

The Embodiment of Algerian Women's Trauma in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine* (A Postcolonial Feminist Reading)

Prepared by:

Reham A. Alamri

MA Scholar, Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, University of Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0009-000-0128-44497>

Email: r.alamri.1996@gmail.com

Dr. Dawla S. Alamri

Associate Professor of English Literature, Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, University of Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Dawla S. Alamri: ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6428-7133>

*Corresponding Author: Dawla S. Alamri, E-mail: dalamri@uj.edu.sa

Abstract:

This study aims to explore how Ahlam Mosteghanemi weaves a narrative in *The Bridges of Constantine* (*Thakirat al-Jassad*) that constructs an insight into the individual and collective traumas experienced by the Algerian men and women in the aftermath of the French colonization, as well as the civil conflict. The novel's portrayal of the resilience of the Algerian people, their ability to find hope and beauty amidst hardship and suffering, is a significant aspect of the research. This study tackles analyses of trauma within the framework of postcolonial feminism in Algeria and the Trauma theory as articulated in Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* and Cathy Caruth's *Unexpected Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. By utilizing Fanon's and Caruth's theories as frameworks, this study explores themes of collective trauma, repression, and healing related to women's trauma. The main contribution of this study lies in extending the argument on the postcolonial engagement of Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine* by focusing on her

portrayals of the gendered experiences during colonialism, offering insights into the intricate interplay between gender, power, and resistance within oppressive systems. The study reveals how Mosteghanemi successfully portrays colonialism's ongoing impact on gender dynamics and follows through by emphasizing the continuous struggle for gender equality in the postcolonial Algerian society.

Keywords: Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Algerian literature, Cathy Caruth, Frantz Fanon, Postcolonial Feminism, *The Bridges of Constantine*, Trauma theory

1. Introduction

“Ahlem is a light which shines in thick darkness. She was able to get out of the linguistic exile in which French colonialism had relegated the Algerian intellectuals” was the jury statement of the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 1998, which Ahlam Mosteghanemi received for the distinction of her first novel, *Thakirat al-Jassad*, and for being the first Algerian woman novelist to write in Arabic. That statement attested to Mosteghanemi's articulation of her genius, rising above all expectations with the use of Arabic and creating literary masterpieces in a country where the Arabic language was prohibited as a result of the French colonization. The Algerian Ahlam Mosteghanemi (b. 1953) is one of the most influential Arab women writers who successfully portrayed substantial periods of Algerian history and her people's tumultuous stories. *Thakirat al-Jassad* was published in 1993, and the first English translation was published in 1999 as *Memory in the Flesh*. In 2013, it was translated by Raphael Cohen as *The Bridges of Constantine*. This novel is considered a turning point in Algerian as well as in Arabic literature, followed by the two sequels, *Chaos of the Senses* in 1997, and *Bed Hopper* in 2003, establishing her as one of the most successful leading Arab women writers.

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Mosteghanemi weaves a strong narrative that delves into the individual and collective traumas experienced by the Algerian men and women in the aftermath of the French colonization and the civil conflict. That collective trauma also symbolizes a country eventually coming to terms with its history and striving toward a future of evolution and recovery. Algeria possessed a profound history of long-drawn social and political turmoils. Since gaining independence in 1962, Algeria grappled with issues the French left to them, such as a ruined economy, high unemployment, illiteracy, internal political conflicts and instability, and fundamentalism, all contributing to the hardships of the Algerian citizens. Despite these challenges, Algerians have shown unwavering dedication to their nation.

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Mosteghanemi portrays this abiding resilience of the Algerian people and their commendable ability to find hope and beauty amidst all kinds of hardship and suffering.

Algerian postcolonial trauma has been a subject for many scholars. Frantz Fanon's valuable perspectives provide important insights into the impact of colonial trauma on a society seeking progression and independence. To elaborate, in his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon examines Algerian trauma and explores in detail the ordeals of Algerians residing under oppressive French colonial domination. His book illuminates the profound psychological effects of colonization and the strive for decolonization and autonomy. Similarly, in his 1959 book, *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon examines in detail the long-lasting repercussions of the colonial rule and the profound impact of the struggle for independence on the Algerian people's psyche within the context of Algerian trauma. Fanon delves into how the collective trauma shapes the psychology of a whole nation, seeking freedom and self-determination of its people, which informs and structures the Algerian movement of resistance to colonial powers. Fanon's experiences and perspectives presented in these two books serve as a powerful testament to the strong resilience of the Algerian people and their steadfast commitment to overturning colonial domination.

