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Saying the Unspeakable through Silence: Poetics of the Unsaid and Traumatic Memory in Lilia Hassaine's Bitter Sun

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ABSTRACT: *This article offers a critical reading of Lilia Hassaine's novel Bitter Sun (2010) through the prism of silence as a literary and memorial device. Set in the context of Algeria's Black Decade and postcolonial exile, the story follows Samia, a young woman forced to flee Algeria after the assassination of her journalist brother. Rather than providing an explicit narrative of the violence she suffered, Hassaine constructs an oblique style of writing, made up of ellipses, sensory fragments, and charged silences. By mobilizing theories of trauma (Cathy Caruth), transgenerational memory and the poetics of Relation (Édouard Glissant), we analyze how silence functions both as a symptom of speech hindered by history and as an aesthetic and ethical strategy capable of making the unspeakable resonate without betraying it. Far from being a linguistic defect, the tacit becomes in Hassaine a space of resistance, where traumatic memory finds a literary form without giving in to spectacularization or narrative recuperation.*

KEYWORDS: Silence; Trauma; Dark Decade; French-Speaking Maghreb Literature; Memory; Poetics of The Unsaid; Postcolonialism.

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Introduction

In Francophone postcolonial literature, silence is no longer perceived simply as an absence of speech, but as a dense textual space, laden with what official history has silenced, repressed, or rendered unspeakable. For Lilia Hassaine, a French-Algerian novelist born in 1960, silence becomes the heart of a poetics of trauma, particularly in *Bitter Sun* (2010), a novel that explores the intimate aftermath of Algeria's Black Decade (1990–2000). Through the story of Samia, exiled in France after the assassination of her brother Karim, a journalist critical of armed groups, Hassaine questions the limits of language in the face of recent, unhistoricized, and deeply taboo violence.

Unlike the narratives of the War of Independence, which today benefit from a memorial framework (even a conflictual one), the Black Decade remains marked by national silence in Algeria and international indifference. In this context, how can we express pain without betraying it? This is the question that *Bitter Sun* answers, not with direct words, but with a writing of the unsaid, of the fragment, of the sensitive.

This article aims to analyze how silence in this novel oscillates between the historical impossibility of speaking and deliberate literary invention, thus constituting a strategy that is simultaneously aesthetic, ethical, and political.

I- Theoretical Framework

Our analysis is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining literary theory, trauma psychoanalysis, and postcolonial studies. We primarily draw on three complementary theoretical axes:

1. Trauma theory, as developed notably by Cathy Caruth in Unclaimed Experience (1996), appears in Lilia Hassaine's *Bitter Sun* not as an explicit theoretical framework, but as a narrative and psychic structure that profoundly shapes the story. The novel embodies, through its form and content, the three fundamental characteristics of trauma according to Caruth: inassimilability at the time of the event, delayed return, and the presence of absence.

1.1 The Inassimilability of the Traumatic Event

For Caruth, trauma is not simply a violent event, but an experience so extreme that it cannot be fully experienced or understood at the time it occurs. It therefore remains "unintegrated" into conscious memory. In *Bitter Sun*, the death of Karim, the brother of the heroine Samia, a journalist murdered during the Dark Decade, is never directly described. It emerges in fragments, through clues, through what it leaves behind: "His notebook was found in the street, open to the page for March 12. Nothing else. No body. No message. Just the wind turning the pages." (p. 27)

The absence of bodies, of witnesses, of a coherent narrative precisely reflects this inassimilability: the event is so brutal, so senseless, that it cannot be told as a story. It escapes linear narration, and this is why the novel leaves it in the shadows, not by omission, but out of fidelity to the traumatic experience.

1.2 Delayed Return and Repetition

According to Caruth, trauma does not manifest itself at the time of the event, but later, often in the form of intrusive repetitions: nightmares, flashbacks, bodily symptoms. It is this "delay" that defines its logic.

