic, and men and women, into simple opposition. During a phone call with a man referred to by the narrator as the *Beloved*, she switches from French to Arabic and immediately senses his discomfort and hesitation, prompting her to begin speaking in French again. In his explanation of his inability to speak Arabic later on in the conversation, the *Beloved's* anger and frustration with Arabic, coming from a francophone childhood, is clear: "L'arabe "langue nationale", comme l'on dit ici, j'y suis totalement fermé!"<sup>100</sup> His story and experience establishes a strict opposition between French and Arabic, while the narrator's childhood and personal experience establishes a dichotomy between masculine and feminine. She explains to the *Beloved*, "Vous seriez plutôt le fils de mon oncle maternel! Vous savez bien, la branche paternelle compte pour l'héritage, et

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<sup>99</sup> Djébar, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Djébar, 42.

donc pour les mariages d'intérêts, tandis que la lignée maternelle, par contre, est celle de la tendresse, des sentiments, de..."<sup>101</sup> The feminine is literally contrasted to the masculine in a difference of meanings that determines marriage, heritage, and emotions, structured by a clear dichotomy between the paternal and maternal sides of the family; the paternal branch of the family is the line of inheritance and profitable marriages whereas the maternal line is that of tenderness and feelings.

These dichotomies, however, are subverted by the unnamed presence of multilingualism in Part One, represented by both Tamazight and the narrator's distinct internal language.

Tamazight is the first to disrupt the binary conflict between French and Arabic through the use of irony: "“She [the Beloved's mother] was Berber, or in any case a speaker of Berber. But she always spoke to me in French, nothing but French!’ He laughed and added somewhat roughly, ‘Didn't you notice that I only speak French? Not a single Arabic or Berber word comes into my sentences. Nothing, no exception, no asides!’”<sup>102</sup> The Beloved's Amazigh heritage, due to the linguistic politics and dynamics of colonial Algeria, ironically placed him solidly on one side of the conflict without any recourse to another. Further on, a fourth unnamed language appears:

“Une voix en moi, blanche ... La voix se dévide nette et dure ; elle ne s'exprime ni en français, ni en arabe, ni en berbère, une langue d'au-delà, celle des femmes évanouies avant moi et en moi.”<sup>103</sup> While the language is spoken solely within the narrator, it has been and will be spoken by all women. This voice with no name is simultaneously personal and collective, unrestricted.

This fourth language is representative of the reality of language as a whole in Algeria:

simultaneously personal and collective; inseparable from gender and familial dynamics;

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<sup>101</sup> Djébar, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Djébar, 41.

<sup>103</sup> Djébar, 103.

unnameable because of its resistance to centralization, organization, identification. While acknowledging the reality of the conflict between French and Arabic, Djébar illustrates through deconstruction that a linguistic dichotomy is not sufficient to frame the complexity and the depth of the conflict, or *différance*, between men and women, which differentiates women to the extent that they become subaltern in society.

Despite her lack of agency in creating this deconstruction of gender and language binaries, the narrator of Part One, Isma, is not simply a symbol of femininity, but is closely modeled on Djébar herself. Her occupation as a researcher and historian is interwoven within the romantic, linguistic plotline and she takes on authorial agency as she begins to search for, record, and tell stories about other Algerian women: “Faire la quête d’abord. S’oublier dans les autres; les autres qui attendent. Les autres souvent muets.”<sup>104</sup> Isma plans to forget herself, to silence her consciousness, in this search for the waiting women, but as she pursues her research and finds herself making false assumptions (“Je salue deux très jeunes femmes en sarouel et tunique brodée ... Je les ai prises pour des citadines traditionnelles; ‘deux jeunes filles à marier’, les taquine mon accompagnatrice, mais je découvre qu’elles finissent leurs études de médecine à la capitale”<sup>105</sup>), Isma recognizes that her perspective is always influenced by others’ perspectives. This very brief episode serves as a powerful reminder, to both author and reader, of the complexity of the Algerian subject and the futility of the search for a lost, inviolable origin. She is well aware that the authors of the primary sources that she investigates influence her account, which she acknowledges as she recounts stories and history. In her research, Isma reads accounts written by Ibn ‘Arabi and interrupts a third person narration of his experiences with this aside:

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<sup>104</sup> Djébar, 46.

<sup>105</sup> Djébar, 47.

“Sous l’emprise du récit d’Ibn ‘Arabi évoquant ainsi son adolescence et ses années de formation mystique en Andalousie, je voyais avec précision sa route -- éclairée de passion -- qui menait vers Séville; j’imaginai le shaykh Abou Yacoub Youssef à cheval, lui, un des disciples les plus proches d’Abou Madyan...”<sup>106</sup> As a historian, Djébar interprets the events using both the archive and her own perspective in order to write history, but when the archive does not have all the details required to compose the full story, interpretation is supplemented by imagination. In shifting from third to first person perspective, mid-narration, and using verbs such as “see” and “imagine,” Djébar suspends the clamor of her own consciousness by, in fact, bringing it to the fore.

Part Two embarks upon an exploration of the ancient history of Algeria and North Africa, centered around how that history was recorded, and subsequently discovered and represented. Titled “L’effacement sur la pierre,” this section therefore takes up an investigation of language in terms of the act of writing. Djébar regularly pushes to remind the reader of the actual physical act of writing, and the creation of history through this physical process: “Le geste de Jugurtha ne sera pas écrite en langue berbère : les lettres de cet alphabet ... semblent d’elles-mêmes avoir pris la fuite ... Polybe, « le plus grand esprit de ce temps », qui va être septuagénaire, écrit.”<sup>107</sup> Despite the fact that Jugurtha is Amazigh, his story will not be written in his own language for an unknown reason, other than that the letters of the Tamazight alphabet seem to have almost fled from existence. Instead, the historian-narrator explains to the reader that Jugurtha’s story was recorded and narrated in Latin by a seventy year old Roman historian. The reality of Algeria’s past is that a traditionally Algerian hero such as Jugurtha lived during a time when the primary

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<sup>106</sup> Djébar, 72.

<sup>107</sup> Djébar, 156-7.

written language was an Other's language, Latin. The reality of the historian's discipline is their dependence on sources written in an Other's language, even when those sources date from the pre-colonial era, even from antiquity. By reminding the reader of the the reality of the past and therefore the limitations of her discipline, Djébar suspends the discipline's consciousness-effect.