Colonialism and its societal impact were not the only trauma Algeria suffered. In 1979, Mosteghanemi criticized the denigrating circumstances of Algerian women, referring to some of the most popular Algerian writings in French and Arabic. The work highlighted the plight of the women in Algeria who were considered to exist outside of the world of the Algerian men who made all the key decisions covering all the details, regardless of the women's opinions. Women as mothers or wives were portrayed in a very profane way. The women were not regarded as companions in the revolution but as possessions. This complexity was caused by the absence of dialogue between the two-genders, leading to complex psychological, social, and literary crises. As she said, the revolution events were supposed to encourage such dialogue after centuries of traditions separating them. Unfortunately, nothing has changed after years of the Algerian independence. The burdens of that heritage block all "the bridges of joy.. and balance in front of our generation" (Mosteghanemi, 1979, p.20). She mentioned that the women were absent due to the ignorance of the Algerian men. Moreover, the women were not portrayed naturally or realistically. The case got further complicated if that woman was "an intellectual or liberated" (p.21). The exception was portrayed in the Algerian literature written in French and in the writings of Malek Haddad, Assia Djebbar, Mouloud Feraoun, and Kateb Yacine. Thus, Mosteghanemi

found herself with her pen, fighting the aftermath of colonialism, oppressive patriarchal traditions, and corruption, expressing herself liberally on sexism, love, and women's rights.

Hence, this study aims to explore the embodiment of the collective trauma that has been experienced by Algerian women during and after colonialization, as portrayed in *The Bridges of Constantine*, narrating their efforts and ability to find love, hope, and resilience against all odds of a seasoned patriarchal social structure. This study explores the complexities of an Algerian identity and the nation's psyche during the colonial settlement through the female characters and their stories. This research aims to discuss how Mosteghanemi's storytelling weaves a tapestry of loss and resilience, offering a nuanced portrayal of a nation grappling with its past and striving towards a broadminded future of reconciliation and healing.

The significance of this study is implied in its attempt to analyze Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*, bringing into focus the many stories that have been largely passed over by Algerian women who lived through the traumas of colonialization and the civil conflict. The study analyzes these narratives from a postcolonial feminist perspective to better understand the juncture between gender, trauma, and national identity. It aims to enhance the field of postcolonial studies by providing insights into a specific historical and cultural context in Algeria. The memories those women share in conversations portray the Algerian trauma impacted by colonialization and the civil wars, their pain, postcolonial awareness, disappointment, disillusion, and displacement of their revolutionary values and ideals. The novel explores trauma by analyzing how female characters experience and cope with it.

2. Literature Review

Given the psychological, cultural, and historical impact of the Algerian civil war and colonialism, critics and writers often delve into the controversial topic of Algerian trauma. Postcolonial scholars were interested in discussing Ahlam Mosteghanemi's works and contribution as a North African writer to examine the postcolonial dominance over Algerian people during and after the Civil War. Many scholars and reviewers have challenged official narratives by providing rich empirical data gathered through extensive fieldwork with the male and female survivors, contributing significantly to the study of Algerian postcolonial history.

To elaborate, Hodgins and Thakkar (2017) analyzed the representation of trauma in Algerian documentary cinema, focusing on the effects of the 'black decade' of the civil war in the 1990s. They also discussed the impact of Fanon's theories in understanding Algerian trauma and explored

the decolonization of the psyche in general to comprehend trauma effectively. Likewise, Guémar (2023) offered a profound understanding of the violence faced by women during times of conflict, particularly focusing on Algerian women who fled during the 'Black Decade' in the 1990s. In addition, Guémar investigated the experiences of Algerian women beyond their homeland, exploring the challenges they encounter in seeking gender-appropriate protection internationally and the networks they establish to maintain societal connections with Algeria. Overall, both works employed innovative research methods to investigate the Algerian experience of conflict, flight, and living in exile.

Many postcolonial scholars have discussed the challenges that the Arab women writers face in seeking international acknowledgment and appreciation due to being doubly marginalized as women and being from the Orient. Baaqeel (2019) discussed the lack of recognition of Mosteghanemi as an Arab woman writer in the Anglophone academy. She compared Mosteghanemi's work with that of two prominent Arab women writers, Nawal al Sadawi and Assia Djebar, focusing on the politics of literary forms, language, and translation. She argued that Arab women writers repeatedly face challenges in the international reception of their work, being confined by a Eurocentric feminism that portrays them as representatives of the Orient.

