Writing History Otherwise: Individual Memory and Collective Narrative in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes… and Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre by Maïssa Bey

كتابة التاريخ على نحوٍ مغاير: الذاكرة الفردية والسرد الجماعي في روايتي «هل تسمعون في الجبال...» و«حجر ودم وورق أو رماد» لمايسة باي

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Abstract:

Maïssa Bey, a leading figure in contemporary Algerian literature, revisits the Algerian War by intertwining individual memory and collective narrative beyond official historiography. In *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* and *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, she gives voice to marginalized and silent figures. Her work emphasizes the intimate and subjective, highlighting the traumas of colonization and war. By blending testimony, fiction, and memory writing, Bey shows how personal narratives shape collective memory, resistance, and the reappropriation of history.

Keywords: Maïssa Bey; Algerian War; writing of history; individual and collective memory; transmission.

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ملخص:

تُعدّ مايسة باي شخصية بارزة في الأدب الجزائري المعاصر، حيث تعيد النظر في حرب الجزائر من خلال نسج الذاكرة الفردية والسرد الجماعي بعيدًا عن الإطار الرسمي للتاريخ. في روايتي هل تسمعون في الجبال ...وحجر ودم وورق أو الرماد، تُعطي الرّوائية صوتًا للشخصيات المهمشة والصامتة. تُركز أعمالها على البُعد الشخصي والذاتي، مسلّطة الضوء على صدمات الاستعمار والحرب. ومن خلال المزج بين الشهادة، والخيال، وكتابة الذاكرة، تُظهر مايسة باي كيف تُشكل السرديات الشخصية الذاكرة الجماعية، والمقاومة، وإعادة الاستيلاء على التاريخ

كلمات مفتاحية: مايسة باي؛ الثورة الجزائرية؛ كتابة التاريخ؛ الذاكرة الفردية والجماعية؛ النقل.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the field of contemporary Algerian literature, Maïssa Bey stands out for a distinctive mode of writing that revisits History, particularly the history of the Algerian War, through voices long marginalized and narratives imbued with intimacy. Far from limiting itself to a mere chronicle of historical events, her work offers a re-reading of the past in which collective memory and individual subjectivities intersect. In *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* (2002) and *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre* (2008), the author explores the traumas of colonization and war by restoring a voice to women and anonymous figures, who have often been silenced by official historiography. As she herself emphasizes: *« I am deeply convinced that literature possesses an*

extraordinary potential as a counter-power to hegemonic narratives. It constitutes an ethical form of resistance […] my work seeks to make audible those marginalized voices, those fragments of memory too often consigned to oblivion » (MOUFFOUK, 2024) (translation mine).

Her writing thus operates as a memorial and political act, in which fiction becomes a space for the reappropriation of history and the rehabilitation of erased voices. By challenging dominant representations imposed by official History, Bey promotes a plural and critical understanding of the past grounded in the multiplicity of experiences and memories. This article therefore examines how an intimate and subjective mode of narration enables the author to destabilize national master narratives while proposing a more inclusive vision of historical transmission.

Three main hypotheses guide this study. First, intimate writing rooted in individual memory functions as a counter-discourse to official historiography by reinscribing marginalized voices and resisting symbolic erasure. Second, the explicit subjectivity of narrators serves as a narrative strategy that exposes the constructed and ideological nature of historical discourse through emotion, fragmentation, and doubt. Finally, by centering women and anonymous figures, Bey develops a writing from the margins that combines aesthetic displacement with a political gesture aimed at destabilizing rigid national narratives and restoring forgotten experiences to collective memory.

This research is situated within a multidisciplinary framework drawing on memory studies, trauma theory, and spatial approaches. It mobilizes Paul Ricoeur’s reflections on memory

and narrative, Cathy Caruth's work on trauma, and Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of topophilia to analyze the affective bonds between subjects and spaces marked by historical violence. Methodologically, the study relies on qualitative and comparative textual analysis of the two novels, focusing on the narrative processes through which history is inscribed in intimate experience.

