

## **Transnational Feminist Writing: Deconstructing Masculine Domination in Hatab Sarajevo by Said Khatibi An Intersectional Feminist Reading**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper seeks to deconstruct the mechanisms of masculine domination and the discourse of violence in the context of civil wars, taking the novel *Hatab Sarajevo* (Firewood of Sarajevo) by the Algerian writer Said Khatibi as a model for critical inquiry. The study proceeds from the hypothesis that the violence inflicted upon women during wartime is not incidental, but rather a systematic strategy for the "rape of the nation" through the female body. The paper discusses how the encounter between the Algerian character Selim and the Bosnian character Ivana in a "Third Space" (following Homi Bhabha's approach) creates an opportunity for the formation of a hybrid identity that transcends closed nationalisms. The study also fundamentally focuses on the act of writing (metanarrative) as a feminist strategy of resistance, through which the character transforms from an object of trauma and physical violation into a narrating subject that reclaims the authority of storytelling, thereby deconstructing the official narrative of history.

**Keywords:** Feminist Writing; Cultural Crossing; Masculine Domination; Third Space; Politics of the Body; Metanarrative; Hatab Sarajevo.

### **Introduction**

The novel *Hatab Sarajevo* (2019) by the Algerian novelist Said Khatibi constitutes a foundational text in the corpus of contemporary Arabic narrative, not only for reaching the shortlist of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (2020), but also for its remarkable capacity to construct a narrative bridge connecting two historically distant yet structurally similar wounds: the Black Decade in Algeria and the ethnic cleansing war in Bosnia. Through the intersection of its characters' destinies across Algeria, Sarajevo, and Ljubljana, the novel traces the contours of a transnational human experience that seeks to explore the depths of the besieged self in contexts of war and exile, thereby transcending narrow local narratives toward a broader universal horizon.

This study derives its relevance and significance from its proposal of an intersectional feminist reading of the text, one that goes beyond the surface of events to delve into the mechanisms through which the image of the female is constructed in spaces of conflict. The novel does not present the character of Ivana as a passive victim stripped of agency, but

rather as an active subject who practices resistance through writing (metanarrative) and the reconstruction of a hybrid identity in a "Third Space" for cultural negotiation. The added value of this research lies in its deconstruction of the structures of masculine domination that attempt to "militarize" the female body, and in examining how the narrative resists this domination through strategies of polyphony and recontextualization.

Based on the foregoing, the central problematic of this study can be formulated through the following question: How does the novel *Hatab Sarajevo* employ strategies of transnational feminist writing to deconstruct the discourse of masculine domination and reconstruct the female self outside the framework of the "silent victim"? This central problematic branches into the following sub-questions:

How does the "genealogy of pain" intersect between the female body (Ivana) and political memory (Selim) to form an alternative archive of the history of war? What is the role of the "Third Space" (Ljubljana) as a zone of cultural crossing in deconstructing traditional gender binaries (savior/victim) and producing hybrid identities? How does the "metanarrative" (the writing of the play within the novel) function as a tool of resistance through which the feminist character reclaims the "authority of storytelling" from the official masculine discourse?

This paper seeks to achieve a number of objectives, the most prominent of which are: deconstructing the mechanisms of symbolic and material violence inflicted upon women in civil wars, and revealing their connection to deep patriarchal structures; analyzing the dynamics of "cultural crossing" and their impact on forming a new consciousness that transcends lethal nationalist affiliations; and highlighting the role of creative writing (narrative and theater) as an existential act of salvation and restoration of the shattered self.

To address this problematic, the study adopts the comparative approach in its cultural framework (Cultural Studies Approach), supported by a postcolonial feminist perspective. The study borrows its operative tools from Homi Bhabha's concepts of the "Third Space" and "hybridity," as well as the propositions of trauma studies (Trauma Studies) advanced by Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, to analyze the mechanisms of representing pain and its renarration. This methodological synthesis allows for reading the text as both a cultural and aesthetic document simultaneously, revealing the layers of meaning hidden behind the apparent tale.

