

## Algerian Women and the Traumatic Decade:

Daoudi, Anissa

*License:*

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Daoudi, A 2017, 'Algerian Women and the Traumatic Decade: Literary Interventions', *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*.

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

## Algerian Women and the Traumatic Decade: Literary Interventions

Anissa Daoudi

&lt;SPACE&gt;

Discourses of trauma are common in Algerian literature and are inseparable from the political, social and economic situation of the country. This paper seeks to challenge official narratives and to highlight discourses of trauma in relation to two aspects. The first is about the way Algerian women writers have coped with the traumatic history of Algeria and used writing to remember, to heal, to construct, and to unveil layers of history. The second aspect is about celebrating polylingualism and multiculturalism and promoting the variety of languages to dismantle the hegemonic narratives of the past (pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial past).

Polyglossia in Algeria is not new; it did not start with French colonialism but rather goes back to the invasions of the Greeks and Romans of the Berber territories, followed by the Arabs in the 600s: "From this moment until the 12th century, Berber, Arabic, and Latin were used in Algeria. Turkish and Spanish invasions from the fifteen century onwards added to the already present linguistic pluralism . . ."1 Linguistic trauma narratives can only be understood within the long histories of trauma, with local cultural, religious, gender and social oppressions in mind. In this paper, special attention will be given to the Civil War of the 1990s, known as the "Black Decade," which has been eclipsed from memory and remains unknown to this date due to the Amnesty Law, which forbids Algerians from dealing with that period. Prior to that, I provide the historical context that led up to the 1990s, followed by theoretical reflections on trauma in literary narratives. The final section is an analysis of selected Algerian women's writings, including Fadhila Al Farouq's novel in Arabic, Taa Al Khajal (1998),<sup>2</sup> and Assia Djebar's three novels written in French, as reactions to the Civil War, namely, Le Blanc de l'Algérie (1995), Vaste est la Prison (1995), and Oran, Langue Morte (1997). Ahlem Mosteghanemi's novel, Dhakirat al-Jasad (Memory in the Flesh) (1993) is also mentioned to illustrate and challenge narratives of the colonial past in a comparative way. The selection of novels purposefully illustrates Algerian trauma narratives in literature, written in Arabic as well as in French, with the aim of establishing whether or not language choice influences the textualisation of the content. Furthermore, the comparison between the three writers exposes two different historical periods in Algerian history (War of Independence and the Civil war). For example, Al Farouq's novel deals with the conflict in the 1990s and highlights rape as a recurrent theme in the history of Algeria. As a specifically sensitive issue, loaded

with cultural assumptions and values, rape is chosen in this study not only to construct discursive narratives of trauma, but equally to highlight other trauma narratives that are woven into the fabric of the Algerian society, like patriarchal discourses and regionalism, which are accepted and normalised. In other words, while rape is the overarching theme in Al Farouq's novel, other, equally important, traumas are embedded in Algerian society and need to be shown as social traumas.

<SPACE>

A war that refuses to speak its Name?3

The history of Algeria's colonial era and its liberation war are well known and well documented, so is the complex social situation in post-independence Algeria which eventually gave the Front de Liberation National (FLN) complete control of the country. The FLN was responsible for narrating and formulating the official historiography of independent Algeria and "set out to decolonise history".<sup>4</sup> The official Liberation War narratives were framed by what is also known as "the Arabophone intellectual elites' role in shaping national history."<sup>5</sup> In practice, this meant that narratives of war became the work of men only. The two points raised in this section (the FLN's power and the male/masculine system of "decolonisation of history") seem to be separate. In reality they are not only interrelated, as I will show, but also extremely complex and represent the core of a struggle in independent Algeria.

The question asked by Jacob Munday, which gives the title to this section--"A war that refuses to speak its Name?"--is a question that remained unanswered for some time in Algeria. Naming the decade that costed more than 200000 Algerian lives as "war" is still debatable: "Throughout the conflict, Algerian officials vehemently rejected the label civil war."<sup>6</sup> Their preferred words were "crisis," "national tragedy" and "events." Louisa Hanoune, Head of the Workers' Party (Parti des Travailleurs) still rejects the term civil war, as she would rather talk about the death of civilians. It was only when President Bouteflika was elected in 1999 that the term was used in his attempt to distance himself from that era, known as the "Black Decade." As for the factors that contributed to the emergence of violence in Algeria, although the invalidation of the elections by the army was the direct cause, in reality several other factors were responsible. The principal factor was the sharp decline of oil and gas revenues, as global prices fell to very low levels in early 1980s. For a country like Algeria, which relies extensively if not entirely on the revenues from its hydrocarbon resources, the blow was felt badly. As a result, the government could not subsidise or maintain the social welfare of the country, which led to mounting debts to foreign creditors. The high

birth rate in Algeria was another factor that contributed to the social crises of overcrowded schools, hospitals, lack of housing, and so forth. Algeria is one of the youngest countries in the world, where more than half of the population are between 20 and 30 years old. The unemployment rate was very high and the youth had no glimpse of hope that the situation would get better. More importantly, the educational system was supposedly being Arabised, but in reality, the administrative sectors remained largely Francophone, which meant that as far as jobs were concerned, the priority was given to those who could communicate with the external world (mostly France). This situation applied to both the private and the public sectors, which meant that the Arabophone (Arabisant) candidates were basically excluded from the job market. Many of them were encouraged to study Islamic Sciences at university level, to find themselves once again with no clear idea of what they could do with their degree. Many were later targeted by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and some recruited by the Armed Islamic Group known as GIA (Groupes Islamiques Armes). At the level of "women's fights for equality," in 1984 the Algerian government issued the new Family Code that legalised gender discrimination between men and women. Marnia Lazreg calls 1984 "the year of the rupture between women and their government and women and the radical questioning of the state's legitimacy."<sup>7</sup> Zahia Salhi notes that the discriminatory provisions of the Family Code have exacerbated and legitimized violence against women and made it difficult for them to deal with the consequences of widespread human rights abuses.<sup>8</sup>