The objective of this article is to demonstrate that Maïssa Bey's fiction constitutes an alternative mode of writing the history of the Algerian War, in which individual memory becomes a key vector for the transmission and reconfiguration of collective narratives, while revealing the tensions between trauma, memory, and historical representation.

2. Writing History from a Feminine Perspective in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* by Maïssa Bey

In *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007), Maïssa Bey situates her narrative within a poetics of wounded memory by entrusting the narration to a female voice marked by a fragmented and violent past. The novel opens in a transient space—the train compartment—which functions as a site of condensed memory conducive to the resurgence of traumatic images: « Beneath her lowered eyelids stretch dusty, rocky expanses […] mounds surrounded by white or grey stones carelessly piled to mark the graves » (bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation). Memory thus emerges not through linear narration but through sensory fragments inscribed in landscapes of death and anonymity.

The narrator, daughter of an executed combatant, embodies

a generation deprived of both archives and institutional recognition. Her voice becomes a site of tension between intimate memory and collective History, shaped by paternal silence and the absence of official truth. Writing thus functions as an attempt to fill this historical dispossession, echoing Ricoeur's view that individual memory contributes to the reconstruction of collective memory (Ricoeur, La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli, 2000). History, in Bey's novel, is never stable or objective; it appears through shattered scenes and intrusive recollections, as when colonial songs resurface in the French doctor's consciousness: « Snatches of songs clinging like tufts of thorny brush deep within consciousness […] 'We come from the colonies to defend the country' » (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation). Such moments reflect the persistence of trauma and the impossibility of closure.

The encounter between the Algerian woman and the former French soldier establishes a dialogical space where asymmetrical memories confront one another. The doctor recalls a nostalgic and leisure-filled Algeria : « the beaches of Fort de l'Eau […] happiness… lost happiness… » (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montages..., 2007) (my translation), revealing the gap between colonial reminiscence and postcolonial mourning. Listening becomes an ethical act: the narrator does not accuse directly, but exposes the mechanisms of denial and forgetting that structure colonial memory.

This arrangement endows the female voice with a crucial ethical function. By assuming a painful and fragmented subjectivity, the narrator makes it possible to articulate trauma

without reducing it to a victimizing discourse. As Cathy Caruth emphasizes, literature constitutes a privileged space in which trauma can be expressed—not in its entirety, but through its deferred returns and silences (Caruth, 1996). In Maïssa Bey, this feminine mediation opens onto a more inclusive memory, capable of embracing the complexity of experiences without erasing responsibilities or perpetuating ideological simplifications.

In *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*, Maïssa Bey constructs a closed setting within a train compartment, a concentrated space where three figures converge: an Algerian woman, the daughter of an executed combatant; a former French conscript; and a French woman, the daughter of colonists. This microcosm becomes the stage for a confrontation of memories, where official History clashes with the intimate, and past wounds are replayed through a fragmented, hesitant, and often painful voice. The narrator observes: *« She closes the compartment door behind her in the hope of not being disturbed, of making the journey alone… the train is almost empty, there is no crowd on the platform »* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation), signaling from the outset the necessity of a protected space for the expression of a vulnerable memory.

By entrusting the narration to a female voice, Bey undertakes a process of reclaiming historical speech. The unnamed narrator embodies the generation of the heirs of silence: those who bear the scars of a war they did not witness but whose repercussions they continue to endure. The narrator's anonymity symbolizes the identity dispossession inflicted on women by dominant historical narratives and underscores their role in the restitution of collective memory. This mediating function is

further reinforced by attention to memory-laden landscapes: *« Beneath her lowered eyelids stretch expanses of rocky land… mounds surrounded by white or grey stones carelessly piled to mark the graves that fill the cemeteries without hedges or fences across the countryside of her country »* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation). These descriptions inscribe memory in the territory, giving history corporeal form through place, as highlighted by Yi-Fu Tuan in his theory of topophilia (Yi-fu, 1979), where space and affective experience are intrinsically linked.