### **Section One: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework (Intersectional Approaches)**

#### **1.1 Feminist Criticism and Discourse Analysis: From "the Image of Women" to "the Politics of the Body"**

Feminist criticism is one of the most important critical methodologies that crystallized in the 1960s and 1970s of the twentieth century, coinciding with the second wave of feminism in the West. The American critic Elaine Showalter solidified this term in her seminal essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979), calling for a criticism that goes beyond merely detecting the image of women in literature, to focusing on "woman as writer" and on the texts produced by women (Showalter, 1979). In the context of this study, feminist criticism does not aim merely to defend women's rights, but seeks to analyze and deconstruct the discursive mechanisms through which masculine domination is constructed within

literary texts. It is an investigation into "the material, social, political, and psychological motives" that govern the production and reception of the text. Its operative objectives include:

Re-reading the literary archive: to rescue marginalized female voices from oblivion. Deconstructing stereotypes: that confine women to the roles of "angel" or "devil," or "passive victim." Revealing "the politics of the body"; that is, how the female body within the text is transformed into a site of ideological and political struggle (Abu Al-Naja, 2002, p. 20).

### **1.2 Transnational Feminism and Homi Bhabha's Concepts**

In order for the study to transcend the traditional Western feminist discourse and engage with the reality of women in the contexts of civil wars and exile (Algeria/Bosnia), it opens up to the concepts of postcolonial criticism, specifically the propositions of Homi Bhabha in his pivotal book *The Location of Culture*.

**The Third Space:** This concept refers to that interstitial zone (In-between) that forms at the intersection of cultures. It is a "site of enunciation" that allows for the emergence of "hybrid identities" that transcend the binary of (Self/Other) (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56). In the novel *Hatab Sarajevo*, exile constitutes this "Third Space" that reshapes the consciousness of the characters outside strict national boundaries.

**Hybridity:** This does not mean a mere blending of two cultures, but is rather a strategy of resistance that unsettles dominant power. It is "the creation of something new and different, something new and unrecognizable that comes into being" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 327). The hybrid feminist character is one who refuses to be confined within a lethal nationalist identity, and chooses to open up to the Other as a condition for survival and self-restoration.

### **1.3 The Concept of Cultural Crossing**

The concept of "cultural crossing" in contemporary critical discourse refers to the movement of persons, discourses, and values across geographical and symbolic boundaries, and the processes of identity negotiation, cultural hybridization, and redistribution of power relations between "Self" and "Other" that result from this transition. This concept is closely linked to postcolonial studies and cultural studies, where the moment of contact between cultures is viewed not merely as a spatial transition, but as an event that simultaneously reshapes systems of meaning and identity (Barada, 2012, p. 114).

In this horizon, cultural crossing is not understood as a unidirectional movement from "periphery" to "center" or from South to North, but as a negotiative space akin to what Homi Bhabha calls the "Third Space"; that is, the interstitial zone where hybrid identities are generated and where rigid binaries such as (East/West, Self/Other) are fractured (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 53-56, 327). This space enables the interrogation of closed nationalist narratives and opens the field for new forms of belonging based on shared experience rather than singular origin.

The components of cultural crossing can be detailed in light of this study as follows: **Identity Negotiation:** the reconstruction of identity in new spaces, where the self is tested in its contact with different languages and values, revising its prior assumptions and redefining itself. **Cultural Hybridization:** the blending of multiple cultural elements (language, memory, religion, national narratives) into a single fabric that is neither a repetition of the origin nor

a complete assimilation into the host culture. Strategies of Resistance and Adaptation: the mechanisms adopted by the self to deal with the violence of the new context, ranging from closure and denial to openness, questioning, and criticism. Transnational Memory: carrying individual and collective memory across borders and transforming it into a symbolic resource that frames the crossing experience and does not allow the erasure of the roots of pain and oppression (Barada, 2012, p. 114).

Cultural crossing becomes a fundamental hermeneutic axis in the novel Hatab Sarajevo for understanding the characters' experience, particularly the female characters who cross from the space of war to the space of exile, from one language to another, and from the position of "silent victim" to the position of "writer/witness." Ivana's transition from Sarajevo to Ljubljana represents not merely a geographical movement, but a founding moment of a new identity where the memory of the Bosnian war intersects with the experience of European exile, while Selim carries with him the fragments of the memory of the Black Decade in Algeria to the same space, transforming exile into a "Third Space" that gathers multiple wounds into a single transnational narrative.

#### **1.4 Comparative Literature and Interdisciplinary Studies: Henry Remak and the Geo-Political Comparison (Algeria/Bosnia)**

This study transcends the traditional concept of comparative literature (the French school), which confines its interest to historical relationships of influence and reception, to adopt the broader American concept formulated by Henry Remak, who defines comparative literature as "the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature and other areas of knowledge and belief" (Remak, 1961, p. 3). This perspective opens the door wide to interdisciplinary studies (Interdisciplinary Studies), which are no longer an academic luxury but a methodological necessity for understanding contemporary novels in which historical, political, and cultural narratives are intertwined.