In *Bitter Sun*, Samia is haunted by memories that arise without warning, disrupting the narrative's chronology: *Sometimes, I wake up in 1994. The street smells of smoke. Karim is there, he holds out his scarf to me. Then I'm in Paris, in the rain, and the scarf is wet.* (p. 63)

This passage illustrates the overflow of the past into the present. Time is no longer linear; it is traumatic, that is, traversed by compulsive returns. The very structure of the novel, made up of time jumps, dreams, and unsent letters, mimics this psychic functioning: trauma is not recounted, it returns.

1.3 Trauma as the Presence of Absence

Caruth emphasizes the central paradox of trauma: it is absent from consciousness at the moment it occurs, but obsessively present thereafter. It lodges in silences, blank spaces, objects.

In *Bitter Sun*, it is precisely in what is not said that trauma resides. The dialogues are truncated, the emotions restrained, the explanations absent. But this absence speaks:

And over there? ...Mom?

Don't ask questions, my daughter. (p. 102)

The ellipses are not a void: they are charged with fear, censorship, repressed memory. Similarly, objects become substitutes for impossible speech:

I kept his pen. It doesn't work anymore, but I put it on my papers when I write. As if he were rereading over my shoulder. (p. 71)

The silent pen embodies Karim's ghostly presence. It doesn't speak, but it inhabits the space of writing. This is the paradox of trauma: it remains unspoken, yet it continues to be felt.

In *Bitter Sun*, trauma theory is not applied from the outside: it structures the narrative from the inside. Hassaine does not recount the trauma; she shapes it through fragmented, elliptical, sensory writing. The silence, the ellipses, the fetish objects, the temporal ruptures are not stylistic shortcomings, but faithful symptoms of the traumatic experience as defined by Caruth. Thus, the novel becomes less a narrative about trauma than a literary incarnation of the trauma itself, making it a work that is at once poetic, ethical, and historically valuable.

2- Memory and Silence in Lilia Hassaine

In *Bitter Sun*, family silences are not voids, but channels of transmission. Through the mother's silence, the absence of narrative, fetish objects, and the exile of memory, Hassaine shows how unresolved historical wounds in this case, those of the Dark Decade cross generations without using words. Here is how this silent transmission manifests itself in the novel:

2.1 Maternal Silence as a Nonverbal Archive

Paul Ricoeur, in Memory, History, and Forgetting (2000), distinguishes between individual memory, collective memory, and material traces (objects, places, bodies) that connect past and present. In *Bitter Sun*, Samia's mother never recounts what happened in Algiers, but her silence bears the trace of trauma:

My mother never spoke about Karim. When I said his name, she would get up, turn on the television very loudly, or go out to do errands she hadn't planned. (p. 38)

This behavior is not insignificant: it reveals a psychological survival strategy, but also a transmission through the body and gestures. Maternal silence becomes an unwritten, unhistoricized, but lived emotional archive. As a child, Samia learns not to ask questions, not to name the loss. Thus, trauma is not transmitted by language, but by the prohibition of language itself.

2.2 The Absence of Narrative as a Legacy

Ricoeur emphasizes that memory needs narratives to stabilize itself. However, in *Bitter Sun*, no coherent family narrative exists surrounding Karim's death. There is no precise date, no clear circumstances, and no burial site. This lack of narrative prevents mourning and transforms memory into a specter:

I wasn't allowed to cry. No coffin, no prayer, no name on a grave. So I buried his words in my head. (p. 45)

The *right to cry* is here linked to the right to a narrative. Without a narrative, there is no social recognition of grief; without recognition, no psychological closure. Samia therefore inherits not a story, but a narrative void that she must fill herself, hence her journal, which becomes an autonomous act of memorial reconstruction.

2.3 A Transnational and Multidirectional Memory

Michael Rothberg, in Multidirectional Memory (2009), shows that traumatic memories are not compartmentalized, but enter into a silent dialogue across borders. In *Bitter Sun*, Samia lives in France, but her trauma is Algerian and yet misunderstood in her host country:

When I said 'my brother was killed in Algeria,' people looked at me as if I had just returned from an old, over war. (p. 54)

This gap illustrates what Rothberg calls the tension between national memories: France does not recognize the Black Decade as a shareable memorial event, while Algeria buries it in official silence. Samia thus finds herself outside the framework of memory, carrying alone a memory that has no public space. Her exile thus becomes a memorial exile: she is cut off both from the land of trauma and from the country that could hear her.