In October 1988, hundreds of young Algerians took to the streets protesting against unemployment, poverty, lack of freedom of speech and corruption. The riots started in Algiers and spread to other cities, resulting in about 500 deaths and 1000 wounded. As a result, the State decided to amend the constitution and to allow a multi-party parliamentary system. A few parties were created including the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The election results came as a big shock to the government. The FIS won the first round of elections in 1991 with 54% of the seats. It was presented as the party which would replace the corrupt FLN and fight against injustice and for social and economic reforms. Soon, change started to appear in the public sphere, such as the imposition of hijab on women employees,<sup>9</sup> the separation at work between men and women and the banning of cultural activities seen as "against the principles of Islam."<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that before widespread physical violence against women began, verbal abuse in Algeria was common as early as 1989, according to the analysis of Dalila Lamarene Djerbal.<sup>11</sup> As the FIS seemed likely to win the second round of elections in 1992, the government decided to cancel the

elections and declared the new party (FIS) illegal. The FIS declared war against the army, the regime and its representatives, and also against civilians. In the same year (1992), the armed groups (the Islamic Army of Salvation (AIS), the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and other related groups) "carried out a series of bombings, killings, slaughtering, abductions, rapes, village massacres, beheadings etc."<sup>12</sup> The armed groups targeted people working for the government, starting with women and then members of police forces, their families, intelligence, the army, journalists, artists and all intellectuals. According to Farhat Slimani (2015), the number of deaths was around two hundred thousand Algerian civilians. <sup>13</sup>

As far as writings of the Civil War are concerned, Benjamin Stora in his book La Guerre Invisible, Algérie, Années 90 argues that numerous young Algerians began to write about the atrocities seen in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> According to Christiane Achour, the number of works published between 1998 and 1990, included 70 by women alone.<sup>15</sup> This large number of writings remains linked to the violent nature of that time and to the misunderstandings and the falsifications of history. These writings narrate the traumas of the horrific daily life (le quotidien) in Algeria in the "Black Decade." The Algerian women literary scene can be divided into decades. In the 1970s, it was limited to a few names such as Djamilia Debeche and Marguerite Taos Amrouche, followed by the early work of Assia Djebar. It was in the 1980s that emerged other names, leading to a boom in the 1990s, as mentioned above. Examples include Djebar's three works (in French) that address the "Black Decade" as both biographical and narrative reflections and work in Arabic by Fadhila al Farouq. After independence, female Algerian writers took on the mission of giving voices to their fellow Algerian women who could not write themselves. These authors, including Djebar, Malika Mokeddem, Leïla Sebbar, Maïssa Bey, Nina Bouraoui and many others, learnt the lesson that "silence is a crime" as stated by Miriam Cooke in her book Women and the War Story.<sup>16</sup> As Mehta Brinda suggests, women's writings in Algeria, as opposed to the male dominated literature, offer "gendered perspectives that feminize and complicate Algerian historicity and postcolonial subjectivity."<sup>17</sup> For Brinda, "Algerian authors dispel monolithic representations of women as passive victims of colonial and nationalist and religious ideology, even as they demonstrate how masculinist ethics of war have ravaged the female body and women's history through violence, silencing and exclusion."

<SPACE>

#### Trauma Studies and Literary Narrative

Trauma narratives in postcolonial studies have been studied bearing in mind psychological approaches that take into consideration the effects of

"colonialism and decolonisation on the colonised or formerly colonised, as well as colonisers."<sup>18</sup> In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon theorizes the psychology of both the colonizer and the colonized and argues that colonialism is a system of domination held together by violence. His analysis based on race, shows the exploitation of the native by the settler. He argues that "colonialism dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, turns him into an animal, and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its victory"<sup>19</sup> For Fanon, the effects of violence on the victims/survivors, as well as the colonizers, are long lasting and cause among Algerians scarred by French colonial rule not only physical distress but also psychological disorders. Marnia Lazreg emphasizes in the same context that any study of the colonial mind must engage with the cruelties perpetrated as part of the imperial claim that the colonized communities are subordinate and inferior.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, narratives of trauma were mainly about male Algerian fighters and warriors, while women were not mentioned in what is known historically as "the Algerian Syndrome." <sup>21</sup> Yet, female Algerian war veterans of the War of Independence fought alongside their male comrades. However, as soon as Algeria became independent in 1962, female war veterans were sent home to revert to their traditional roles. In her work on Trauma and Recovery (1992), Judith Herman asserts that women who have survived violence (e.g. rape) often experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in a similar way like men.<sup>22</sup> Herman defines trauma as an event which "overwhelm[s] the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning."<sup>23</sup> Dominick LaCapra adds that "trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered."<sup>24</sup> This means that trauma is not simply an act in the past, but it is "relived endlessly in the present through repeated painful re-enactments, nightmares, hallucinations and flashbacks. The past intrudes insistently on the present . . ." <sup>25</sup> What is missing in LaCapra's definition is the notion of trauma as a discursive construction. In the case of Algeria, the violent past of colonial Algeria overlaps with the violent Civil War and is reflected in the daily lives of Algerians' present. Discussions on how to be oneself in relation to others in contrast with "recent concepts of the self, influenced by Marx, Freud and feminist theories focus on the ways the self is formed in relation to others and is sustained in a social context."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, our notion of selfhood is informed by the "cultural context in which we live, between the language made available and the structuring of experience we have adopted. Trauma

fractures selfhood by breaking this continuous narrative, serving the connections among remembered past, lived present, and projected future.”<sup>27</sup>