In the context of reading Hatab Sarajevo, the comparative approach in its interdisciplinary dimension allows us to move from "comparing texts" to "comparing contexts and representations," through: Geo-political comparison: linking the "Black Decade" in Algeria with the "Balkan War," not as two separate political events, but as two adjacent human experiences in suffering, revealing the "universality of oppression." Epistemological intersection: exploiting the tools of political sociology to understand the structure of civil wars, and the tools of psychoanalysis (especially trauma studies) to deconstruct the mechanisms of the characters' (Selim and Ivana) responses to violence. Cultural analysis: studying "exile" (Ljubljana) not as a geographical place, but as a hybrid cultural space that reshapes the identities of immigrants.

In this sense, interdisciplinary studies become an epistemological "excavation" tool, revealing how the novel transforms from an individual tale into a cultural document that condemns wars and champions the values of coexistence (Al-Qadi et al., 2010, p. 56).

## **1.5 The Sociology of Masculine Domination: From Symbolic to Material Violence in Wars**

The concept of "masculine domination" in this study draws on the foundational theses of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that this domination is not merely physical control, but a symbolic system deeply rooted in social and cultural structures that works to "normalize" gender inequality and make it appear natural and self-evident.

This domination manifests in times of peace through what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence," a soft and invisible violence, even to its victims themselves, practiced through the imposition of comprehensive masculine standards, the division of gender roles, and the silencing of the female voice. However, the context of war, as in Hatab Sarajevo, reveals the transformation of this symbolic violence into excessive and systematic physical violence.

Here, the study transcends Bourdieu's general analysis to intersect with feminist theses that have analyzed the mechanisms of war, where: First, the body becomes a site of invasion: as Susan Brownmiller argues, rape in war is not a sexual act, but a strategic weapon to humiliate the enemy and destroy its social fabric through the violation of its women's bodies. Second, domination deepens through militarization: Cynthia Enloe demonstrates that the culture of war reinforces masculine domination by placing men in the position of "protectors and warriors" and women in the position of "national symbol" requiring protection, thereby stripping them of their agency and reducing them to mere symbolic "possessions" of the nation.

In the novel Hatab Sarajevo, masculine domination manifests in both dimensions: the symbolic violence that marks the characters' lives (silencing the voice and marginalizing women), and the brutal physical violence that transforms the bodies of Ivana and her sister into a political map of pain.

### **Section Two: Textual Thresholds and Narrative Structure**

## **2.1 Context of the Novel: From the Archive of the "Black Decade" and the Bosnian War to the "Novel of Crisis"**

The novel Hatab Sarajevo (2019) by the Algerian novelist Said Khatibi was published in a literary moment that seeks to transcend closed local narratives toward a transnational human horizon, linking two tragedies that are contemporaneous in time yet distant in geography: the Black Decade in Algeria and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Khatibi, 2019).

The text begins with a fundamental question about the fate of "survivors" whom the war did not kill physically, but in whom it killed the capacity to live, leaving them suspended in a state of helplessness, guilt, and perforated memory. The narrator Selim declares this existential link between the two places when he says: "We are brothers in pain; apart from that, everything separates us... Death became a ritual, we grew accustomed to it, and the miners laughed at us" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 15).

This quotation establishes from the outset the logic of "comparison through pain"; the novel does not draw a political comparison between Algeria and Sarajevo, but an existential comparison between two shattered beings.

The "novel of crisis" is manifested in how the writer presents the city of Ljubljana (the meeting place) not as a European paradise, but as an extension of the nightmare, as Selim describes exile: "Ljubljana is nothing but a waiting station... It does not resemble Algeria, nor does it resemble Sarajevo, but it resembles us in our fear" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 20). This early awareness on the part of the characters that geography does not resolve the crisis of memory is what gives the novel its philosophical depth.

Furthermore, Khatibi exploits his autobiography as an Algerian writer residing in Slovenia to practice what might be termed "criticism from a safe distance." His presence in the Balkan region allowed him to see the tragedy of his country (Algeria) more clearly through the mirror of the Other (Bosnia). This interstitial position, the "Third Space," is what enabled him to write a novel that does not condemn the executioners so much as it mourns the victims, and does not seek a "historical truth" so much as it seeks a "human truth."