2.4 Objects as Supports of Transgenerational Memory

Paul Ricœur emphasizes that, when words fail, memory relies on concrete clues objects, places, and images to weave a link between past and present. In *Bitter Sun*, these material traces are not mere relics: they become active mediators of memory transmission. If Karim's pen, placed on Samia's papers *as if connecting over my shoulder* (p. 71), embodies this ghostly presence of the deceased, it is also the red scarf that later crystallizes the silent legacy of an unspoken trauma: *I found it in a box, at the back of a closet. It still smelled of smoke. I never wore it, but I keep it in my drawer, folded like a secret* (p. 103).

These objects are not part of personal memory, but of a memory passed down, sometimes without explanation, often without narrative. Samia thus finds herself inhabited by a pain she has not experienced, but which shapes her relationship to the world, to history, to herself. This phenomenon illustrates the very paradox of transgenerational memory: one can carry within oneself an absence one has never known.

The novel thus gives substance to Ricœur's reflections on the necessity of traces and recognition for memory to live on, while also joining Michael Rothberg in the idea that historical traumas transcend individual boundaries and circulate, even in silence. In Hassaine, this silence is not erasure: it is a suspended memory, mute but present, waiting for a gesture, an object, a word to awaken it.

II- Methodological Framework

Methodologically, we combine thematic analysis (exploration of memory, identity, and historical issues) and discursive analysis (study of narrative, stylistic, and enunciative processes). This dual approach demonstrates how literary form in Hassaine's work is inseparable from historical content: silence is both a theme and a mode of writing.

1- Thematic Analysis: The Silences of History and Exile

Bitter Sun articulates three major thematic silences; all linked to the postcolonial and traumatic condition.

1.1 The Silence of the Black Decade

The violence of the 1990s in Algeria, often referred to as the "black decade," remains deeply buried in the folds of public silence. Marked by mass killings, the systematic assassination of journalists, intellectuals, and civilians, as well as the terror wielded by both Islamist armed groups and security forces, this period was the subject of an official policy of forgetting: the 2005 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation institutionalized amnesia by exchanging impunity for silence. In this context, Maïssa Bey's *Bitter Sun* does not simply evoke the trauma; it restores its very structure, adopting a style of writing made of ellipses, blank spaces, and silent objects.

Karim's death is its most poignant emblem: *His notebook was found in the street, open to the page for March 12. Nothing else. No body. No message. Just the wind turning the page* (p. 27). This scene, of tragic sobriety, condenses several dimensions of impossible mourning. The absence of a body prevents any

funeral ritual, any symbolic closure; the absence of a message prohibits any interpretation, any justice; and the wind, a figure of indifferent time, becomes the only witness to a disappearance that no one dares to name. As Cathy Caruth writes, trauma *is not simply the effect of past suffering, but also the repeated attempt to relive it in the impossibility of understanding it*. Here, it is the reader who is confronted with this incomprehension: he will never know who killed Karim or whether he was abducted by armed groups, executed by law enforcement, or *disappeared* in the interstices of an undeclared war. This intentional indeterminacy is not a narrative omission, but an ethical strategy: it refuses to simplify a complex violence, while denouncing the silence imposed by the state.

This silence is not an absence of memory, but repressed memory, as Paul Ricœur emphasizes: *To remember is not only to recall, it is also to recognize*. However, in post-civilitarian Algeria, this recognition is denied to the victims. The novel clearly demands it, through the insistent presence of material traces: the notebook, later the scarf, the unsent letters, which become so many substitutes for the missing body. These objects function as mnemonic clues, in the Ricœurian sense: they anchor the past in the present when language fails. But they are also, according to Marianne Hirsch, supports of post-memory memory: Samia, who did not experience the violence, inherits it through these fragments, and has built her identity on this speaking absence.