In addition, many postcolonial feminist scholars have discussed how Mosteghanemi's work addresses Algerian political reality and the Civil War and how she uses her writing to fight for liberation. Tageldin (2009), for instance, explored how Mosteghanemi questions Algerian political reality and depicts the ongoing civil war. Tageldin explained that Mosteghanemi's acceptance of the Mahfouz Medal Award signifies that if the new war for Algerian liberation was truly about language, she wrote in Arabic to fight with the pen, not with the gun. Similarly, Suyoufie's study (2005) of Mosteghanemi's novel *Bed Hopper* relied on the Freudian concept of the uncanny to show the defamiliarizations of the ordinary and the estrangement from one's homeland in postcolonialism. Suyoufi employed a textual approach to examine the central elements of the uncanny, revealing changes in the essence of life, humanity, and art from a postcolonial perspective in the novel.

Likewise, Ghazoul (2005) provided a comprehensive review of *The Bridges of Constantine*, exploring how Mosteghanemi's novel offers insights into contemporary Algeria using the language advocated by Malek Haddad, the Francophone Algerian poet and novelist. Additionally, the novel's exploration of Algerian history, the impact of colonialism, and the post-independence challenges were examined. Ghazoul scrutinized the narrative, focusing on the intense relationship

between Khaled, a middle-aged Algerian militant turned artist, and Hayat, a young fiction writer. Ghazoul discussed how the novel decolonizes thinking on two levels, appropriating Algerian history against the ravages of colonialism and writing in Arabic, the language of the victims, with passion and mastery. She also discussed the novel's narration and how each character is realistically portrayed, standing for a type encountered in our contemporary world.

Although many scholars have discussed Mosteghanemi's exploration of the significance of national identity in a globalized world and the role of art in reconstructing a fragmented nation, some scholars have argued against the use of 'collective memory' in Mosteghanemi's works when discussing the traumas of contemporary Algeria. McDougal (2010), for instance, argued against the usage of 'collective memory' in describing what Algeria has been through. Instead, he suggested the concept of 'social memory,' which refers to the social relations of praxis. McDougal criticized the 'collective memory' for abstracting the factors of selfhood from actual social processes and relocating them into an intangible, ethereal realm of collective consciousness. Similarly, Stampfl (2010) examined Mosteghanemi's novel to explore the significance of national identity in a globalized world and the role of art in reconstructing a fragmented nation's belief that such notions can lead to homogenizing comprising of analytically useless categories, like the national character or the group psyche.

In addition, Gouffi and Berrahal (2020) thoroughly analyzed the themes of 'neocolonialism' and 'unhomeliness' present in the novel, providing a detailed discussion of their fictional representations. Bougherira (2019) also explored the novel's profound and artistic portrayal of the growing sense of despair and disillusionment in the newly independent Algeria. The study examined how the novel, authored by a woman in Arabic, appealingly captured the struggle of Algerians against French colonialism and its enduring impact. The study also discussed the theme of nostalgia within the context of the declining Algerian community following the period of independence.

While many scholars employed different methods to examine the question of postcolonial dominance over Algerian people during and after the War of Independence and the civil wars in Mosteghanemi's works, *The Bridges of Constantine* has not been thoroughly studied from a postcolonial feminist perspective yet. This study aims to enhance our understanding of the trauma and exile as portrayed in the novel through the lens of Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* and Caruth's *Unexpected Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

3. Methodology

Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine* illustrates how oppressive colonial systems, coupled with patriarchal standards, affect the lives of the female characters. This study aims to explore the intersection of personal and political Algerian trauma in the context of postcolonial feminism, drawing from Fanon's perspectives in *A Dying Colonialism* and Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

To analyze the trauma in Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*, it is vital to study how the female characters handle their distressing experiences, exploring the psychological, emotional, and cultural impacts of the traumatic occurrences on the people and the communities of Algeria. By utilizing Fanon's and Caruth's theories as frameworks, this study addresses the female experiences from postcolonial feminist viewpoints, including the restrictions on women's freedom, double marginalization, and reimagining gender roles, exploring the themes of collective trauma, repression, and healing related to women's trauma in postcolonial contexts. It also examines the depiction of trauma that introduces post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), collective trauma, and cultural trauma as theoretical frameworks.