In a continuation of her work in Part One, however, the historian-narrator also works to suspend her own consciousness throughout Part Two. Using a common storytelling technique, the narrator situates herself with the reader as she recounts a story: "C'est alors - après 1630 - que, pour nous, l'histoire commence."<sup>108</sup> Here, the narrator introduces the first person plural form, 'nous,' and interrupts a previously third person narrative to explicitly put herself in the position of a reader, even as she continues to also be a historian, by identifying herself with her own reader. Djébar uses this technique again just a few pages later, but this time goes even further by identifying both herself and the reader with the historical source: "C'est alors qu'intervient - joliment, il est vrai - son don d'une gazelle: l'*alzarón*, dit-il. Nous sommes fin 1633; en janvier 1634, il écrit que cette gazelle a été prise en Nubie."<sup>109</sup> The narrator recalls to the reader that the source, Thomas d'Arcos, is the one speaking to Djébar through his writing, and then she locates us in the year 1633, with Thomas as he is writing. Thomas becomes part of the group, made up of the writer, the reader, and the historian who is both reader and writer. The historian writes that which she has read, which is only ever that which other people have written: the narrative of history is a product of this process.

Part Three of *Vaste est la prison* builds on the two previous sections as the reader follows Djébar undertaking her ambitious and innovative project of revealing women's stories as history

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<sup>108</sup> Djébar, 122.

<sup>109</sup> Djébar, 124.

yet simultaneously weaving them into the very fabric of history. In claiming women's "anecdotal" stories as legitimate, she is on the one hand subverting and undermining existing narratives of history, while at the same time performing the act of a more pluralistic historiography.

While the first two sections of the novel contrast and subtly question the idea of personal versus historical narrative, by manipulating the order and structure of Part Three, these two seemingly distinct types of narrative become the same thing. This section of the novel alternates between chapters recounting the narrator's personal story as she produces and directs a film, and chapters telling the stories of women throughout generations of a family, communicated from aunt to niece, mother to daughter. Those telling the narrator's personal story are titled *Femme arable*, each numbered with Roman numerals. Now in the role of filmmaker, the narrator's story explores the challenges she faces as a contemporary female storyteller. These chapters then frame and inform the other chapters, which are each titled as a different "mouvement." In each movement, the reader directly receives women's histories as they are received by the narrator, now in the role of audience as opposed to storyteller. As the chapters progress, the difference between the two types of chapters becomes less clear. This analysis examines a sequence of two chapters in particular: *Femme arable II* and "2<sup>e</sup> mouvement: De la grand-mère en jeune épousée."

The *Femme arable* chapters are a critically important part of Djébar's attempt to represent the voices and stories of Algerian women because the inclusion of these chapters is a structural performance of theoretical concerns. They foreground the lasting impacts of colonialism and a patriarchal society that would otherwise be invisible: for example, an Algerian

woman can face limited access to the stories of other Algerian women, as demonstrated by the filmmaker's experience with the Madonna:

Je sus donc très vite que la Madone n'existerait que pour moi, en dehors du 'champ', qu'on ne pourrait acheter son image ... avec comme seule raison paraissant évidente: "Non, parce que son mari - mon fils - travaille à la capitale et est absent d'ici" ... Elle qui, la première, avec ce sourire timide offert à moi, aurait pu dire: "Je représente ici toutes les femmes que tes machines ne cerneront pas. Je suis la frange de l'interdit et je t'aime."<sup>110</sup>

Even though the filmmaker is working to represent an Algerian woman fully and honestly through her film, she is limited to representing one Algerian woman instead of Algerian women as a whole. Her cameras cannot identify the Madonna. The filmmaker-narrator's privilege as an educated, Westernized woman—educated in French—creates a *différance* in their experiences as Algerian women. She cannot access, and therefore cannot represent, the subaltern, and the reader becomes invested in the work that she therefore has to do as a storyteller.

The reader's knowledge of this *différance* then informs their reading of the movements in which the narrator tells the stories of the women of her family. The second movement, "De la grand-mère en jeune épousée," tells the story of Isma's grandmother. Married at fourteen to an eighty year old man, Fatima lived through experiences that her granddaughter would never have to fear thanks to her education. Isma's access point to her grandmother's story is her aunt, who through her placement between generations becomes historian and storyteller. Djébar again uses interruption in narrative perspective, and here also through dialogue, to draw attention to the orality of the story and to the ignorance of Isma, and her dependence on her aunt:

Or Ferhani donne sa deuxième fille, âgée tout juste de quatorze ans, à un vieillard de...  
- Soixante-dix ans? demandé-je.  
- Oh non, répond ma tante. On disait qu'il était centenaire!

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<sup>110</sup> Djébar, 222-3.

- Non, je rétorque, cela ne se peut! Et d'ailleurs, se serait-il remarié?
- La tante insiste:
- Les petits-fils de ce Soliman avaient déjà de la barbe!...<sup>111</sup>

Interrupting a third person narrative, the narrator inserts herself and her assumptions into history. By so doing, Djébar simultaneously allows and acknowledges that this is a specifically oral history, rather than attempting to conform it to the mode of written literature. Additionally, by including dialogue, Djébar is directly contrasting her narrator's ability to engage with the oral sources of history to the written sources of Part Two.

Finally, the novel concludes by discussing the questions of writing, history, and language in a first person reflection. The suspension of consciousness-effect continues here in Part Four: "Lors j'interviens, la mémoire nomade et la voix coupée. Inlassablement, j'ai erré aux quatre coins de ma région natale – entre la Ville prise et les ruines de Césarée, elle s'étend au pied du mont Chenoua, à l'ombre du pic de la Mouzaïa, plaine alanguie mais aux plaies encore ouvertes."<sup>112</sup> The entire work of the novel, the work of the historian and author, is an intervention in memory and history. Djébar avoids freezing the subject, Algerian women and Algerian history, into objects of investigation by continuously framing the personal and intentional, as well as academic and disciplinary, character of her work.

Djébar relates her, or her narrator's, journey and accumulated knowledge to Algeria's present. After having traced the development of the various routes of Algeria's history, cultures, and languages, she brings them into dialogue with the legacy of the War of Liberation and the rise of Islamic militancy at the end of the twentieth century:

Les morts qu'on croit absents se muent en témoins qui, à travers nous, désirent écrire !  
Ecrire comment ?

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<sup>111</sup> Djébar, 204.

<sup>112</sup> Djébar, 255.

Non en quelle langue, ni en quel alphabet – celui, double, de Dougga ou celui des pierres de Césarée, celui de mes amulettes d'enfance ou celui de mes poètes français et allemands familiers ?

Ni avec litanies pieuses, ni avec chants patriotiques, ni même dans l'encerclement des vibratos du *tzarlrît* !