Another passage from the novel reinforces this logic of institutionalized silence:

No one spoke of those who were no longer there. We said 'they left,' as if they had chosen to go. But we knew, deep down, that they had been taken away, torn away, erased. And we kept quiet, so as not to be next (p. 45).

Here, language itself is corrupted: the verb *to leave* masks the uprooting, the violence, the forced disappearance. Silence is no longer simply imposed from above; it is internalized, reproduced by loved ones themselves, out of fear or survival. This is what Michael Rothberg calls *multidirectional memory*: even when it is denied locally, traumatic memory circulates, is transmitted, and often resists in the margins, in novels, in objects forgotten at the bottom of a drawer.

Thus, *Bitter Sun* does not simply tell an individual story of grief. It gives literary form to a repressed collective experience, transforming ellipsis into an act of testimony. Silence, in Maïssa Bey, is not empty: it is charged with what could not be said, but which continues, stubbornly, to haunt the present. And it is precisely in this *wind that turns the pages* that resides the tenuous, but real hope of a future memory, still to be written.

1.2 Unmourned Grief

Samia can neither enter her brother nor mourn publicly. In a society where the deceased of the Black Decade are deprived of burial, name, and sometimes even official existence, mourning is rendered illegitimate, even forbidden. This ritual deprivation, *I wasn't allowed to cry. No coffin, no prayer, no name on a grave. So I buried his words in my head* (p. 45), sums up with painful simplicity the impossibility of mourning in a context of unacknowledged political violence.

The absence of a body, of a ceremony, of a place of memory forces Samia to perform an interior, almost clandestine gesture: she herself becomes Karim's tomb. Her *words*, fragments of thought, writing, or memory, replace the missing tombstone. This displacement of mourning from the collective register to the psychic register illustrates what Cathy Caruth calls *unfulfilled mourning*: a pain that cannot be symbolized, because it has not been socially recognized, and which therefore returns constantly, in the form of haunting. But this inner silence is not erasure. On the contrary, it is a saturated presence, a memory that does not calm down because it has not been allowed to express itself. As Paul Ricœur emphasizes, *just memory* requires both fidelity to the past and recognition by others. However, in post-conflict Algeria, this recognition is refused: the victims are made invisible, the families silenced, the stories stifled. The novel denounces this policy of impossible mourning by showing how memory, deprived of its collective forms, responds to itself on the bodies and minds of those who survive.

This is where a subtle but essential transformation takes place: interrupted mourning becomes transgenerational memory. Samia, although she did not directly experience the violence, becomes its repository. As Marianne Hirsch shows, *postmemory* is transmitted not through memory, but through emotional impregnation through silences, restrained gestures, and preserved objects. By *entering the words into her head* Samia does not forget them: she keeps them alive, ready to resurface.
Thus, the silence in *Bitter Sun* is never empty. It is charged with what could not be said, mourned, buried. It is the trace of an absence that structures identity, language, and the relationship to the world. And it is precisely in this solitary, painful, but tenacious memory that a form of resistance resides: that of not letting the missing disappear a second time.

1.3 Exile as a Rupture of Identity

In France, Samia experiences a double uprooting: she is a foreigner in Algeria, because she left and is therefore suspected of betrayal or abandonment, but she remains a foreigner in France, where her story, her silences, her pain find no comprehensible echo. This identity tearing is not only played out geographically or politically; it is embodied in language itself, that intimate place where memory, belonging, and otherness are woven together. *I speak French like a foreigner who has learned to remain silent. Even my silences are due to an accent* (p. 89).
This poignantly accurate sentence reveals that silence is not an absence of language, but a language in its own right, a marked, accented language, laden with a history that the host society does not perceive, or refuses to understand. *Silence with an accent* thus becomes the metaphor of an irreducible identity, which cannot be erased by exile, nor absorbed by assimilation. Samia does not only speak in French; she speaks through an experience that French mainland France does not contain. Her elocution is shot through with the unspoken words of the dark decade, with the names that are no longer spoken, with the tears that are not shed - all traces that resist the linguistic neutralization imposed by the republican model.
This relationship with language illustrates what sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad called "the double absence": the exile is never quite where he is, because he carries within him an elsewhere that haunts him. But in Maïssa Bey, this double absence is coupled with a stubborn presence: that of a transgenerational memory that refuses to be diluted. Samia's silence is therefore not passivity; it is discreet resistance to an injunction to forget, whether it comes from Algeria (which wants to turn the page) or from France (which refuses to hear). By refusing to speak *like a Frenchwoman*, by allowing her silence to retain its accent, Samia affirms, without saying so, that she belongs to a history that has no right to exist but that nevertheless exists.
Thus, language becomes the last territory where memory can lodge. And it is perhaps there, in the gap between words and what they silence, that lies the possibility of a future word, a word that denies neither exile, nor mourning, nor otherness, but assumes them as the foundation of a plural identity, wounded, but alive.