The voice of the former French soldier resonates as an attempt at justification: *« It was… it was… a war like any other. Much hatred, injustice, suffering. There were those who… gave the orders… and those who carried them out. […] No need to question… no need to challenge the orders. One had to serve and obey »* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation). This confession illustrates the mechanism of abdication of responsibility structuring colonial memory: rationalization, forgetting, and minimization of suffering. The narrator listens, not to approve, but to understand, transforming this act of listening into an act of resistance: she forces the silence to crack. The eruption of the repressed, where memories become *« increasingly painful »* (my translation), reflects the dynamics of trauma described by Cathy Caruth, who analyzes literature as a space for the expression and processing of trauma (Cathy C. , 1996).

The contrasting experiences of the characters also reveal the plurality of memories: the narrator observes French daily life

as she imagines it through the testimony of the French doctor: *« His Algeria, certainly the beaches of Fort de l'Eau and La Madrague… happiness… lost happiness… nostalgia »* (bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation). The juxtaposition of perceptions underscores the distance between intimate memory and official memory, as well as the complexity of identities within a postcolonial space.

The final silence in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* does not signify forgetting, but the conclusion of a voice that, after being expressed, attains a measure of inner peace: *« She is silent now. Even if not everything has been said, even if a painful throbbing still makes her shiver, something has loosened within her. […] Whether it is him or someone else, it does not matter. She tells herself that nothing resembles her childhood dreams, that the executioners have human faces […]. And this idea terrifies her a little more »* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation). This passage encapsulates Bey's overall project: to demystify the figure of the executioner and the hero, to humanize the inhuman, and to show that evil does not reside in an external entity but behind ordinary faces. The novel thus presents itself as a space for fictional reconciliation with a past that could hardly be articulated otherwise than through literature.

By whispering to the former French combatant, *« Like all the others. First blind and deaf, and for a long time… mute… and even amnesiac… »* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation), the narrator embodies the despairing lucidity of a generation confronted with the persistence of historical amnesia. This female voice, simultaneously witness, heir, and victim, stands against forgetting and transforms writing

into an instrument of active memory. The novel's initial dedication, *« to the one who will never be able to read these lines »*, and its conclusion, *« You have the same eyes… the same gaze as… as your father. You resemble him greatly »* (Bey, Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., 2007) (my translation), close the narrative loop, creating a symbolic encounter between the dead and the living, individual memory and collective memory.

From this perspective, Maïssa Bey engages in a true writing of trauma, aligning with Cathy Caruth's theories that literature constitutes a privileged space for articulating and working through trauma (Cathy c. , 1996). Through fiction, the author reintroduces subjectivity into the historical narrative, challenges official discourse, and emphasizes that the truth of the past does not reside solely in archives, but also in the silenced voices that seek to be heard.

Paul Ricoeur also illuminates this approach: *« Forgiveness does not erase the debt of memory, it makes it livable »* (Ricoeur, La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli, 2000) (my translation). Bey's writing thus transforms trauma into a communicable and livable experience, providing a space where individual memory enriches collective memory, and where literature becomes a tool for emancipation and symbolic repair. The novel does not merely reconstruct History; it redefines the relationship between memory, identity, and speech, endowing the text with an ethical and memorial dimension essential for understanding the legacies of colonization.

3. *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre* by Maïssa Bey: A Narrative at the Boundary Between History and Fiction

Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) is a hybrid narrative situated at the boundary between historical reconstruction and poetic elaboration. Through a dense and sensitive rereading of French colonization in Algeria from 1830 to 1962, Maïssa Bey transforms historical discourse into literary material, adopting an almost didactic tone reminiscent of a history lesson while transcending historiographic neutrality. History is thus poeticized and endowed with emotional depth, allowing the reader to engage not only with events but with their human consequences.

The novel revisits major episodes of colonization—the invasion, repression, mass violence, and forms of resistance—revealing the memorial weight of these events. Literature here does not merely recount facts but exposes their affective and ethical implications, contributing to the rehabilitation of obscured or silenced histories often minimized by official narratives. By re-inscribing violence and resistance within a narrative structure, Bey opposes collective amnesia and restores historical visibility to forgotten victims.