Ecrire, les morts d'aujourd'hui désirent écrire : or, avec le sang, comment écrire?<sup>113</sup>

Like the *différance* of gender, the problem of writing—particularly writing history—cannot be contained and expressed by one language. The dead to which Djébar refers here are the dead of many eras within Algerian history: Jugurtha and the other Numidian-Amazigh ancestors who came under Roman rule; the narrator's great-grandfather and other Algerians who resisted the initial French conquest;<sup>114</sup> the *mujahidin* and martyrs of the War of Liberation; and the intellectuals being murdered by extremist violence as Djébar was writing. As she writes their history and their stories, she must try to identify what they have left behind—language, structure, alphabets, customs—with which to write the present, but she finds that death leaves behind nothing but blood. As Bensmaïa writes, “the predicament of postcolonial Maghrebi writers was never mainly that of knowing what to say—they were never truly lacking in subject matter—but that otherwise more sensitive question of knowing in what language to write.”<sup>115</sup> In *Vaste est la prison*, Djébar proves that there is not one language sufficient to say what she has to say as an Algerian woman. Despite her radical work that pushes the limits of theory and writing, Djébar still searches for a language through which *différance* can be expressed and in which *pensée-autre* can take form.

No part of this book tries to exclusively comment on any one aspect of Algeria. While there are allegorical aspects, such as the allegory of writing and death, these allegories are never

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<sup>113</sup> Djébar, 346.

<sup>114</sup> Djébar, 321-2.

<sup>115</sup> Bensmaïa, 69.

simple and straightforward due to the *différance* of language. Djébar's privilege of writing in French already separates her from certain audiences, including not only Algerians who do not know how to read or write French, but also those who are illiterate or who have no access to books. As an author facing this *différance*, Djébar continuously frames her use of French by acknowledging her personal privilege and her roles as historian and author, and by investigating the history of her country, all of which complicates Jameson's idea of a national allegory. Some scholars have argued that Djébar's writing posits an affinity between French and the "occluded" languages of Tamazight and dialectal Algerian Arabic due to the "equivalences" she draws between French colonial artists like Eugène Fromentin and herself in their efforts to represent and give voice to Algerian women.<sup>116</sup> Djébar, however, by drawing these equivalences reminds her reader of the fact that she is irrevocably linked to these men because of her role as a historian bound by the limitations of the archives. Throughout this novel, Djébar reminds her reader of the complexity of language dynamics and demands a reading as multidisciplinary and postcolonial as her writing in order to begin to understand the history and the experience of women and writing in Algeria.

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<sup>116</sup> "... only by writing from the margin of French can Algerian women recover their 'outsider' tongue, their marginalized women's voices and originary Tamazight and dialectal Algerian Arabic 'mother tongues.' Associating '[la] langue maternelle' [the mother tongue] with the silenced language of origins ..." Tageldin, 472.

Published in Arabic in 1985, *Memory in the Flesh*, *Dhakirat al-jasad* ذاكرة الجسد was a landmark achievement in Algerian literature. Not only is the novel written in Arabic by a woman, *Dhakirat al-jasad* is narrated from the perspective of a male painter and veteran of the Algerian War for Liberation. The inside flap of the English translation of the novel, published in 2003, describes the story as “concerned with Algeria’s struggle against foreign domination as well as its post-independence struggle with itself and the fate of revolutionary ideals in a post-revolutionary society” and that it combines a “convincing embodiment of a male voice alongside narrative techniques in which the author subtly joins the achievements of world literature with that of local storytelling and traditional modes of narration.”<sup>117</sup>

In order to effectively argue for her critiques of Algerian society post-independence, Mostaghanemi relies on an authoritative male voice as the novel’s narrator. She establishes his authority beyond his characterization as a well-educated war veteran by incorporating a strong intertextuality with both Arabic literary tradition and modern Algerian literature throughout the novel. This intertextuality also sets the stage for the linguistic tension between French and Arabic in the story, which is heightened by the occasional intrusion of French language and references to Western culture. By choosing Arabic as the language in which to author her critique of Algerian society as well as her vision for a progressive future, Mostaghanemi asserts Arabic as the language of liberation for all Algerian citizens.

From the very beginning of the novel, *Dhakirat al-jasad* establishes an intertextuality with classical Arabic literary tradition by incorporating recognizable elements of classic, well-known

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<sup>117</sup> Ahlam Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, translated by Baria Ahmar Sreih, revised translation by Peter Clark, Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2003.

works, especially classical poetry. One of the earliest instances takes place in the first chapter as the protagonist and narrator Khalid begins to write:

فأشعلت سيجارة عصبية، ورحت أطارد دخان الكلمات التي أحرقتني منذ سنواتوت ... هل الورق مطفأة للذاكرة؟ نترك فوقه كل مرة رماد سيجارة الحنين الأخيرة، وبقانا الخيبة الأخيرة.. بينما أسحب نفساً من سيجارة أخيرة، يرتفع صوت المآذن

[Nervously, I light a cigarette and chase through the smoke for the words that for years have seared my soul ... Is paper a dustbin for the memory, a place where we always deposit the ash of the last cigarette of nostalgia, the remnants of the final disappointment? ... As I take another puff of my last cigarette, the loudspeaker on the minaret blares away.]<sup>118</sup>

Khalid's nostalgic reflection on the as-yet unnamed lover, materializing among the smoke of cigarettes and their ashes, recalls the poet's nostalgic remembrance of his lost love as he stares at the ashes of his love's abandoned campsite. This is a direct reference to pre-Islamic poetry when the authors of the *معلقات*, the suspended poems<sup>119</sup>, would open their odes at the beloved's campsite reflecting on time's passing and the whereabouts of their object of affection.<sup>120</sup>

Elizabeth Holt identifies a subtle and extensive reference in chapter three to Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's poem "Unshudat al-matar" (انشودة المطر, or "The Song of the Rain"): "... the protagonist Khalid invites Ahlam/Hayat out onto his 'balcony' (*shurfa* شرفة). The word repeats twice more in the space of the next four lines, and then the novel briefly moves to the 'tears' (*dumu*) of the city, before repeating the word 'rain' (*matar*) six times over the course of nine lines. Khalid then speaks of Hayat/Ahlam's 'eyes' (*aynayki*)."<sup>121</sup> Although Holt argues that any

<sup>118</sup> Mostaghanemi, 28 *ذكره الجسد*, *Memory in the Flesh*, 2 and 15.

<sup>119</sup> The best odes were selected for the extraordinary honor of draping the Kaaba at the heart of Mecca.

<sup>120</sup> McLarney also notes this reference: "The novel itself opens with Khalid contemplating the memory of Ahlam over the ashes of an extinguished cigarette ('nostalgia's last cigarette'), much like the poet of classical tradition, mourning over the ashes of the abandoned campsite, carrying on a dialogue with the phantom (*tayf al-khayal*) of his past." McLarney, 36.