2- Discursive Analysis: Silence as a Narrative Device

In *Bitter Sun*, silence goes far beyond the thematic dimension to become a true narrative device, structuring both the form of the story and its ethics. Maïssa Bey does not simply speak of silence; she writes from silence, making ellipsis, lacunae, and the unspeakable the very driving forces of her narration. The blanks in the text the absence of names for the executioners, Karim's missing body, the dates without context, the interrupted dialogues are not gaps, but aesthetic and political choices. They form a writing of refusal: refusing to simplify complex violence, refusing to legitimize an official narrative that denies the victims, and also refusing to present trauma as a spectacle.
This device is part of what literary criticism calls a *poetics of ethical ellipsis*: the author prefers to silence what cannot be said without betraying, rather than artificially filling the gaps left by censorship and trauma. Thus, the sentence *Her notebook was found in the street, open to the page for March 12. Nothing else* (p. 27) does not seek to reconstruct the facts, but to restore the very experience of absence. The reader is placed

in the same position as Samia: confronted with a mystery without a solution, a loss without a ritual, a memory without an anchor. This is the power of narrative silence: it does not describe impossible mourning, it makes us experience it.

Similarly, the internal focus on Samia, whose hesitant, fragmented, often suspended voice bears the traces of trauma, transforms the narrative into an intimate memorial space. The character's silences become those of the text; her unanswered questions, those of the reader. This narrative strategy creates a form of ethical complicity: the reader is not invited to consume a story, but to inhabit a lack, to actively participate in the reconstruction of a meaning that will never be fully given. As Shoshana Felman writes about the literature of testimony, *to say the unspeakable is not to make it visible, it is to make its absence heard*.

Finally, silence as a device allows the novel to escape the binary logic of *say/silence* to establish a third space: that of presence through absence. The silent objects (the notebook, the scarf, the photos), the unfinished sentences, the implicit blank pages all function as active memory clues, in the Ricœurian sense. They do not replace speech, but prepare it, solicit it, make it urgent. Silence is therefore not the end of the story, but its hidden engine: it is because certain things cannot be said that the novel exists to carry them, without betraying them.

2.1 Internal Focalization and Fragmented Subjectivity

The narrative is entirely focused on Samia's consciousness, but this consciousness is discontinuous, punctuated by dreams, intrusive memories, and blank spaces. The narration adopts a non-linear structure, which mimics the workings of trauma:

Sometimes, I wake up in 1994. The street smells of smoke. Karim is there, he hands me his scarf. Then I'm in Paris, in the rain, and the scarf is wet. (p. 63)

The transition from past to present without temporal transition creates an effect of temporal disorientation, characteristic of traumatic experience.

In *Bitter Sun* (2010), Lilia Hassaine constructs a narrative deeply rooted in the consciousness of her heroine, Samia, through a total internal focalization which, far from producing a coherent subject in control of her narrative, reveals a dislocated subjectivity, traversed by the unresolved aftermath of the Algerian black decade. As Gérard Genette has shown, internal focalization allows access to *a character's point of view, their perceptions, their thoughts*, but in Hassaine's work, this narrative device is diverted from its classic function: it does not serve to illuminate a unified psyche, but to literarily embody the functioning of trauma, as defined by Cathy Caruth as an experience *unassimilable at the moment it occurs*, which returns in a delayed manner in the form of repetition, intrusion and temporal rupture.