Cathy Caruth recognises that trauma “is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature--the way it was previously not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on”.<sup>28</sup> The notion of the “enduring and ultimately unknowable and inexpressible nature of traumatic wounding” is relevant to this study. Caruth’s focus on the impossibility of exact and “ultimate” knowing does not oppose or contradict the notion that narrative is curative and that “trauma victims may come to terms with their traumatic experiences.”<sup>29</sup> This is useful in the Algerian context, where the country has seen two wars in a relatively short space of time (the Liberation war 1954-62 and the Civil War in the 1990s). Caruth’s emphasis on the discursivity of curative narratives is of equal importance. Judith Herman finds that construction of trauma narratives as a way towards healing. Hence, the importance of literature in representing and dramatizing trauma in various manifestations is acknowledged. It is to literature that Algerian female writers turn to construct their view of a better Algeria. They fight with their pens to heal, to build and to remind the world of their fellow women, Algerian ‘Moudjahidāt’, in Arabic, female Algerian war veterans, a source of inspiration for a large body of literature both in Arabic and in French. Yet, the reality concerning the fate of these freedom fighters is far from rosy. As it was not possible for “Moudjahidāt” to document their contribution to the War of Liberation, it was and is the same for women who were subject to violence and trauma during the “Black Decade.” For “Moudjahidāt,” the silencing was through different means, including the Arabisation movement of the 1970s. They were denied jobs because they did not master Standard Arabic, as they were French educated and knew only the Algerian dialect and in some cases Berber. Another way of silencing “Moudjahidāt” was through their idealisation by reducing them to abstract “symbols of nation without citizenship rights.”<sup>30</sup> Being reduced to a symbol of the mother-land and the subsequent “dehumanization” resulting from it happens frequently in nationalist rhetoric. Survivors of the “Black Decade” on the other hand, were silenced for example by the Amnesty Law (1999, 2015). Both cases of silencing of Algerian women are still generating controversial arguments. As consequence, women are excluded from taking an active part in the nation building process.

<SPACE>

Ahlem Mosteghanemi’s views on language and writing in Algeria

بين ألف الألم وميم المتعة كان اسمك

تشطره حاء الحرقه... ولام التحذير. فكيف لم أحذر اسمك الذي ولد وسط الحرائق الأولى؟، شعلة صغيرة في تلك الحرب. كيف لم أحذر اسماً يحمل ضده ويبدأ ب((أح)) الألم واللذة معاً. كيف لم أحذر هذا الاسم المفرد- الجمع كاسم هذا الوطن، وأدرك منذ البدء أن الجمع خلق دائماً ليقسم.31

[Between the alif (letter /a/) of alam (pain) and the mim (letter /m/ of muta' (pleasure) was your name. The (letter /ḥ/ of ḥurqa (burning/agonny) bisects it [your name] . . . as does the lam (letter /l/) of caution. For how can I not be cautious of your name that was born amidst the first fires (ḥaraiq), a small flame in this war. How can I not be cautious of a name that carries its opposite and begins with the "aḥ" of pain (alam) and delight together? How can I not be cautious of this solitary name? plural like the name of this nation (watan), when I realized from the beginning that the plural is always created in order to be divided].32

<SPACE>

In a creative and generative move, the prominent Algerian writer, Ahlem Mosteghanemi, dissects her first name "Ahlem," plural of "dream" in Arabic, to uncover the meanings of agony, torture, pain, burning and war. With similar words, in a telephone interview Mosteghanemi explains why she writes:

I write for Algeria, I write for my father, the son of Constantine, who fought the French and dreamt of a free Algeria. . . I write for Malek Haddad, whom I love and from whom I get my inspiration. Malek Haddad, the son of Constantine, who also dreamt of an independent Algeria. Haddad, who took the oath not to write in a language that is not his and died in silence. Both my father and Malek Haddad were sons of Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama,33 both died heartbroken. I write for them, for me, for the character I created, Khaled Ben Toubal, who resembles me, who narrates my pain, my grief, my defeat, my father's and Haddad's defeat, pain and sorrow. I chose a masculine language to give a voice to women. 34

Similar to Mosteghanemi's name, words like colonialism, violence, death, horror and lately, fanaticism and extremism, are evoked when Algeria is mentioned. The book Djamila and Picasso and the film The Battle of Algiers, known to the general public, depict Algerian women playing an active role in the revolution. In the Arab collective memory, Algeria is known as the country of "The Three Djamilas," an Arabic name, meaning "beautiful" and referring to three Algerian women war veterans called Djamila Bouheird,



Djamila Boupasha and Djamila Bouazza, standing for the fight against the coloniser during the Liberation War (1954-62). In a recent book, Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria 1954-2013, Natalya Vince thoroughly analyses the gender discourses in Algeria since the revolution of 1954. She sheds light on the dynamics behind silencing Algerian female war veterans, referring to the "academic, popular and semi-official argument that Algerian women have been forgotten in the writing of Algerian history."<sup>35</sup>