The Algerian War of Independence and civil wars had an impact of collective trauma on the Algerian people. In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth (2016) explores the complex nature of trauma to understand the narrative of collective trauma in colonized societies. The book delves into how trauma steers the long-lasting impact of colonialism on postcolonial societies, highlighting the new colonial burdens faced by Algerian men and women. Caruth posits that stories do not only recount traumatic events but also 'speak to' and 'speak through' them. According to Caruth, trauma is not solely about physical violence but also about the profound psychological impact that resonates internally, as evidenced in the Algerian trauma.

Furthermore, as demonstrated in Fanon's book *A Dying Colonialism*, Algeria has been a significant focal point in the study of postcolonial feminism and women's repression. The book offers valuable insights into the liberation struggles from a postcolonial feminist perspective. In a section entitled "Feminine Society", Fanon sheds light on women's involvement in the Algerian War of Independence and the subsequent changes in the behavioral norms within the Algerian female society. Those women participating in the war "initiated radical changes in certain patterns of behavior within the Algerian feminine society" (Fanon, 1967, p.102).

Fanon emphasizes that the war has affected the entire society, asserting that all Algerian women's roles have been impacted and changed. Fanon declares that women in Algeria have undergone aggressive and violent experiences that have reshaped their entire identities as females.

In addition, this study analyzes Fanon's perspectives to recognize the resistance practices employed by women in challenging colonial and patriarchal systems. Fanon depicts women's resistance, subversion, and resilience strategies in the face of oppressive structures. He states that "[t]he Algerian woman, suddenly deprived of a husband, is obliged to find a means of feeding her children. She finds herself having to go from place to place" (Fanon, 1967, p.115). He argues that the Algerian woman is often left alone to face a challenging life without a husband, thus being forced to take on his role. He emphasizes that "with these considerable shifts in population, the whole social panorama and the perceptual framework are disturbed and restructured" (Fanon, 1967, p.117). Consequently, he claims that traditional gender roles are reshaped in Algeria, challenging stereotypical patriarchal societies. The concept of gender inferiority, strongly ingrained in the minds of colonized individuals because of oppressive colonialism, results in the double marginalization of Algerian women. Caruth, on the other hand, emphasizes the stages of trauma experienced by Algerian women. According to Fanon and Caruth, racism impacts Algerians and alters gender dynamics, leading to feelings of alienation and trauma.

Therefore, this study analyzes the novel to demonstrate how oppressive colonial systems coupled with patriarchal standards affect the lives of the female characters. The analysis delves into the intersection of personal and political Algerian trauma, addressing the female experiences of Hayat, her mother, and her grandmother from postcolonial feminist viewpoints. It includes discussions on restrictions on women's freedom, double marginalization, women's trauma, and reimagining gender roles. Thus, Fanon's and Caruth's perspectives on trauma theory and postcolonial feminism are employed to better understand Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*. By utilizing these perspectives to examine women's trauma, the study aims to explore Mosteghanemi's depiction of trauma and how her female characters overcome their traumatic experiences and memories.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Known for her poignant and lyrical writing, Mosteghanemi, in *The Bridges of Constantine*, delves into the complexities of love, loss, and memory within Constantine, Algeria's historically and culturally rich city. The novel follows the lives of male and female characters grappling with

personal and collective traumas, employing a time-shifting narrative technique to convey the intensity of the experience, seamlessly transitioning between various locations and time periods. Through her characters' memories, Mosteghanemi portrays four decades of the turbulent history of Algeria. Khaled, a former Algerian War of Liberation revolutionary who lost his arm in the war, has been in a self-exile in Paris for two decades, disgusted by the corruption that riddles the country he once fought for. Now a celebrated painter, Khaled is consumed with a passion for Hayat, the daughter of his old revolutionary commander, Si Taher, who unexpectedly reenters Khaled's life. Hayat had been just a child when he last saw her, but she has now become a seductive young novelist. The novel illustrates how Mosteghanemi's female characters suffer another trauma. Her female protagonist, Hayat, her mother, and her grandmother not only struggle with the aftermath of the Algerian wars but also confront the patriarchal conflicts and challenges. Si Taher, Hayat's father, neglected his family during the war. Despite his physical and emotional absence, Hayat's mother and grandmother regard him as the family hero. Si Taher sends Khalid to name his newborn daughter Hayat. The narrative employs a time shift technique to reveal Khalid's reunion with Hayat in Paris twenty years later and his recollection of the traumatic events endured by Algerians.