The novel's narrative structure reflects this traumatic logic through a radical fragmentation of time. The story rejects any linear chronology in favor of a discontinuous temporality, where past and present coexist without mediation. One of the most emblematic passages is the following:

Sometimes, I wake up in 1994. The street smells of smoke. Karim is there, he holds out his scarf to me. Then I'm in Paris, in the rain, and the scarf is wet. (Hassaine, 2010, p. 63)

The absence of temporal markers or logical connectors between the two propositions creates an immediate shift, mimicking the intrusive surge of traumatic memory. The reader, like the character, is projected from Algiers to Paris without transition, without any latency. This temporal disorientation is not a stylistic artifice, but a form faithful to the post-traumatic experience, where *the past is not behind oneself, but in the very present*. The trauma, here, is not recounted: it returns, and the syntax of the novel becomes its vector.

This fragmented subjectivity is also manifested by the porosity between dream, memory, and perception. The boundaries between the regimes of consciousness regularly blur, reflecting Samia's inability to distinguish what belongs to the lived past, to reconstructed memory, or to affective hallucination:

Last night, he spoke to me. Not with words, but with the sound of his footsteps in the hallway. I got up. There was no one there. Just the notebook open on the table, as if he had just written it down. (p. 78)

Karim's absence is not simply noted; it is felt as a sensory presence. This indirect, furtive, and material mode of appearance avoids the spectacularization of the ghost while reinforcing its emotional charge. It is part of what Paul Ricoeur calls *mnemic traces*: concrete clues (objects, sounds, smells) which make it possible to connect past and present without resorting to narrative language, when this is lacking.

Finally, internal focus reveals a consciousness haunted not only by the traumatic event, but also by the family silence that surrounds it. Samia doesn't possess the facts, but she feels their absence. Her introspection is punctuated by unanswered questions, painful assumptions, and internalized silences:

I wonder what he saw before he died. I wonder if he was afraid. I wonder why no one looked for his body. But I don't ask the questions. I keep them in my chest, like stones.(p. 51)

These questions, repeated in the imperfect tense, then frozen in the present tense, show how the unspoken becomes corporeal matter. Samia's subjectivity is thus doubly fragmented: by historical trauma and by the transgenerational transmission of silence. Internal focalization does not provide access to a stable inner truth, but to a consciousness awaiting a narrative, a consciousness that bears the traces of a story it has not been told.

In short, internal focalization in *Bitter Sun* functions not as a tool of realistic psychologization, but as a mimetic device for trauma. By blurring temporalities, erasing the boundaries between dream and reality, and embodying silence in the character's body, Hassaine transforms fragmented subjectivity into a literary form of the unspoken.

The reader does not access a recounted memory, but a memory that returns, that weighs, that inhabits, and it is precisely in this absence of narrative control that the ethical and aesthetic power of the novel resides.

2.2 Punctuation and Typographical Blanks as Forms of Meaningful Silence

In contemporary literature, silence is no longer simply an absence of speech: it becomes a meaningful presence, a space where the unspeakable can emerge, where memory and the unsaid are articulated in the interstices of the text. Punctuation and typographical blanks particularly ellipses, dashes, and spaces between lines play a central role in this dynamic. The following passage subtly illustrates this phenomenon:

Do you think he knew? ... Samia? He knew we wouldn't speak. (p. 102)

This short exchange, structured by an economy of words and formal precision, condenses several levels of meaning where punctuation itself becomes an operator of discourse. The aim here is to analyze how silence, inscribed typographically, acquires a strong semiotic and narrative value, to the point of becoming an essential vector of memory and meaning.

2.2.1 Punctuation as a Device for Writing Silence

Ellipses are the first visible markers of this silence. Unlike strong punctuation (period, question mark), they indicate a suspension of speech, a rupture in language. Here, they reflect a moment of emotional tension or inner reflection, where speech is momentarily impossible.