<sup>121</sup> Holt, 130.

reader familiar with classical Arabic literature would detect this subtle reference,<sup>122</sup> Mostaghanemi also offers the reader a more direct reference when Khalid is so moved by Hayat/Ahlam's eyes that he recites the first two lines of al-Sayyab's famous poem. She demonstrates here an ability not just to cite classical Arabic poems, a respected skill in Arab-Muslim culture, but also to interweave elements of that poetry into her own writing. Such nuanced and impeccable exemplification of, and therefore placement within, the norms of the historically male-dominated Arabic literary tradition have in fact led to claims of the book being written by male Arab authors.

Mostaghanemi also embraces an intertextuality with modern Algerian literature in *Dhakirat al-jasad* by using certain techniques that are characteristic of her predecessors' writing, notably the intrusion of another language in the text as a way to introduce linguistic tension. Unlike authors such as Rachid Boudjedra and Kateb Yacine, Mostaghanemi does not include French in her writing, but "she includes the occasional intrusion of French"<sup>123</sup> in a way that recalls Boudjedra's inclusion of Arabic intrusions in his francophone works.<sup>124</sup> Holt cites Khalid and Ahlam/Hayat's initial meeting as an example, in which Khalid explicitly calls attention to the linguistic distance between the two languages: "In the Arabic text, Khalid asks in French written in French: 'And how are you, Miss?' The next line in the Arabic text reads, in Arabic: 'And you responded to me with the same linguistic distance,' followed by Ahlam/Hayat's response in French written in French: 'Fine, thank you.'"<sup>125</sup> These are just two lines of an entire

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<sup>122</sup> "the novel relies on an Arabic readership that is able to parse *the novel's investment in and intertextuality with the Arabic literary tradition.*" Holt, 123.

<sup>123</sup> Holt, 133.

<sup>124</sup> When Boudjedra switched to arabophone writing in the 1980s, he would continue this practice of the intrusion of other languages into his text; as in Mostaghanemi, French was the intruder into an Arabic literary world. Holt, 128.

<sup>125</sup> Holt, 134.

conversation that takes place in French, and the “counterfactual reading” required by its expression in Arabic does create a linguistic tension for the reader.<sup>126</sup> The physical separation of the lines of French from the rest of the Arabic text, however, creates the orthographic shift that represents the radical difference between speaking French and Arabic for these two Algerians living in exile.<sup>127</sup>

The linguistic tension caused by this radical difference represents what Holt refers to as “the Algerian national linguistic drama.”<sup>128</sup> The Tunisian author Albert Memmi analyzes the linguistic dynamics that emerged from colonialism in North Africa in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, arguing that North Africa is “neither a purely bilingual situation in which an indigenous tongue coexists with a purist’s language (both belonging to the same world of feeling), nor a simple polyglot richness benefiting from an extra but relatively neuter alphabet; it is a linguistic drama.”<sup>129</sup> In Algeria, at least two languages could be considered indigenous to Algerians, Tamazight and Algerian Arabic (*darija*), and in the place of one “purist’s language” exist two languages of prestige and of violently opposed power structures, French and standard Arabic. Considering the role of indigenous languages in the text, Holt argues that the sense of intimacy Algerian Arabic (*darija*) creates when it appears in the text illustrates “the distance between colloquial and standard, written Arabic, itself a major issue in Algerian (and other Arab)

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<sup>126</sup> “The decision that Ahlam/Hayat and Khalid only speak in Arabic from this disclosure forward reads in the Arabic original as a resolution of a linguistic tension in the text, a tension represented to the Arabic reader both by the intrusion of lines of French into the text, as well as by the counterfactual reading that the Arabic demanded when the majority of this conversation ‘in French’ appeared in the text in Arabic.” Holt, 135.

<sup>127</sup> Holt writes that “the ‘atomizing, pulverizing’ style of Kateb Yacine or Rachid Boudjedra’s French writing” does indicate difference, “but this difference would be that between mainstream French and French from a decolonizing Algerian perspective. It would not measure the linguistic distance between Arabic and French from a decolonizing Algerian perspective. The contexts cannot be made commensurate; the distances being measured are not the same.” Holt, 136.

<sup>128</sup> Holt, 140.

<sup>129</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1st American ed. New York: Orion Press, 1965: 107-8.

linguistic debates.”<sup>130</sup> These inclusions of Algerian Arabic are as close as Mostaghanemi comes to exploration of indigenous Algerian languages, however, as she makes no reference to Tamazight at any point in the novel.

Despite this lack of acknowledgement of roles played by indigenous languages in Algeria, Mostaghanemi still manages to portray at least part of the Algerian national “linguistic drama,” to quote Memmi’s wonderful description, with depth and complexity. As Memmi argues, both languages in situation that could be categorized as purely bilingual, as opposed to a linguistic drama, must belong “to the same world of feeling.” There is a radical difference between the worlds of feeling to which French and Arabic belong, however, which can be illustrated by two examples. For Ahlam/Hayat and Khalid living in exile in Paris, French has become “‘rote’ language, no longer the language of feeling, love, or creativity;”<sup>131</sup> Ahlam/Hayat speaks in French out of habit, not out of heart, as she tells Khalid emphatically during one of their first conversations.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, Arabic belongs to a world of incredibly strong feeling. Some of the most powerful manifestations of linguistic drama in the novel take place around Arabic, such as when Khalid quotes Malek Haddad: “When lines of Haddad’s writing appear in the Arabic text *in Arabic*, Mustaghanemi is legibly enacting a sort of postmortem linguistic liberation for Haddad’s words before the novel’s Arabic readership.”<sup>133</sup> The difference between French and Arabic here is of such emotional significance for both the audience and the author

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<sup>130</sup> Holt, 135.

<sup>131</sup> Tageldin, 492.

<sup>132</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 56.

<sup>133</sup> Holt, 133.

that the translation and writing of Haddad into Arabic represents a linguistic liberation parallel to the national liberation achieved two decades previously.<sup>134</sup>

The intertextuality with both Arab literary tradition and francophone Algerian literature used to illustrate the Algerian linguistic drama also serves another function, providing the male narrator's voice and point of view with authority. Her narrator's authority and reliability permits Mostaghanemi to conduct "an extensive study of the nature of the masculine narrative voice"<sup>135</sup> in both classical Arabic and modern francophone Algerian literature, and to critique this narrative voice through imitation and parody. Muhsin al-Musawi also argues that use of the male perspective allows for bypassing of moral and societal norms<sup>136</sup> in order to comment on issues of gender, as well as national identity and interpretations of history. The placement of *Dhakirat al-jasad* within both classical Arabic and modern Algerian literature is demonstrated through Khalid's understanding and portrayal of women, namely his mother, his French lover Catherine, and his Algerian love Ahlam/Hayat. He represents each of these women with tropes found throughout modern Algerian literature, both arabophone and francophone: the mother, the foreigner, the woman-object, and the woman-symbol.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> As I note in the Introduction and Chapter One, Tamazight writers and intellectuals are employing a similar strategy in order to liberate texts from the others' languages in which they were originally written by writers of Amazigh descent both past and present. By translating these works into Tamazight, they too are also "enacting a sort of postmortem linguistic liberation" for the words of Apuleius and Saint Augustine, Kateb Yacine and Mohammed Choukri, and others before their Tamazight audience.