Mosteghanemi's interview illustrates the burden she carries on behalf of her fellow Algerian men and women alike. Her reference to the linguistic battle that erupted in independent Algeria denotes her clear stand for women's emancipation, yet through a masculine voice or language. Her reference to her father and to Malek Haddad is not as straightforward as it appears, it is more complex, as I argue, because it is related to Algeria, to Arabic, to the religious institution and to women's issues. Mosteghanemi makes an argument for the language she uses in her trilogy, and "in a voice of a suffering, effectively castrated Algerian male narrator whose stunted perception of Algerian women issues from masculinity that itself is stunted by the traumas of colonialism and failed nationalist revolution."<sup>36</sup>

Mosteghanemi is presented in this paper for two reasons. The first is to expose her views on language and Algerian women's emancipation question and the second to practically organise her representation and dramatization of the Liberation War in writing, showing the different ways Algerian men and women cope with traumas. It is worth mentioning that while Djébar sought coping with trauma in French, as I argue below, Mosteghanemi argues the contrary. She believes that it is through Arabic and Arabic alone that Algerians (men and women) can heal. Mosteghanemi deems that for Algerian women's liberation to happen it should not be done at the expense of Algerian men and Arabic language and that both men and women need to be freed.<sup>37</sup> On her personal website, Mosteghanemi speaks about her father and recalls his decision of sending her to study Arabic, though he was a teacher of French. Proud of his daughter, he encouraged her to write about love, sex and taught her to be free. Arabic language becomes a tool for emancipation and for freedom. Through her writing, Mosteghanemi presents the power of narratives through a male narrator called Khaled in Dhakhirat al Jassad (Memory in the Flesh) and a female character called Ahlem in Faoudha al Hawās (Chaos of the Senses). Through her two characters, Mosteghanemi demonstrates that memory is gendered and that men and women deal with trauma differently. The choice of place is significant: the male narrator Khaled leaves for France, whereas Hayat, the female character stays in Constantine, where violence is part of the daily living.

Therefore, Khaled's traumas of the past in addition to his exile disempower him and prevent him from moving on with his life. He is constantly battling with his past (Algerian War) and his present (exile in France). Hayat, on the other hand, lives the present as a successful writer, who faces new challenges as part of her daily life, finds ways of coping with her traumatic past and present as well as with her patriarchal society. More importantly, Hayat's writing as a solution to her traumatic present represents Mosteghanemi's emancipatory idea and a way for Algerian women to go forward. Writing becomes the fence Algerian women have to build against their internal weaknesses and the bridge with their social realities. Writing for Hayat is therapeutic and a way to represent trauma. Nevertheless, in the 1990s writing can be a reason to lose one's life.

<SPACE>

Djebar's Narratives of the 1990s

Djebar's novel Le Blanc de l'Algerie (1995) translates a specific historical phase (the "Black Decade") into narratives that picture what was going on in Algeria. In this novel she narrates the 1990s, but not in her usual fictional writing or autobiographical style. Instead, she immerses herself in the « quotidien », as cited by Mireille Calle-Gruber, who argues: "L'écrivain (Assia Djebar) n'aura jamais collé d'aussi près à l'actualité (fait divers, fait privé, fait politique) et cependant jamais elle n'aura cessé de se tenir au cœur de la langue de poésie." [The writer (Assia Djebar) would have never been so close to news (news items, private news and political news). However, she never stopped to stand at the heart of the language of poetry].<sup>38</sup> In other words, Djebar would not have gone into such detail about the daily life in Algeria, if it were not to report the violence and to document the history of Algeria in the 1990s. The novel, which was translated into English as Algerian White: A Narrative in 2003 by Marjolijn de Jager and David Kelley, "is an impressively multifaceted attempt to grapple with the bloody conflict and the assassinations of Algerian intellectuals."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, trying to make sense of the atrocities is a complex cognitive operation that defies human attempts to make sense of the bloody conflict. Djebar asks: "Dites-le donc tout haut, amis: à quoi ça sert de tuer un poète?" [Say it out loud, friends: what use is there in killing a poet?],<sup>40</sup> but the question could also apply to the number of journalists, activists, university professors who also lost their lives for an article they wrote or a demonstration they took part in. Djebar is well placed to go back and retrieve the past, for which she uses analogies of violence taken from the colonial period to understand the present and to make us as readers wonder whether there has been any interruption of violence between the two wars of Algerian history

(War of Liberation 1954-1962 and the Civil War in the 1990s). Trauma, as Cathy Caruth argues is "evidence of a wounded psyche that cannot move on from a particular event. In doing so, the wounded psyche repeatedly attempts to recall the past event--often called the primal scene--in an effort to understand it, yet the psyche cannot fully access it because the event is unknowable.<sup>41</sup> In other words, trauma is not just about the violent event itself, but the incomprehensibility of that event.

Djebar's stand on language changed over time. What is relevant to this paper is her 2006 address speech to the Académie in Paris, where she declared her "break with Arabic and full embrace of French."<sup>42</sup> Her endorsement of French does not mean forgetting the traumatic colonial past, which has left generations of Algerians in turmoil. In the address speech, Djebar reminds the French of the wounds created by colonialism, which affected at least four generations and calls her audience to acknowledge the French language as colonial violence. Yet, when she thinks of the language question in the 1990s, she realises that Arabic is "now the colonial executioner and French the wounded tongue."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, French is no longer a language of fear; instead, it is a language through which women's emancipation happens. Arabic monolingualism is the new threat for Djebar, as it excludes the other and kills the other (in reference to Algerian intellectuals killed in the 1990s for being Francophones). In this case, with French becoming part of the healing process, Djebar can denounce colonialism and can contribute to the construction of traumatic narratives and the writing of history.