In this excerpt, the character responds with "..." to a direct question. This silent response, although seemingly empty, is equivalent to a statement laden with meaning. It can be interpreted as an implicit confession, a pain too acute to be expressed, or a silent complicity between the characters.

The ellipse is therefore polyphonic: it leaves room for a multitude of interpretations without setting them in stone.

2.2.2 Typographical White: Space of Memory and Projection

The white space between lines, combined with the suspensions, becomes a zone of narrative latency. The absence of words is not empty: it constitutes a zone of memory, where what is not said weighs just as much, if not more, than what is expressed.

In the context of the sentence *He knew we wouldn't speak*, the preceding unsaid becomes the silent echo of a shared truth. What is silenced is not ignored: it is deliberately kept at a distance, to preserve, to protect, or to respect a shared pain.

This process makes the reader an interpretive actor. The reader must inhabit the silence, project meaning into the white space. The narration thus becomes participatory: the text does not say everything, but it provides the tools for the reader to guess, imagine, and feel.

2.2.3 Towards a Poetics of Silence: When the Text Speaks in the Void

The silence in this passage is not simply an absence. It constitutes a form of poetic expression. In this respect, it echoes what discourse theorists (Barthes, Blanchot, Didi Huberman) have analyzed as speech in the void, or the discourse of withdrawal.

This form of writing suggests that the essential does not always come through verbalization, but through peripheral forms of language: interruption, suspense, silence, and the repetition of blank spaces. These processes are part of a minimalist aesthetic, often specific to writing about memory or trauma.

From this perspective, the characters cannot (or will not) speak, because language is no longer sufficient. Silence then becomes the only possible language, more eloquent than words themselves.

Far from being a simple stylistic effect, the strategic use of punctuation and spaces in the dialogue constitutes a veritable grammar of silence. Ellipses, ellipses, and typographical blanks become sites of tension, memory, complicity, or suffering. In a narrative space where language collides with its own limits, these silent forms allow the unspeakable to be expressed and engage the reader in an active interpretation.

Conclusion

In *Bitter Sun*, Lilia Hassaine makes silence much more than a simple narrative motif: she makes it the very matrix of writing and memory. This silence, inherited from colonial history and migratory fractures, is not an absence, but a paradoxical presence, a restrained voice that resists erasure. Through a dual strategy both thematic (silence as a trace of repressed memory) and discursive (silence as a form of enunciation) Hassaine reinvents the possibility of speaking without saying everything, of bearing witness without exhibiting. She makes the unspeakable resonate not as a void, but as an inhabited space, where the affects of loss, uprooting, and trauma are deposited.

From this perspective, the unsaid is neither a sign of powerlessness nor a refusal to speak; it becomes an act of writing and a gesture of resistance in the face of the violence of history and institutionalized forgetting. Silence then becomes a negative word in the sense given to it by Ricoeur or Caruth: a form of testimony that escapes the framework of the official narrative, but which is no less significant. By inscribing the wounds of exile and filiation in the economy of the unsaid, Hassaine transforms the novel into a space of symbolic reappropriation, where collective memory can be reformulated differently, through the silences of the text.

Hassain's writing thus falls within the tradition of French-speaking Maghrebi writing, from Assia Djebar to Maïssa Bey, which explores the tension between speech and erasure to reinvent the transmission of memory. However, Hassaine renews its scope: for her, silence is not what remains when words fail, but what makes words possible. It precedes, frames, and permeates speech, like an underground vibration that gives the text its emotional and poetic density.

In this sense, *Bitter Sun* proposes a poetics of silence where traumatic memory does not achieve healing, but acquires a form of literary presence: a sensitive, fragmentary memory that inhabits language instead of being erased by it.

In doing so, Hassaine gives silence an ethical and aesthetic value: it becomes the place of an intimate resistance, where literature regains the power to say differently what history has forced into silence. Through this writing of withdrawal, *Bitter Sun* establishes itself as a work of resonance; that of a wounded memory, but always speaking through its silences.

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