This narrative strategy resonates with Paul Ricoeur's conception of narrative as an ethical act of remembrance: « To tell is already to resist erasure; it is to do justice to those whose speech has been confiscated » (Ricoeur, La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli, 2000) (my translation). Through this work of memory, Bey reassembles fragmented histories and gives narrative form to what has long remained unspeakable. Her writing thus functions not only as aesthetic creation but as symbolic reparation, where fiction

becomes a means of historical transmission and ethical responsibility.

3.1 The Symbolic Role of Madame Lafrance: A Critical Allegory of Colonial Discourse

In *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, Maïssa Bey dismantles the myth of a « civilizing » colonization through an allegorical strategy that exposes the ideological foundations of colonial discourse. The novel functions as a counter-narrative, in Edward Said's sense, challenging the humanitarian rhetoric used to legitimize domination. By aligning literary voice with the subaltern, Bey participates in the postcolonial project of rewriting History described by Homi K. Bhabha, where fiction becomes a space of resistance and re-signification.

This critique is crystallized in the figure of Madame Lafrance, an allegorical incarnation of colonial France and its paternalistic ideology. She embodies the rhetoric of the so-called civilizing mission: « She says she has come to 'civilize' them. She loves this word very much and repeats it often » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) (my translation). The repetition of the term reveals what Gayatri Spivak defines as epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988): the negation of the Other's voice through imposed knowledge. By placing this discourse in the mouth of a fictional character, Bey exposes both its moral absurdity and the gap between colonial language and violent reality.

Madame Lafrance's relentless advance « on paths paved with lies and broken oaths » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) (my translation), symbolizes the ideological momentum of

colonial expansion. Her white clothing, traditionally associated with purity, becomes an ironic signifier of what Frantz Fanon calls foundational violence (Fanon, Les Damnés de la Terre, 1961), concealed beneath the rhetoric of civilization. Through this figure, Bey transforms colonial discourse into an object of satire and demystification, turning the benevolent colonizer into an icon of hypocrisy.

Alongside this figure, the Child occupies a central symbolic role. Remaining perpetually a child from 1830 to 1962, he embodies a colonized people frozen in historical immobility, deprived of autonomy and agency. This suspended growth reflects what Paul Ricoeur terms impeded memory (Ricoeur, La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli, 2000), constrained to silence and repetition of trauma. The Child thus becomes a metonymic figure of Algeria itself, wounded in its temporality and denied historical development.

This allegory also reflects the colonial infantilization analyzed by Albert Memmi, whereby the colonizer justifies domination by representing the colonized as immature and dependent. The Child's namelessness reinforces this dispossession: deprived of identity and lineage, he symbolizes a people erased from historical subjectivity. As Homi K. Bhabha suggests, colonial identity is shaped by loss and imposed mimicry, caught between erasure and resistance (Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 1994).

Finally, the persistence of childhood until independence gives the figure a prophetic dimension: the Child embodies a suspended future, awaiting historical rupture. Liberation thus marks the possibility of entering history as subject rather than

object. Through these two figures, Bey exposes the ideological mechanisms of colonial domination while re-inscribing silenced experiences into narrative memory, making literature a space of ethical restitution and symbolic justice.

3.2 The Figure of the Child: A Symbolic Witness

In *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, the character of the « Child » occupies a singular place due to the symbolic weight it carries. This character, who remains eternally a child from 1830 to 1962, escapes the logic of biological growth and thus embodies an allegorical figure of Algerian colonial history. Maïssa Bey transforms this immobility into a metaphor for the condition of the colonized people, frozen in a position of inferiority, deprived of historical maturation, and prevented from attaining full autonomy.

First, the Child appears as a wounded memory: he does not grow because colonial time is a suspended time, marked by violence and the prohibition of becoming. This immobility embodies what Paul Ricoeur calls *« impeded memory »*, that is, a memory *« wounded by forgetting, constrained to silence or to the repetition of trauma »* (Ricoeur, La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli, 2000) (my translation). Thus, the Child becomes the receptacle of collective pain, a metonymic figure of an Algeria mutilated in its temporality, still incapable of reinventing itself. In Maïssa Bey, the non-age of the Child corresponds to a historical non-time: a History prevented from growing, just like the character.