As mentioned above, the violence of the 1990s changed the way Djebar imagined not only the role of language in her country, but also the place of her country in her language. At the height of the attacks on intellectuals, journalists and artists, Djebar interrupted her Strasbourg writing project because of an urgent need to write a response to the growing terror in her country. The resulting texts were Vaste est la Prison (So Vast the Prison) (1995), Oran, langue morte (Oran, Dead Language), (1997) and Le Blanc de l'Algérie (The White of Algeria) (1995). "Each interrogates the self-destruction of the author's homeland without making sense of it, and tries to reimagine a linguistic landscape in which a multiplicity of tongues would replace the dichotomy of French and Arabic."<sup>44</sup> In the 1990s, French became synonymous with secularism and the language battle became an ideological one. For Djebar, who first considered French as the booty of war or the poisonous gift (as in L'Amour, la Fantasia [1985]), later started to infuse Arabic and Berber in her new language. "But Djebar's ability to make sense of Algeria's language politics, and her desire to cast its traditional polylingualism in a

positive light, faltered as her characters and her real-life friends and colleagues began to fall victim to the violence of young Islamists."45 She realized that her "dream of an Algeria where one can flow freely between languages, where identity is flexible and not tied down to language, dissipates and is forgotten."46 Djébar attempted to depoliticize the language by arguing that the flow of languages is a natural and an organic process in the history of any nation that has seen different linguistic intersections. For her, "a nation is an entire bundle of languages and this is especially true of Algeria."47

Djébar's texts convey her inability to understand the new world imposed on her and on Algerians and which made no sense. The inability to comprehend the killing of Algerian intellectuals, in what is called intellocide, is something that not only Djébar, but the whole of Algeria is struggling to come to terms with at the present time. Francophones and Berbers, who were called Hizb Fransa (the Party of France) by their opponents, were the target of Islamists. Tahar Djaout's killing is an example of an intellectual who was hit by a bullet in the head for being secular, for speaking out his mind and for refusing to die in silence. Djaout's famous words became a slogan for fighting against silence:

<SPACE>

Silence means death  
 If you speak out, they kill you.  
 If you keep silent, they kill you.  
 So, speak out and die

<SPACE>

Djaout's slogan was lifted on banners by the left wing women's organization RAFD who took to the streets of Algiers, calling for democratic Algeria. Women were also targeted by Islamists. In Oran, Langue Morte (1997), Djébar takes the language tension and the violence associated with it in Algeria to discuss the killing of women language teachers. It was in the same year (1997), on the 27th September at 15:30, as stated in Djazairouna's archive that 12 teachers from the Western part of Algeria (near Sidi Bel Abbès) were slaughtered.48 The only survivor of this carnage was the bus driver, intentionally spared so that the horror could be told in detail. The women were young; the oldest was not forty years old. For the 1990s, the Sidi Bel Abbès's incident represents a cultural trauma: ". . . as opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion."49 In this sense, the trauma is not only individual but collective. It may

also be called a "national trauma," as defined by Arthur Neal (1998) "a 'national trauma' according to its 'enduring effects', and as relating to events 'which cannot be easily dismissed, which will be played over again and again in individual consciousness', becoming 'ingrained in collective memory.'"50 The killing of teachers has been remembered every September by certain organisations such as Djzairouna, Réseau Wassyla, SOS Disparus, Observatoire Violence Femme OVIF and a few others from the Education sector. They continue to do so despite the Amnesty Law (1999-2005) that forbids people from remembering the "Black Decade" in public.

Djebar responded to the killing of the teachers in her short stories Oran, Langue Morte, in a chapter called "La Femme en Morceaux" (The Woman in Pieces). Atyka, the female teacher of French at a high school decides to tell her students a tale from A Thousand and One Nights when four armed men burst into the classroom and execute Atyka in front of the children in her classroom. Atyka is accused of teaching obscene stories to the children. For Djebar, language became the reason for tearing "its speaking subjects apart."51 Djebar, as a historian by training, needed to represent stories, moments, feelings and give voices, particularly to women. In fact, Algerian women's writings would not have emerged and developed if it were not for the work of the pioneer Djebar who documented the War of Independence and engraved the role of women in the War of Liberation in Algerian history. Her themes evolve around:

[T]he role of women in Algerian society, a theme the author addresses from historical and ethnographic, as well as autobiographical perspectives. The second arises from a sense of anguish arising from an impression of ambiguous cultural complicity with colonial society; common perhaps for an Algerian intellectual of her generation who found herself steeped in French culture on one hand, yet longing for a distinct, autonomous national culture on the other. Thirdly, most of her works are oriented toward contributing to a national imaginary, recalling, rehearsing, and retrieving Algerian experience as she perceives it.52

<SPACE>

#### Fadhila Al Farouq's Trauma Narratives

In this section, the focus is on the reference to the linguistic situation in Algeria, as depicted in Al Farouq's novel Ta'al khajal (2003), which has been translated into French La Honte au Féminin (2009). It is the first novel to narrate the atrocities of the 1990s against Algerian women. It is also the first novel to denounce rape and sexual violence against women in Algeria in the 1990s and to talk about the phenomenon as a weapon of war. Despite its size (94 pages), it is an important work that

illustrates the two points I argue in this paper, namely, the Algerian female writers' call for documenting Algerian women's traumatic narratives and the concept of polylingualism in Algeria. The main character is called Yamina, a young woman from the Eastern Berber side of Algeria, who speaks Tamazight (Chaoui dialect).<sup>53</sup> The language of the novel exemplifies polylingualism. Al Farouq uses French in a spontaneous way, in the same way Algerians speak in their daily lives. For example, in chapter four, called دعاء الكارثة , "Prayer for Disaster" (60), French is used directly when Khalida interjects: Sois Bref.. خالدة [be brief Khalida]

Also, in chapter six, called الموت والأرق يتسامران "Death and Insomnia in a Nightly Entertainment" (69), French is embedded within an Arabic statement:

<SPACE>

أحقا لم تفهمني انت الذي تعرف أن Le romancier ne romance que sa vie "أحقا؟  
["Did you, who says the novelist imagines only his own life" Really?"]