<sup>135</sup> McLarney, 24.

<sup>136</sup> "While the narratee is more at home with a discourse of revolutionary rhetoric that slides into poetic adoration, there is an intimate suggestion that the male protagonist is given this narrative space to bypass moral strictures which a woman writer cannot escape in her own voice. ... These intimations occupy a substantial space in *Dhakirat al-jasad*, but their feminist twist is submerged into a large body politics, which attempts to cut across cultures, poetics, liberation movements, ideologies, and women."

Muhsin J. Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*, Boston: Brill, 2003: 238.

<sup>137</sup> Mostaghanemi identifies these in her own literary research and divides her book *Algérie: femme et écritures*, analyzing the presence of women in modern Algerian literature, into the different tropes of women that appear in the literature. McLarney, 27.

Khalid's relationship to his mother can be characterized as the orphaned protagonist and son of a repudiated, idealized mother. Mostaghanemi defines the repudiated mother in *Algérie: femme et écritures* as a wife who understands that "le mari avec qui elles partagent leur vie ne leur appartient pas. ... C'est uniquement cet enfant qui peut leur offrir enfin l'assurance et la stabilité dont elles ont besoin dans une maison où elles se sentent souvent étrangères" [the husband with whom they share their life does not belong to them. ... Only this child can finally offer them the assurance and stability that they need in a house where they often feel like strangers].<sup>138</sup> This type of mother appears notably, and frequently, in Boudjedra's novels, where his protagonists' mother is one wife among many, repudiated and lost within the so-called "harem" of the household.<sup>139</sup> In *Dhakirat al-jasad*, Khalid explains of his mother during his tumultuous adolescence that

أمام انشغال أبي عني وعنّها، بتجارته وعشيقاته، أصبحت لا تطلب من الله إلا عودتي لها، وكأنني الشيء الوحيد الذي يمكن أن يبزر وجودها، والشاهد الوحيد على أمومتها وأنوئتها المسلوبة.

[While Father was preoccupied with his business and his lovers, she would ask God only that I return to her in safety, as if I was the only thing that gave meaning to her life, the only witness to her motherhood and her diminished femininity.]<sup>140</sup>

In this dynamic, with the traditional paternal figure excluding himself from the family, Khalid becomes the primary masculine presence of the family and household and therefore develops a complex, powerful bond with his mother.

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<sup>138</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 48.

<sup>139</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 67.

<sup>140</sup> Mostaghanemi, 331 ذكره الجسد, *Memory in the Flesh*, 213.

Conforming to Mostaghanemi's characterization of the orphaned son trope,<sup>141</sup> Khalid is so attached to his mother that upon her death, he is dramatically affected to the point that he makes the reckless decision to join the resistance. Although each martyr has a different story, due to a certain lack of self-awareness the young Khalid sees his relationship with his mother as totally unique:

واكتشفت في المناسبة نفسها، أنني ربّما كنت الوحيد الذي لم خلفه سوى قبرٍ طرّ لأمّ ماتت مرضاً وقهراً، وأخٍ فريد يصغني بسنوات، وأب مشغول بمطالب عروسه الصغيرة.

[At the same time, I discovered that I was probably the only one who left behind the fresh grave of a mother who died from sickness and a broken heart, one brother a few years younger, and a father too busy with the demands of a young bride]<sup>142</sup>

It is not until much later in his story, at the end of his most passionate and emotional love affair at the age of fifty-two, that he is able to realize how much his relationship with his mother impacted his life. By the fifth, and penultimate, chapter of the novel, Khalid finally registers that he has been making implicit comparisons of other women to his mother for his entire life, and understands the futility of these comparisons:

"أمّا" عوّضتها بألف امرأة أخرى.. ولم أكبر. عوّضت صدرها بألف صدر أجمل.. ولم أرتو.. فلماذا في لحظة جنون تصوّرت أنك امرأة طبق الأصل عنها؟ لماذا رحت أطلبك بأشياء لا تفهمينها، وبدور لن تطاليه؟

A thousand other women took Mother's place and I never grew up. I replaced her bosom with a thousand others, still lovelier, but I never had enough. ... Why did I, in a moment of madness, imagine that you were a woman as she was? Why did I go on asking you about things you did not understand, requiring you to play a role you could not play?<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup> "Attachés à leur mère comme par une relation de chair, tous ces héros supportent très mal sa disparition. Un tel malheur ... constitue souvent pour eux l'heure du bilan et des grandes décisions" [Attached to their mother as though by a connection of flesh, all of these heroes deal very poorly with her disappearance. Such a misfortune ... often constitutes for them the hour of evaluation and grand decisions].

Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 59. My own translation.

<sup>142</sup> Mostaghanemi, 26 ذاكرة الجسد, *Memory in the Flesh*, 14.

<sup>143</sup> Mostaghanemi, 333-4 ذاكرة الجسد, *Memory in the Flesh*, 215.

This final aspect of the orphaned son trope that Mostaghanemi portrays in *Dhakhirat al-jasad* is the long-term impact of the mother on her son's relationships with other women, namely that all other women will seem insufficient in comparison to her. Khalid finally becomes aware of his internalization of these stereotypes of the mother-son relationship as a result of the knowledge he gains from his affair with, and subsequent rejection by, Ahlam/Hayat.

Initially, however, Khalid subjects Ahlam/Hayat to a similar metaphorical representation. He portrays her, in both his imagination and his paintings, as what Mostaghanemi in *Algérie* terms "la femme-objet," or the woman as object. His objectification of Ahlam/Hayat begins with his reflection on her name, given to her by her father, and registered within the legal system by Khalid himself: "Between the first letter *alif* of the word *alam*, 'pain,' and the first letter *mim* of the word *mut'a*, 'pain,' was your name, Ahlam, 'dreams.'" <sup>144</sup> Khalid draws the two letters of *alif* and *mim* together, forming the word *umm*. McLarney points to the multiple, significant meanings of this word in Arabic, ranging from mother to essence; taking the meaning of mother, she argues that "implicit in this image, too, is a relationship with a woman that is virtually sexless."