The female characters in *The Bridges of Constantine* are victims of the double marginalization of patriarchal standards, as well as the oppressive colonial systems that inhibit their freedom. Mosteghanemi prudently portrays the confinement of women's freedom and independence by societal expectations and pressing gender norms. Colonialism often promoted the traditional patriarchal values that restricted women's freedom and empowerment, relegating them to second-class status at both public and private levels in society. Algerian Women were expected to care for their children while Algerian men were away from home, serving in the military (Hodgin & Thakkar, 2017). This is evident at the novel's beginning, when Si Taher departs to join the military, leaving his pregnant wife to manage the household, tend to the children, and confront the realities of her life alone (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.22). He abandons them, subjecting very little communication with his pregnant wife. Fanon further elaborates on the unequal role of women in Algerian families, stating that the Algerian women were obliged to find a means of feeding their children if she was suddenly deprived of their husbands (Fanon, 1967, p.122). This indicates that women were left to confront the hardships of life without any family support during the periods of war.

In a separate scene, Si Taher tries to convey to the men in his military unit that he considers them his only family. Although he initially denies any existing familial ties, Si Taher's demeanor changes when he learns that his wife has given birth to a daughter. He confides discreetly in Khalid, expressing a sense of shame at the thought of the men finding out. He entrusts Khalid with the task of informing them that his daughter "be named Ahlam," as naming the daughter is a privilege provided only to the father (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.44). It is important to note that Khalid decides to call her Hayat as a secret code between him and her. Si Taher's decision to distance himself from his family poignantly reflects the changing dynamics of familial relationships in the war-torn Algeria.

Twenty years later, Khalid tells Hayat that her career as a writer would appall her father. Khalid expresses, "You cannot fathom how fortunate you are to live in a country that enables you to be a cultured young woman, with the opportunity to study, work, and write" (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.58). Khalid implies that in Algeria, there are constraints on women's freedom. However, Hayat sarcastically retorts that even her father would not stop her from writing because he was not present in her childhood. She elaborates that her father was not truly hers during childhood, but her writing is solely hers. She adamantly refuses to let anyone strip her of that right. Hayat conveys that the Algerian women "write to reclaim" what they have "lost" and what has been "taken" from them (p.58). She asserts that the Algerian women write to diligently express their traumatic experiences, their losses, and what has been stolen from them. She further declares, "Writing is solely mine, and no one can take it away!" not even her father (p.58). Twenty years later, Algerian women recognized the evolving dynamics of their societal relationships and asked for their rights.

In a particular instance, Si Taher whispers his daughter's name to Khalid as if it is a secret. This shows how women in postcolonial contexts face double marginalization because of their race and gender. Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* delves into the impact of colonialism on exacerbating the existing gender inequalities and racial hierarchies, leading to the double marginalization. Si Taher feels ashamed and admits his "weakness" to Khalid, associating weakness with family (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.43). This highlights the passive nature of women in the postcolonial era and shows how Si Taher marginalizes his wife and his daughter.

Similarly, Hayat, as a girl, experiences marginalization in her childhood. Her father prioritizes the boys and men in the family, ignoring her. As she grows up, she realizes that even her father does not belong to her. She describes her childhood as that of an only daughter whose mother is busy taking care of the family, while her father is considered some kind of a "public property in

Algeria" (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.59). The existence of Hayat and her mother is deliberately ignored, while the whole of Algeria praises her father for being an Algerian father. This reflects the double marginalization experienced by the female characters in the novel. Mosteghanemi raises the vital question of why women were left to care for their families during the Algerian Wars. At the same time, the men were absent, reduced to mere memories and images in their houses and amongst their families.

In a heartbreaking scene, Hayat shares with Khalid the story of her grandmother, Amma Zahra, who was deeply affected by the loss of her son. Drawing from Caruth's work, when Hayat explains that traumatic story, she not only recounts distressing events but also gives voice to these occurrences and processes them internally. According to Caruth, trauma encompasses not just physical violence but also the profound psychological impact that lingers within the individual. Hayat describes how her grandmother seemed trapped in the past, unable to move forward, and consumed by memories. She believes that her grandmother lives to remember her son, as she seems to live in the past while others look to the future.