Furthermore, the Child constitutes an allegory of the Algerian people. By choosing to freeze this character in childhood, Maïssa Bey transposes the paternalistic gaze of the

colonial discourse, which regarded the colonized as immature beings in need of tutelage and education. This perspective, analyzed by Albert Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur*, rests on a dialectic of domination: *« the colonizer infantilizes the colonized to justify his own authority »* (memmi, 1957) (my translation). In Bey's work, the Child thus embodies this imposed infantilization: he is a metaphor for a people denied political, cultural, and identity maturity, reduced to the status of object of History rather than historical subject.

Moreover, the Child symbolizes sacrificed innocence. By situating him in an extended temporal frame marked by dispossession, hunger, and death, the author reminds readers that colonization even stole the innocence of childhood. This reading aligns with the reflections of Frantz Fanon, who in *The Wretched of the Earth* notes that colonialism operates as a system that dehumanizes by breaking the continuity between generations and destroying the collective memory of dominated peoples (Fanon, les damnés de la Terre, 1961). The Child thus becomes the silent witness of transmitted wounds, the bearer of a collective traumatic memory, an entity frozen between remembrance and loss, unable to speak yet compelled to remember.

The absence of a name for the Child further accentuates this identity dispossession. Being referred to solely by the status of « Child » universalizes his condition while stripping it of individuality. This narrative choice reflects Maïssa Bey's intention to depict the colonized Algerian as a depersonalized being, erased by the colonial discourse. The name, bearer of lineage and history, is here denied: no transmission is possible. As Homi K. Bhabha explains, colonial identity is always in process, caught between

the desire for imitation and self-loss (Bhabha, The location of culture, 1994). By depriving the Child of a name, the author denounces the symbolic violence of colonization, which, by denying voice and memory, also negates the very existence of its subjects. The Child thus emerges as the figure of a dispossessed collective being, whose quest for a name mirrors the quest of a people for recognition.

Finally, the persistence of childhood until 1962 endows the character with a prophetic dimension: he embodies the anticipation of liberation, the promise of a reclaimed time. It is only with independence that the cycle of immobility can be broken, allowing the child-people to achieve historical maturity. As Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes, postcolonial identity emerges from the interstice, the moment when the past is reconfigured through acts of resistance (Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 1994). The Child, suspended in this period of waiting, prefigures this interstice in which a new identity is forged, freed from domination.

3.3 The Child as a Mirror of Algerian History: Between Dispossession and Resistance

In *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, Maïssa Bey entrusts the figure of the Child with the symbolic condensation of Algerian colonial history. More than an individual pupil, he represents a people placed under tutelage, deprived of language, transmission, and historical agency. Through this figure, the novel narrates a collective experience oscillating between erasure and resilience.
The colonial school becomes a key site of symbolic violence. The scene in which the Child struggles with French before Madame

Lafrance illustrates linguistic dispossession as a tool of domination: « There are those… who hesitate, stumble over words… The Child is one of them… 'J'ime mo piyi, la Fronce.' » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) Language here functions as an instrument of assimilation, where loving France implies renouncing one's original belonging. As Paul Ricoeur suggests, such repression produces a « blocked memory», preventing individuals from conceiving themselves as historical subjects (Ricoeur, La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli, 2000).

This exclusion is further reinforced by the banishment of Arabic: « this language, their language, is forbidden in these places. » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) The suppression of native language thus becomes a broader strategy of cultural erasure. However, Bey also highlights alternative spaces of transmission. The Child's father, excluded from colonial schooling, can read the Qur'an and calculate at the souk, preserving forms of popular knowledge that resist colonial delegitimation. As Fanon observes, colonialism seeks not only to occupy territory but to dehumanize by destroying cultural continuity (Fanon, peau noire, masques blancs, 1952).

The contrast between Qur'anic school and French school reinforces this symbolic division: « At the Qur'anic school… he writes on a small wooden slate… At the school of the Roumis, he dips his pen into the inkwell. » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) These learning tools represent two conflicting epistemologies—communal memory versus colonial standardization—between which the Child remains suspended.