<sup>145</sup> In another interpretation, by writing Ahlam as *umm*, Khalid reduces her to a symbolic image, an essence. Tageldin further asserts that Khalid objectifies Ahlam/Hayat in his actual naming of her, when he registers her name as Ahlam in the Tunisian legal system for her father even though she has already been given the name of Hayat by her mother. <sup>146</sup> As mother, essence, and dreams,

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<sup>144</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 21.

<sup>145</sup> "By joining the first and last letters of Ahlam's name, the *alif* and the *mim*, Mustaghanami forms the word *umm* (mother, source, origin, foundation, essence, original version) ... The word also connotes an idealized original, while Ahlam is repeatedly described as a "copy" of Si Tahir, of Khalid's mother, of Constantine. ... Implicit in this image, too, is a relationship with a woman that is virtually sexless." McLarney, 32.

<sup>146</sup> "In a metaphor for an Algerian liberation struggle that originally promised new roles for women yet reconsigned them to male domination after independence, Hayat [Life] becomes abstracted as Ahlam [Dreams] at the hands of both her father and his surrogate, Khalid, the would-be lover ..." Tageldin, 490.

Ahlam/Hayat is deprived of her sexuality, of her complexity, and of her reality, becoming a one-dimensional object.

These and the countless other object metaphors for Ahlam/Hayat that appear throughout the text are indicative of how crucial it is for Mostaghanemi to locate *Dhakirat al-jasad*'s critique of this male-dominated world squarely within both classical Arabic and modern Algerian literature. McLarney writes that "Khalid, the representative of the contemporary Algerian writer, most resembles the classical poet in his cloaking of women in layers of metaphor. In the canon of pre-Islamic poetry that served as a model for subsequent generations, the bodies of women were further and further abstracted through long strings of similes and metaphors (as a camel, an oryx, a gazelle, a palm tree, a lightning bolt, etc.)."<sup>147</sup> Included in the "subsequent generations," however, are the male writers of twentieth century male Algeria; in *Algerie*, Mostaghanemi identifies the symbol of a gazelle alone used as a metaphor for women within at least three Algerian literary works written by male authors, both poetry and prose.<sup>148</sup> The object metaphor that appears the most often in *Dhakirat al-jasad*, however, is Khalid's ceaseless representation of Ahlam/Hayat as a bridge, which literally constructs her as object in its implicit comparison of her to a physical, architectural structure.

Not only does the bridge metaphor represent Ahlam as woman-object, this inanimate object is also representative of the city of Constantine, itself signifying homeland and Algeria: in Ahlam's representation as a bridge, Khalid also imagines Ahlam as woman-symbol. The concept of woman as symbol, used in modern Algerian literature most notably by Yacine and Haddad, is

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<sup>147</sup> McLarney, 36.

<sup>148</sup> In the writing of Algerian women, Mostaghanemi locates the effect of this tradition in a tendency to focus on the self, both the body and the consciousness. In response to being veiled or cloaked by others, they lay themselves bare. Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 201-10.

articulated by Mostaghanemi in *Algérie*: “Le rôle de la femme algérienne comme gardienne du patrimoine commun a fait d’elle le symbole le plus vivant de la patrie et de l’identité algérienne. A chaque étape de la lutte ce symbole prenait les traits de la situation prévalant dans le pays” [The role of the Algerian woman as guardian of the common heritage has made her into the most engaging symbol of the homeland and of the Algerian identity. At each step of the fight this symbol took on the characteristics of the prevailing situation of the county].<sup>149</sup> Khalid repeatedly tells Ahlam/Hayat that she represents Constantine for him, and that by painting the bridges of Constantine he is actually painting her.<sup>150</sup> The portrayal of the woman as symbol is more complex than simple imagery though, and Ahlam’s characterization begins to resemble how Khalid characterizes both Constantine and Algeria: beautiful and full of potential, but lost and in need of guidance. McLarney argues that in Khalid’s mind, “Ahlam is emblematic not of the dreams of the future, but the dreams of the past and of the period of the war,”<sup>151</sup> but the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, Khalid’s hopes for Algeria’s future are the ideals of the past, and in seeing Ahlam as Algeria’s future, he imposes on her the ideals of the past. For example, he pushes for her to speak only Arabic with him<sup>152</sup> and to maintain a memory of her (and his) cultural heritage and traditions.<sup>153</sup> He also co-opts her critiques of Algerian society, comparing them to his own, when he says that she looks like him “in your proud injuries and in

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<sup>149</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 173.

<sup>150</sup> One example: “I had never made love with my homeland through painting ... ‘You’ve put life into it [the painting],’ I said. ‘It’s you.’ ... ‘You are a city, not a woman.’” Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 107-8.

<sup>151</sup> McLarney, 31.

<sup>152</sup> “‘Look, let’s only talk Arabic to each other. I’m going to change your habits.’” Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 57.

<sup>153</sup> “‘You must realize that you will not understand anything of the past you are looking for, nor of the memory of the father you never knew, unless you understand the traditions of Constantine and adhere to them. We don’t discover our memory by looking at a picture postcard or even a painting like this one’” Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 77.

your provocative style of challenging the nation.”<sup>154</sup> In his compulsion to guide and teach Ahlam, Mostaghanemi illustrates Khalid’s actual desire to redirect Algeria to its former guiding principles, which he is only able to enact by imagining Ahlam as woman-symbol.

In stark contrast, Khalid’s French lover Catherine is painted superficially, yet realistically, in her role as the foreign woman. This portrayal is both metaphorical and literal. Following the model that Mostaghanemi describes of the “l’étrangère” trope,<sup>155</sup> Khalid represents Catherine as unsubstantial, capricious, and promiscuous: “She took the keys of my flat from me and flew off like a butterfly in her yellow dress. ... did she suddenly become jealous for me or of me? Or was she already lusting for me when she arrived?”<sup>156</sup> Their love, according to him, could never last, which is made manifest by his realist painting of her. McLarney conducts an extensive analysis of the language used around this literal portrayal of Catherine:

When talking about this painting, Khalid disparagingly remarks that Catherine is a woman ‘painted only with realism.’ The key words used to describe this realism are ‘completely exposing’ (*tafaddaha tammaman*), metonymically repeating the root *fadaha*. Khalid uses the verb *fadaha* in the sense of disclosing or revealing, but there is also the implied meaning of dishonoring or shaming through such exposing, in the sense of a *fadiha*, shaming, degradation, debasement, or disgrace<sup>157</sup> ... The symbolization of women is thus a means of elevating and protecting them from their inherently (sexual) nature. It also has the effect of concealing their bodies and sexuality.<sup>158</sup>

While Khalid seeks to protect Ahlam/Hayat from both him and herself by veiling her in the symbolism of bridges, he exposes and shames Catherine by painting her realistically. Ironically,

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<sup>154</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 67.