<SPACE>

These passages written in Latin script not only imitate the naturalness of using French in the Algerian dialect but also demonstrate its applicability. This style is far from the traditional restrictions imposed by the use of the standard form of writing in mainstream Arabic literature. In addition, the author uses a variety of dialects including the Algerian, Egyptian, and Levantine to reflect the natural speech of the characters. And when she suspects lack of understanding on the part of the reader, she provides a translation from Berber (Chaoui) into Arabic in footnotes, such as in in chapter seven, called جولات الموت "Death's Excursions" (75)

<SPACE>

عشر سنوات تقريبا , كان لا ينام الا بجانبى , لا يأكل الا من يدي , عادة أحضر له  
المفاس...

[For nearly ten years, he would only sleep next to me, he would only eat from my hand (what I cook), usually I prepare 'Mafas' for him]. Mafas is explained in a footnote.

<SPACE>

Code switching and code mixing are common in Algeria.<sup>55</sup> This is what makes the Algerian dialect polyglot and multicultural. The novel is written in an autobiographical style, in which the language used represents the daily lives of Algerian. Through this language, Al Farouq documents a case of rape narrated in chapter three, called "مربوطة" لا غير "A closed letter /t/ (ð) and nothing else" (36), that is a female and nothing more since the closed letter /t/ is a marker of feminine in Arabic language. She also includes statistics:

<SPACE>

سنة 1994 التي شهدت اغتيال 151 امرأة , واختطاف 12 امرأة من الوسط الريفي  
المعدم .

[The year 1994 has seen the killing of 151 women and the kidnapping of  
12 other women from poverty-stricken rural Algeria]

<SPACE>

The numbers of women killed or kidnapped in one year is what makes the author call it the "year of shame." By giving exact numbers in a straightforward language, the author is documenting women's side of history, something lacking in the Algerian official history of the War of Liberation. In doing so, Al Farouq highlights related issues that are not spoken about in the Algerian society, such as "regionalism," what she calls poverty-stricken peripheral Algeria, known locally as "villes de l'interieur." It is a phenomenon that divides the fabric of the Algerian society, yet not talked about. Here the author records traumas of women of "l'interieur," who suffer injustice, poverty and estrangement in their own society. One notes that she is not referring to the division based on social class, but on where one comes from in Algeria. Al Farouq exposes the ugly side of Algeria, a side other than "Alger la Blanche," in order to construct a different narrative to the official one and to present it as a social imbalance. The latter "are rarely witnessed directly and immediately, but are crystallized and become available for experience only in the reconstruction of the past."<sup>56</sup>

The linguistic analysis of the novel reveals multiple layers and raises the question of polylingualism in Algeria. In the following passage, I will present two cases of linguistic twists to explain in one example the closeness and the intimacy of dialect and in another the strangeness and the "artificiality" of the Arabic language.

In chapter four, called دعاء الكارثة , "Prayer for Disaster" (56), the author uses a footnote to say that the above passage is from a document found after Bentalha Massacre.<sup>57</sup> It reads:

<SPACE>

"اذا كانت سبية و امها , دخلت على امها , فلا يجوز ان تدخل على ابنتها .  
اذا وطأها الأول فلا يجوز وطؤها الا بعد ان تسترئ بحیضة.... ,

<SPACE>

[In the case of both al sabiya (sex slave) and her mother,  
And you had sex with the mother, then, it is not allowed that you have  
sex with the daughter]

[In the case of having sex with al sabiya, it is not allowed for  
another [man] to do the same, until she was purified with her period]

<SPACE>

The purpose of including the document is not only to present classical Arabic in as alien to Algerians, but also to document and construct traumatic narratives of Bentalha Massacre. The passage reveals the re-appearance of classical Arabic, which ordinary Algerian would not comprehend.<sup>58</sup> It is a language that started to appear with the emergence of Islamic movement in Algeria. This language symbolizes the appearance of fanaticism and oppression for Algerian women. It is this language, which Djebbar addressed in her three novels, written as responses to the collective trauma that hit Algerians in the Civil War, as I discuss in this paper.

In another passage, Al Farouq shows the intimacy of using the Algerian dialect, to refer to the word 'rape', when she says:

<SPACE>

هل تعرفين ماذا يفعلون بنا؟ انهم يأتون كل مساء و يرغموننا على ممارسة "العيب" و حين نلد يقتلون المواليد, نحن نصرخ و نبكي و نتألم و هم يمارسون معنا "العيب"....

<SPACE>

[Do you know what they do to us? They come every night and force us to 'perform the shameful act' (rape us) and when we give birth, they kill our babies...we shout, weep, we cry in pain as they perform the forbidden and shameful act' on us (rape us)].

<SPACE>

In the above passage, Yamina is the one who cannot use the word "rape"; instead she opts for a more intimate word, a word in the Algerian dialect, which is vague, as there is no exact acceptable word in the dialect for rape.