Beyond education, the Child functions as a living archive of suffering. He names the dead « to force them to exist a little longer, » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou cendre, 2008) transforming

memory into an act of resistance. Loss, famine, exile, and dispossession accumulate, yet « he does not cry, » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) signaling internalized trauma rather than indifference. This silent endurance echoes Fanon's description of colonial trauma as a slow erosion of human dignity. The Child's political awakening occurs when he realizes that colonial law and authority are embodied by Madame Lafrance: « Si Laloi, it's Madame Lafrance. » (Bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) The maternal figure of civilization is thus unmasked as an agent of domination. Through this allegory, Bey dismantles the myth of benevolent colonization and exposes its ideological foundations.

Ultimately, the Child embodies both dispossession and endurance. Though childhood is symbolically extinguished ; « there is no longer enough childhood in him to trust the day to come » (bey, Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, 2008) ; memory persists as resistance. The Child becomes the silent bearer of a future historical consciousness, prefiguring the emergence of postcolonial subjectivity as theorized by Fanon and Bhabha. Through him, Maïssa Bey restores to the dominated the right to History.

4. CONCLUSION

For Maïssa Bey, History is never merely a narrative backdrop: it is living material, a field of memory in which the fractures, silences, and resistances of a people are replayed. The author interrogates colonial memory through symbolic figures that embody Algeria's wounds and the quest for restorative speech. In *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, this function is assumed by the gaze of the Child. Eternally fixed in his age, the Child

becomes a metaphor for an Algeria prevented from growing, imprisoned in a time suspended by colonization. His absent speech, his never-revealed name, and his vulnerability embody what Paul Ricœur terms *"blocked memory"*, that is, a wounded memory that seeks to express itself despite repression and forgetting.

Through him, Maïssa Bey gives shape to a collective trauma: the mutilated childhood symbolizes the broken continuity between generations, the impossibility of transmitting a reconciled memory. The Child is no longer merely a character but an allegory of the colonized people, dispossessed of their history and reduced to a state of enforced innocence. His persistence in childhood, until the dawn of independence, reflects a latent hope: that of a rebirth, a passage to historical maturity. In this sense, Bey's Child is a figure of History in the making, a silent witness whose silence resonates as a promise of liberation.

In *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*, this representation of History shifts from the silence of the child to the speech of the woman. Where the child endured, the woman questions. Through the confrontation of three memories—the daughter of a *fellaga*, the French soldier, and the Pied-Noir girl—Maïssa Bey stages a symbolic encounter in which formerly opposed voices are finally heard. The choice of a female narrator is far from incidental: it marks the emergence of a historical subject long marginalized. By reclaiming the confiscated voice, the woman becomes the guardian of a plural and intimate memory, capable of articulating the wounds silenced by official narratives. As Ricœur emphasizes, « individual memory nourishes and corrects collective memory »: here, the intimate becomes an instrument of truth.

Maïssa Bey's feminine writing does not claim to faithfully reproduce the past, but rather to reinvent it through sensitivity, embracing the fragmentation of memory. In her quest for understanding and reconciliation, the narrator exposes the moral complexity of History: war is no longer perceived merely in terms of perpetrators and victims, but as a space where guilt, suffering, and the possibility of forgiveness coexist. The revelation that « the perpetrators have human faces » marks a decisive transition—from a wounded memory to a lucid memory that relinquishes manichaeism in order to rediscover the humanity behind the enemy.

Thus, from the nameless child to the woman who reclaims her voice, Maïssa Bey traces the trajectory of an Algerian History in search of meaning and recognition. One embodies foundational silence, the other restorative speech; one represents frozen pain, the other the attempt to articulate that pain. Through these two figures, the author redefines the relationship between literature and memory: to write is not only to bear witness, but also to remake History. Her work, simultaneously poetic and political, transforms fiction into a space of reconciliation—between generations, between memories, between the living and the dead. By giving voice to both the child and the woman, Maïssa Bey makes audible what History has long silenced: the persistent murmur of Algerian silences.

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