<sup>155</sup> “...toute relation avec une étrangère a été vouée à l’échec. Même si l’étrangère n’est souvent qu’une amante, son amour reste hypothétique” [...every relationship with a foreign woman was doomed to failure. Even if the foreigner is often nothing but a lover, her love remains hypothetical] and she is “décrite sous les apparences d’une femme légère, frivole, égoïste” [described as a promiscuous, frivolous, egotistical woman] Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 78-9. My own translation.

<sup>156</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 45.

<sup>157</sup> “In the classical Arabic poetic tradition, the explicit naming of a woman was a way of bringing disgrace to her, her family, and her tribe.” McLarney, 35.

<sup>158</sup> McLarney, 35.

her metaphorical reduction to the trope of foreigner in his own imagination makes him feel compelled by an external force, seemingly Catherine herself, to portray her this way in his art.

As the novel progresses, Ahlam/Hayat resists Khalid's one-dimensional metaphors and layers and seeks to be portrayed with depth and complexity through realism like Catherine by holding Khalid accountable to his own misconceptions and assumptions. The image<sup>159</sup> that Khalid creates of both his mother and Ahlam/Hayat is epitomized in his location of *umm* in Ahlam's name: idealized as essences, as voiceless objects. In bringing together the first and last letter, however, he ignores the letters in the middle and creates a fault line in which "Mustaghanami dismantles these idealized, perfected images of women ... The word *hall*, formed from the middle two letters of the name A-hl-am أ--حل--ام, not only denotes dissolution and breaking up, but also freeing, liberation, and release"<sup>160</sup> Ahlam/Hayat liberates herself from Khalid's metaphors through her comparison of romanticism and realism in his art. When she sees his painting of her, which is actually of a bridge in Constantine, she says, "You're dreaming ... How can you make a comparison between me and that bridge? How could an idea like that cross your mind? ... Any woman who meets a painter has a secret dream that he will make her immortal, that he will paint her, not that he will paint her city."<sup>161</sup> Ahlam tells Khalid explicitly that his painting is of her city, not actually of her, and that he is only dreaming in thinking that he painted her at all. There is such a difference, in fact, between her and the bridge that she does not understand how he could even make a comparison between the two; Ahlam remains firmly grounded in reality, insistent that she has "no kind of relationship" with that bridge. Many

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<sup>159</sup> "He tries to graft his *hanin*, the view from his childhood home and the image of his mother, onto Ahlam, a vision she ultimately rejects." McLarney, 31.

<sup>160</sup> McLarney, 33.

<sup>161</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 109-110.

authors of contemporary Arabic literature in the twentieth century called for the use of literary realism to provide an image of revolution and war that could fully represent their complexity.<sup>162</sup> Mostaghanemi extends the potential of literary realism to provide nuanced representation of women in which their own perception of themselves is heard and fully realized in its complexity. Only by listening to women's real voices and stories will society be able to have an open—exposed, even—conversation on the real experience of women in Algeria.

In its clear and detailed depictions, realism does not permit the veiling that representation as woman-symbol creates. Ahlam admits that every woman's secret dream is also her dream, that she wants to be seen, saying, “‘I must admit,’ you answered bashfully, ‘that my dream, right from the beginning, was to have you paint my portrait’”<sup>163</sup> Ahlam wants from Khalid what Mostaghanemi sees in the writing of female Algerian authors, a focus on the self and the body,<sup>164</sup> and she refuses to accept that he can provide this for Catherine but not for her:

By rejecting the notion that in ‘French’ womanhood comes to light whereas in ‘Arabic’ women must be an absent presence, loved in secret, Ahlam ends a colonial past in which Algerian women were defended as the last bastion of authenticity against French conquest.<sup>165</sup>

Tageldin here also reveals that within Khalid's representation of women as symbols of country lies an implicit parallel between country and language. Khalid believes that Algerian women can only be represented in Arabic, the language of symbols and veils, because by portraying her in French, he would render her as—thereby transforming her into—a French woman. By writing in Arabic, Ahlam deconstructs this binary, and therefore the metaphor of woman-symbol, because

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<sup>162</sup> “By drawing this contrast between reality and irreality, realism and romanticism, Mustaghanami evokes a central debate in contemporary Arabic literature.” McLarney, 34.

<sup>163</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 110.

<sup>164</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Algérie*, 199-200.

<sup>165</sup> Tageldin, 494.

her writing is necessarily realistic: “A woman who writes is a woman beyond suspicion because she is transparent in her nature.”<sup>166</sup> By writing in Arabic, Ahlam/Hayat exposes herself in a way that Khalid cannot at first comprehend, of which he complains when he first reads one of her novels: “I raced breathlessly from one page to the next, as if I was looking for something other than what I was reading. . . . Nothing but an illusion. You did nothing for me in that book of yours except create bitterness, pain, and stupid jealousy, whose venom I tasted for the first time.”<sup>167</sup> He is forced to admit here that his expectation is “nothing but an illusion,” and because of her honesty, he is forced to see her as she truly is: not his, free from her role as woman-symbol.

By liberating herself, she also liberates Khalid. Tageldin asserts in an extensive argument that the Algerian man’s “stunted perception of Algerian women issues from a masculinity that *itself* is stunted by the traumas of colonialism and failed nationalist revolution,”<sup>168</sup> of which Khalid, too, is a victim. Khalid began painting after he was advised to express himself artistically in order to heal emotionally from the loss of his arm. Although he initially wanted to write, like Haddad he did not want to write in the language of the colonizer, and yet was also not proficient enough to write in Arabic: “Having lost not just his left arm to anti-colonial battle but also, figuratively speaking, his right arm—ostensibly his writing arm—to the silencing effect of French, Khalid has suffered in effect a double amputation.”<sup>169</sup> Yet, as he realizes over the course of his affair with Ahlam,<sup>170</sup> painting is inadequate to heal his colonial wounds; indeed, painting is

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<sup>166</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 214.

<sup>167</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 81.

<sup>168</sup> Tageldin, 483.

<sup>169</sup> Tageldin, 486.

<sup>170</sup> “As he ultimately must acknowledge (“*Sa ughayyiru aydan ‘adati*” (92) [I too will change my habits]), he shares with Ahlam the ‘habit’ of speaking French that he initially implies is hers alone. It is Ahlam’s determination to write in Arabic--and the unwelcome comparison her writing invites to his painting--that inspire Khalid to insist on Arabic in conversation and eventually to kick his habit, in turn, of not writing in Arabic: a habit of which he alone is ‘guilty.’” Tageldin, 493.

another form of colonial violence.<sup>171</sup> He will only be liberated from his colonial traumas when he is able to write in Arabic, which he achieves only when Ahlam herself is free: on the day of her marriage to another man.<sup>172</sup> Gender-based oppression, according to Mostaghanemi, is fundamentally related to the violence inflicted by colonialism.