Through the traumatic narrative, Hayat's grandmother is unable to accept the tragedy of her son's death. She insists that she "was waiting for independence for Taher's return" and now realizes that she no longer waits for the Independence Day (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.59). Her grandmother continues to mourn her son, refusing to participate in any celebrations. From Caruth's perspective, this scene illustrates how violent events impacted the Algerian women, leading to long-term effects on their health, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This scene sheds light on how the trauma highlights the lasting consequences of colonialism on postcolonial societies, especially the neocolonial burdens endured by the Algerian women.

In another scene, Algerian women have developed another form of adaptation. When a woman becomes pregnant and needs protection, she visits the tombs of men for safety. They honor these men by naming their children after them (Mosteghanemi, 2014, p.66). As a result, this practice reflects the cultural belief that women need male protection, and during the war, they turned to honoring the dead men by giving their children the same names. Due to the patriarchal societies, women have to rely on men even if they are dead. In addition, Algerian women and children, as Hayat mentions, remember Algerian men as heroes and martyrs. However, she wants to know more about her father beyond the popular accolades of being one of the Algerian martyrs. She says, "It is as though death suddenly made all shahids identical, copies of one template" (p.57). Hayat emphasizes that death has made all Algerian men heroes. Similarly, when Hayat asks her

mother about her father, her mother refuses to talk about him and says that her family married her "to a martyr, not a man" (p.127). Hayat's mother's refusal to talk about her husband, considering him as a dead man, shows the extent to which the Algerian women are traumatized. By envisioning newer possibilities for gender equity and autonomy, the text interrogates the traditional societal norms imposed by the colonial regimes and offers alternate paths toward equality and liberation.

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Mosteghanemi skillfully depicts the trauma of her female protagonist, Hayat, and other female characters who suffered the burdens of postcolonialism and challenged the societal expectations. Those female characters who found themselves helpless in the absence of the male supporters showed strong bonds, supporting each other during and after the war. The author presents the Algerian families during the war, showcasing the support the characters provide, such as Hayat's grandmother to her daughter-in-law while her son, Si Taher, fights for his country. This bond demonstrates the crucial role of the Algerian women during the periods of war.

As Hayat defends her right to 'write,' to claim what has been lost: freedom and identity, Mosteghanemi has adopted that cause in her writings, fighting against corruption, fundamentalism, injustice, oppressive regimes, the denigration of women's rights, and the new forms of psychological colonization. Mosteghanemi stresses the significance of women's right to write to highlight the prevalence of and combat gender discrimination. She contends that she engaged in the war through her writing, emphasizing the power of the pen over the gun. Mosteghanemi asserts that the Algerian women played a crucial role in their country's independence struggle, fighting alongside the men during the revolution. However, she acknowledges that the Algerian society, reeling from the aftermath of the colonial history that claimed over a million and a half lives, was not entirely conducive to open and bold expression by the young women, particularly on the themes of love and women's rights, in the esteemed Arabic language (Mosteghanemi, 2024). What Ahlam Mosteghanemi achieved in that journey, as Ghazoul states, "is turning our pain into a noble art and transforming our grief into majestic literature" (Ghazoul, 2005).

5. Conclusion

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Mosteghanemi sophisticatedly portrays the postcolonial era trauma experienced by the female characters and conspicuously emphasizes their struggle against societal norms to achieve their rights while confronting their traumatic memories. Their individual trauma intersects with the collective trauma of the nation, which is coming to terms with its history

and striving toward a future of consolidation, unity, and recovery. By delving into the gender-specific experiences depicted in *The Bridges of Constantine* and their distinct ties to colonialism, readers can unravel the complex interplay of gender, authority, and defiance within the context of oppressive structures. The novel's depiction of women's distressing experiences during the colonial rule prompts a determined contemplation of the enduring effects of colonialism on gender dynamics and the ongoing efforts for gender equality and freedom in postcolonial communities.