Al Farouq moves to another level of intimacy in relation to language when she says:

<SPACE>

طوال الطريق و أنا أفكر كيف سأكتب في الموضوع, بأية صيغة, بأي قلب, بأي لغة, بأي قلم؟ أقلام القرابة لا تحب التعدي

[I was thinking all the way about how to write about the topic, in which way, with which heart, in what language, with what pen? Pens of kinship don't like violating]

<SPACE>

She adds:

"كيف هي الكتابة عن أنثى سرقت عذريتها عنوة؟"

[How does one write about a female whose virginity was stolen from her by force?]

<SPACE>



Al Farouq's victim (Yamina) is Berber from Ariss and so is the narrator, who says:

<SPACE>

"ابتسمت لها , و اقتربت منها أكثر و حدثتها بالشاوية"

[I smiled at her and I came closer to her and spoke to her in Chaouia]

Yamina replies: "لو كنت من غير أهلي لما حدثتك عن شيء"

[If you weren't from my people, I wouldn't have told you anything]

<SPACE>

The writer's reference to language is to show how closeness is achieved when words are expressed in the same language of thinking. Words come spontaneously and effortlessly. She does not see this closeness as a way of othering Arabs, who don't speak Berber. Instead, she sees it as an addition, as a specificity of Algeria. It is an addition to the construction of the grand narratives, Al Farouq and other Algerian women fight for. In a similar way, Djébar, in her earlier books, uses Berber to celebrate the diversity of Algeria.

<SPACE>

Conclusion

The traumas which Algeria went through in the 1990s are not unique and share features with similar experiences, before as well as after that time in Algeria and elsewhere--in fact, they have been overshadowed by the atrocities in Iraq and Syria, for example. What is different and unique, as the present essay attempts to demonstrate, is the way Algerian writers, particularly women, try to make sense of this trauma as well as the official narrative of it. By analysing literary texts, one realises that it is more complex than one might think. Comparing Mosteghanemi's writing with Djébar's offers an insight into two different periods, the colonial and the postcolonial eras. The paper highlights the new definition given by Djébar to the concept of the coloniser versus the colonised. Her change of stance towards French by considering it no longer the coloniser's language and allocating that status to Arabic is complex and needs a thorough understanding of the "language question" in Algeria, which to this day can be a reason for killing. For Djébar, the way ahead is certainly not Arabic, as she sees it a source of regression and fanaticism. For her, Algerian women need to be emancipated from mono-lingual narratives which tend to be either sanctioned by the state or supported by conservative Islamists ideologies. She adopts a new way of writing which deals with the daily side of Algeria as an approach to give voice to the unrepresented segments of the Algerian society and at the same time construct traumatic narratives. Mosteghanemi, on the other hand, sees in Arabic the potential for women's freedom. She also sees the way forward as not restricted to women only but

involving men as well. Yet, despite their differences, both writers agree about the importance of language (any language) in constructing narratives of liberation. Questioning and revising past narratives does not only aim at helping individuals heal but seek a collective way out of the impasse of the present. Al Farouq's interest in rape and sexual violence against Algerian women in the 1990s originates from her awareness of its significance for those women, who also suffer from the hostility of their patriarchal society. Al Farouq sheds light on the survivors' alienation from Algerian society in order to make us aware of it as a hidden social trauma. Her inclusion of statistics of rape cases aims to prove to the Algerian society as well as to the external world that these women exist. Her novel is a call for recuperation of marginalised histories in Algeria (raped women) and an act of documenting their traumatic lives with a view to advancing their cases. Through different linguistic registers, Al Farouq shows how language can be used to suppress and/or to liberate and support women. In this, she joins Mosteghanemi and Djébar in defying religious institutions and their discourses as well as the patriarchal system which suppresses women in overt as well as subtle ways.

---

1 (Croisy, S "Other Cultures of Trauma: Meta-Metropolitan Narratives and Identities", (PhD Thesis, University of Florida, 2004), 85

2 Al Farouq F, *Taa Al Khajal* (Dar Al Rais Publishing House, 1998). It has been translated as into French *La Honte au Féminin* (2009)

3 Jacob Munday, *Imaginative Geographies of Algerian Violence: Conflict Science, Conflict Management, Antipolitics* (Stanford University Press, 2015:33)

4 McAllistair, E, "Immunity to Arab Spring? Fear, Fatigue and Fragmentation in Algeria", *New Middle Eastern Studies*, (Lachraf, cited by McAllister, (2013):6

5 McDougall, J, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)

6 McDougall, J, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 34

7 Lazreg, M. (2014). *The Elequence of Silence. Algerian Women in Question*, (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2014), 197

8 Salhi, Z, "Gender and Violence in Algeria", *Gender and Diversity in the Middle East and North Africa* (London-New York: Routledge, 2010)

9 Hijab is: a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women.

10 Ait Hamou, L, "Women's Struggle against Muslim Fundamentalism in Algeria: Strategies or a Lesson for Survival?", (*WLUML Publications*, 2004),