Mostaghanemi's search for liberation from oppressive gender dynamics, then, is fundamentally related to her quest for liberation from the effects of colonialism on Algerian society. While I would argue against claiming that Khalid represents Algerian men as an entity, Mostaghanemi has firmly located him within this entity by modeling his narrative voice on prominent male Algerian authors. In addition to the societal authority he gains as a reliable male narrator, his background as a wounded veteran of the War of Liberation gives him the authority necessary to make such comments as: "There he was, a cultural phenomenon in the military world. Or was it the other way around? Or was it that this unnatural marriage had become natural since the plague of jobbery had spread in more than one Arab military headquarters?" and "My homeland was absent that evening. Its wounds and its ugly new face were there instead. It was a French evening. We spoke in French about foreign-interest projects financed by Algeria. Had we really gained our independence?"<sup>173</sup> Born just before the start of the war, Mostaghanemi herself would have no authority to speak on the ideals and principles that inspired the war, nor the state of these ideals in present-day Algerian society. Khalid, on the other hand, is constantly reinforced in his legitimacy, even through his constant references to Constantine, as Musawi argues: "The city ... is also recalled to endorse the narrator's vision, for it is a city that is

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<sup>171</sup> Tageldin argues that painting, as a "specular tongue," is anchored in a visuality and asymmetrical cultural economy intrinsic in French colonialism in Algeria. Tageldin, 487-8 and 495.

<sup>172</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 223.

<sup>173</sup> Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 154.

‘destined to be revolutionary, militant, and rebellious to the end.’”<sup>174,175</sup> Khalid is a legitimate narrator for these critiques of neocolonial Algerian society, but he is only able to give voice to these critiques because of his liberation through Ahlam and through Arabic. A female author and the Arabic language, then, Mostaghanemi seems to say, are the true liberators of the Algerian nation.

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<sup>174</sup> Musawi, 284.

<sup>175</sup> Mostaghanemi puts aside the city’s, as well as the country’s, Amazigh past in *Dhakirat al-jasad*. She describes Constantine on page 13 as an “ancient Arab city” despite its notable history as a capital of Numidia in the Roman era, and she frames its pre-Arab history as separate from the present: “Your love would sometimes seem to me a mythical tale larger than both of us. Something preordained centuries ago, when Constantine was a city called Cirta.” Mostaghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 122.

## Conclusion

When I first began this project, my object of analysis was Algerian language dynamics as expressed through contemporary literature. As I began to study scholarship on the topic, however, the term “dynamics” proved too vague. What I actually wanted to study was why certain languages were valued over others, and how that was embodied in individuals’ lives, because Algeria’s linguistic situation is not simply multilingual, but diglossic. Individuals choose to use French instead of Arabic, or Algerian Arabic instead of Arabic, etc., in a certain moment not just because of the circumstances in that moment; rather, individual language use is regulated at a societal level. The politics of language are larger processes, both historical and contemporary, that regulate language use within society. As Kilito might say, these processes create a language’s story. In this thesis, I sought to explore the history and heritage that have engendered the current politics of language in Algeria and how Algerian authors wrote the politics of the language in which they chose to write into their writing.

Assia Djebar chose the French language to write her novel, *Vaste est la prison*, in which she asserts that no one language is sufficient to give voice to her experience as an Algerian woman, let alone the experience of those less privileged than her. Her writing is radical in the methodology that she applies to frame her use of French. Through the novel’s structure and narrative voice, she foregrounds her personal privilege, acknowledges the demands and limitations of her roles as historian and author, and investigates the history of her country. By the end of the novel, Djebar still searches for a language through which *différance* can be expressed and in which *pensée-autre* can take form. Yet in her expansion of the limits of both theory and literature, she is able to enact a performance of *pensée-autre* in French.

Ahlam Mostaghanemi chose to write her novel, ذاكرة الجسد *Dhakhirat al-jasad*, in Arabic to argue for its unique position as a language of true liberation for Algeria. To argue that Algeria is not yet liberated is to critique contemporary Algerian society, and in order to effectively do so, she interweaves both classical Arabic and contemporary Algerian literary tradition into the fabric of the novel. She is critiquing a male-dominated world, both literary and societal, and so she positions herself squarely within those worlds by writing through a traditionally acceptable, reliable male narrator: a wounded veteran of the War of Liberation who is intimately familiar with classical Arabic literature and holds the same perspectives as the majority of twentieth-century male Algerian authors. Khalid is a legitimate narrator to critique the corruption and malaise of neocolonial Algerian society, but he is only able to give voice to these critiques because of his liberation through Ahlam, and through Arabic. A female author and the Arabic language, then, Mostaghanemi seems to say, are the true liberators of the Algerian nation.

Again, by bringing these two novels by female Algerian authors with such seemingly conflicting premises into dialogue, I hope to bring attention to the ability of Algerian women to represent their diverse, multicultural, and multilingual community. In *The Tongue of Adam*, Kilito traces the search for the original language in which Adam wrote the first poem, an elegy to mourn Abel. The second poem ever written, however, was written by Eve, and Kilito writes, “Unlike Adam’s long lament about the unendurable fact of death, Eve’s poem shows a mastery of despair.”<sup>176</sup> Eve accepts the reality of death, not only by embracing the inevitability of death, but also its immense sadness. Both Djébar and Mostaghanemi exemplify this confrontation of reality and acceptance of complex truths. Rather than remaining within the confines of diglossia,

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<sup>176</sup> Kilito, 46.

these women fight for female emancipation and equality in their writing by fully representing and giving voice to the tongues of Eve.

In the future, I hope to conduct further analysis on these two novels, and these authors. The second half of *Vaste est la prison* especially deserves further attention to study the juxtaposition of women's voices in Part Three, as well as the suggested dialogue with the dead in Part Four. My engagement with the theoretical aspects of this novel could also be much more profound. In particular, I hope to develop a stronger argument on the interplay between Derrida and Khatibi, and the ideas of *différance* and *pensée-autre*. In *Dhakirat al-jasad*, Mostaghanemi draws a complex network of meaning between the ideas of memory, language, and flesh that could have composed another ten pages, at the very least. While that was not within the scope of this current work, it merits further study and would add another level of complexity to my reading of the text. Finally, I had originally planned to have a fifth chapter in which I would directly compare the two works, which I still believe would be beneficial. There is still so much to explore, and I look forward to re-reading both novels for many years to come.

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