Most past studies have analyzed the novel from different political, colonial, and postcolonial perspectives but rarely from a feminist-postcolonial perspective and trauma theory. Thus, the present research hopefully fills the gap left by Mosteghanemi's scholars in the fields of feminist gender studies and trauma studies. However, the study is limited to the issues of the intersection of personal and political Algerian trauma in the context of postcolonial feminism depicted in *The Bridges of Constantine*. That collective trauma has been explored through the perspectives of Frantz Fanon and Cathy Caruth. Other representations of her female characters need further research explorations with her different works, as well as other Algerian and Arab writers. The comparative examination of different postcolonial works could yield a more nuanced insight into the struggles experienced by women within the patriarchal and postcolonial social structures. This study can advance the past research about Mosteghanemi, considering the increasing readability of her writings, the progress Algeria witnessed in women's rights, and Mosteghanemi's efforts in this regard.

To conclude, Mosteghanemi's *Bridges of Constantine* is a pivotal turning point in her literary journey where she brilliantly and masterfully managed to portray her traumatized women persistently struggling for their humane rights of gender equality and freedom, rebelling against the burdens of postcolonialism and societal norms. She embraced their cause, lending genuine perspectives, journeying with them in these thorny, untraveled paths, and exploring newer dimensions for a stronger future in this novel as well as in her subsequent books. Mosteghanemi, through her work, has directed much-needed light into the thick darkness of the plight of the Algerian, Arab, and Third-world women in general, who were suffering at different levels from the aftermath of colonization.

6. References

- [1] Baaqeel, N. A. (2019). Decolonising Language: Towards a New Feminist Politics of Translation in the Work of Arab Women Writers, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Nawal al Sadawim,

- and Assia Djébar. *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies*, 7, 39–49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijclts.v.7n.3p.39>
- [2] Bougherira, H. (2019). Postcolonial Condition: Remembering to Resist or Forgetting to Persist in Ahlem Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*.
- [3] Caruth, C. (2016). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Twentieth anniversary edition). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [4] Djébar, A. (2009). L'amour, La Fantasia. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 46(3), 467–497. JSTOR.
- [5] Fanon, F. (1967). *A Dying Colonialism* (8th ed.).
- [6] Fanon, F. (2019). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.
- [7] Ghazoul, F. (1 July, 2005). "Memory and Desire" Arab World Books. Book Reviews. <https://www.arabworldbooks.com/en/e-zine/memory-and-desire>
- [8] Gouffi, M., & Berrahal, F. K. (2020). Neocolonial burdens and unhomely selves in the Metropole in Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 61(5), 554–567.
- [9] Guémar, L. N. (2023). Algerian Women And Diasporic Experience.
- [10] Guy, A. (2017). Trauma in Recent Algerian Documentary Cinema: Stories of Civil Conflict Told by the Living Dead. *Null*, pp. 31–52.
- [11] Hodgins, N., & Thakkar, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Scars and Wounds: Film and Legacies of Trauma*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [12] McDougall, J. (2010). Social Memories "in the Flesh": War and Exile in Algerian Self-Writing / "ذاكرة الجسد" الاجتماعية: الحرب والمنفى في كتابة الذات الجزائرية. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 30, pp. 34–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27929846>
- [13] Mosteghanemi, A. (1979). "Almaraa in Al-Adab Aljazairi Almuaaser." *Alaadab* 4-5. April 1, 1979. Pp. 17-23. "المرأة في الأدب الجزائري المعاصر". *مجلة الآداب*. <https://archive.alsharekh.org/Articles/255/20321/461224>
- [14] Mosteghanemi, A. (2014). *The Bridges of Constantine* (R. Cohen, Trans.). Bloomsbury. (Original work published 1993)
- [15] Mosteghanemi, A. (2024, July 1) "Biography" Ahlammmosteghanemi.com <https://www.ahlammmosteghanemi.com/about-english>
- [16] Stampfl, T. (2010). The (Im)possibility of Telling: Of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh. *College Literature*, 37, pp.129–158.

- [17] Suyoufie, F. (2005). The Uncanny in Aḥlām Mustaghānmī's “ ‘Ābir Sarīr.” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 36(1), 28–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183528>
- [18] Tageldin, S. M. (2009). Which Qalam for Algeria?: Colonialism, liberation, and language in Djébar's *L'amour, La Fantasia* and Mustaghānimī's *Dhākirat al-Jasad*. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 46(3), pp. 467–497.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Copyright © 2024 Reham A. Alamri, Dr. Dawla S. Alamri, AJRSP. This is an Open-Access Article Distributed under the Terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY NC)

Doi: doi.org/10.52132/Ajrsp.e.2024.64.1