- 
- 11 Lamarène-Djeral, D, "La violence islamiste contre les femmes", *Revue Naqd*, n° 22/23, (Centre National du Livre, Alger, 2006)
- 12 Ait Hamou, L, "Women's Struggle against Muslim Fundamentalism in Algeria: Strategies or a Lesson for Survival?", (WLUML Publications, 2004), 118
- 13 Farhat Slimani, "العشرية السوداء ... حكاية الجزائر مع الإرهاب" [The Black Decade... the story of Algeria with Terrorism] <http://freedjazyri.arablog.org/2015/08/17/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AD%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5/>
- 14 Stora, B, *La Guerre Invisible, Algérie, Années 90* (Presses des Sciences PO, 2001)
- 15 Achour, C, *Noûn, Algériennes dans l'écriture*, (Atlantica, Biarritz, 1999), 58
- 16 Cooke, M, *Women and the War Story*, (University of California Press, 1996), 8
- 17 Brinda, M, *Dissident Writings of Arab Women. Voices against Violence* (Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies, 2014), 27
- 18 (Ward, A, *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 3
- 19 Fanon says: "their first encounter was dominated by violence and their existence together- that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler- was carried on by dint of a greater array of bayonets and cannons" *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961: 36)
- 20 See note 18
- 21 For a more recent, see: Harel-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev (2016) "The politics of Trauma Studies: What Can We Learn from Women Combatants' Experiences of Traumatic Events in Conflict Zones?", *Political Psychology*
- 22 Herman, J, *Trauma and Recovery*. With a new afterword. (New York: Basic Books, 1992-1997).
- 23 Herman, J, *Trauma and Recovery*. With a new afterword. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 33
- 24 LaCapra, D, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP), 41
- 25 Twible, M, "Women who Remember Rape: Representing Trauma and the Self" (BA Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2012)
- 26 Twible, M, "Women who Remember Rape: Representing Trauma and the Self" (BA Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2012)

- 
- 27 Twible, M, "Women who Remember Rape: Representing Trauma and the Self" (BA Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2012)
- 28 Caruth, C, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History* (John Hopkins University Press, 1996)
- 29 Visser, I, "Trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.3 (2011):270-282
- 30 Brinda, M, *Dissident Writings of Arab Women. Voices against Violence* (Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies, 2014), 48
- 31 Mosteghanemi, A, *Dhakirat al-Jasad* (Manshurāt Ahlem Mosteghanemi, 1993), 37
- 32 Translated by Holt, 2008: 137).
- 33 Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama in Arabic: Jam'iyat al-'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn
- 34 Mosteghanemi, A, interview by Anissa Daoudi, 5th October 2016.
- 35 Vince, N, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria 1954-2013* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 212
- 36 Mosteghanemi's trilogy includes: *Dhakirat al jasad* [Memory of the Flesh] (Manshurāt Ahlem Mosteghanemi, 1993), *Fawda el Hawas* [The Chaos of Sense] (Nufal Publishing, 1997) and *Aber Sareer* [Bed Hopper] (Manshurāt Ahlem Mosteghanemi, 2003)
- 37 Tageldin, S, "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, 3 (2009): 483
- 38 For more information, see Benamara, "Pratiques d'écritures de femmes algériennes des années 90 : Cas de Malika Mokkedem" (PhD Thesis, Université Abderahmane Mira, Bejaia, Algérie, 2010)
- 39 Landers, N, "Representing the Algerian Civil War: Literature, History, and the State" (PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2013)
- 40 Djébar, A, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1995), 54
- 41 Twible, M, "Women who Remember Rape: Representing Trauma and the Self" (BA Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2012)
- 42 Djébar, A, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1995), 471
- 43 Djébar, A, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1995), 471
- 44 Šukys, J, "Language, the enemy: Assia Djébar's response to the Algerian intellocide", *Journal of Human Rights* 3.1 (2004): 116
- 45 Šukys, J, "Language, the enemy: Assia Djébar's response to the Algerian intellocide", *Journal of Human Rights* 3.1 (2004): 116
- 46 Šukys, J, "Language, the enemy: Assia Djébar's response to the Algerian intellocide", *Journal of Human Rights* 3.1 (2004): 116

---

47 Šukys, J, "Language, the enemy: Assia Djebar's response to the Algerian intellocide", *Journal of Human Rights* 3.1 (2004): 117

48 Djazairouna in Arabic 'Our Algeria' is an Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) founded in 1996 in the midst of the Civil War, presided by Ms. Cherifa Kaddar who witnessed the torture and murder of her brother and sister. Ms. Kheddar united with the survivors and victims of terrorism. She fights to give them a voice in the wake of more than 10 years of violence.

49 Šukys, J, "Language, the enemy: Assia Djebar's response to the Algerian intellocide", *Journal of Human Rights* 3.1 (2004): 117

50 Neal, A, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (M E Sharpe Inc, 2001), 2

51 Neal, A, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (M E Sharpe Inc, 2001), 120

52 Landers, N, "Representing the Algerian Civil War: Literature, History, and the State" (PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2013)

53 Berber languages are the languages of the indigenous population in North Africa. These languages are called Tamazight; there are variations within the Berber language, such as 'Chaoui' In the Eastern part and Kabyle in the centre of Algeria.

54 All translations are by the author.

55 For more information about Arabic sociolinguistics, Reem Bassiouney gives a sketch of the main research trends about code switching, diglossia, language contact and language change and many more issues related to Arabic Sociolinguistics, which is the title of her book: Arabic Sociolinguistics (2009), Edinburgh University Press.

56 Giesen, B, "Social Trauma", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2001: 14473).

<http://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/science/article/pii/B0080430767003867?np=y>

57 Bentalha Massacre: (Arabic: بن طلحة), about 15 km south of Algiers, on the night of September 22-23, 1997, more than 200 villagers (according to Amnesty International) were killed by armed guerrillas. The number of deaths reported ranged from 85 (initial official estimate) to 400

58 Calvet (1998) compares Classical Arabic to Latin in some European countries in the Middle Ages.