The novel, then, is not a documentation of two events; it does not content itself with recording events of violence, but is an "excavation" into the layers of shared fear, where the city, memory, and exile are transformed into a laboratory for posing questions of meaning after collapse, in an attempt to answer a terrifying question: What remains of the human being when the homeland is reduced to "firewood"? And how can writing save the self from drowning in the archive of blood? The geographical articulation (Algeria/Sarajevo/Ljubljana) thus becomes an existential articulation through which the two experiences are read as two parallel faces of a single hell (Khatibi, 2019).

## **2.2 Semiotics of Thresholds: Deconstructing the Significations of the Title "Hatab Sarajevo" (The Dialectic of Stagnation and Combustion)**

The title "Hatab Sarajevo" constitutes the first threshold that reveals the tragic identity of the text and orients the reader's horizon of expectation. It is composed syntactically of an indefinite, inanimate construct noun (*mudaf*) "hatab" (firewood) and a proper noun of a place burdened with bloody history (*mudaf ilayh*) "Sarajevo." The signifier "hatab," as an inanimate noun, connotes desiccation; everything that has dried from trees and lost its capacity for life and growth, becoming fuel for ignition, which imbues the title with the signification of stagnation and latent death in things before their consumption by fire (Ben Tomi, 2019, p. 45).

However, the annexation of this inanimate signifier to "Sarajevo" transports it from its lexical signification to the level of grand metaphor. The principal characters, foremost among them Selim and Ivana, are nothing but human "firewood"; beings whose wars have dried the sap of life in their veins and reduced them to remnants capable of burning.

This title carries a striking paradox: firewood is typically used for heating, but in the novel it transforms into a symbol of internal combustion. Here the dialectic of stagnation/combustion is established: firewood is ordinarily used for warmth, but the novel inverts the equation, making it a symbol of internal combustion and an extension of the time of siege and destruction that marked the city (Khatibi, 2019, back cover). According to the perspective of threshold semiotics as formulated by Genette, the title becomes an "interpretive key" that encapsulates the central proposition of the work (Ben Tomi, 2019, p.

46); that is, war does not kill everyone immediately, but leaves survivors in the form of firewood that feeds on the ashes of memory (Khatibi, 2019, back cover).

This title poses a fundamental question: What distinguishes the firewood of "Sarajevo" from any other? Is it because the scent of death has become transcultural, clinging to its memory? This bleakness at the threshold spurs the reader to delve into the body of the text in search of a "flame of life" amid this desiccation.

### **2.3 Narrative Architecture**

The novel *Hatab Sarajevo* is built upon a complex narrative architecture that breaks chronological linearity and employs modern techniques to represent the besieged self:

#### **A. Polyphonic Technique (The Polyphonic Novel)**

The novel *Hatab Sarajevo* is constructed upon a narrative architecture that approaches what Mikhail Bakhtin terms the "polyphonic novel," where no single voice dominates the narrative, but multiple voices and independent perspectives coexist within the text (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). The narration alternates between the voice of Selim and the voice of Ivana in the first person, each possessing their own consciousness and distinct vision of the world, granting both characters clear narrative independence and preventing the reduction of the experience to a unidirectional perspective.

This polyphony achieves not merely a "formal democracy," but also reveals the gendered differences in perceiving and experiencing war. While Selim presents the war from the perspective of a journalist witnessing the massacres of the Black Decade in Algeria, Ivana renarrates the catastrophe from the position of the tormented female body in Sarajevo, thus juxtaposing "the memory of blood" and "the memory of the body" in a single textual fabric (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 35). In this sense, polyphony becomes both an aesthetic and ideological strategy, allowing the destabilization of the official masculine narrative of history by making space for a counter-female voice that negotiates memory from within pain.

#### **B. Analepsis as a Narrative of Trauma**

Time in *Hatab Sarajevo* does not proceed according to a simple chronological linearity, but is based on a density of temporal flashbacks that interrupt the course of the present and return the reader to decisive moments in the characters' history, conforming to what Gerard Genette calls "analepsis" as a return to events preceding the time of narration (Genette, 1980, p. 40). However, the function of these flashbacks transcends the mere filling of informational gaps about the past; they transform into a technique for representing trauma, where the painful past returns not as a quiet memory but as a forced intrusion upon the present, disrupting the sequence of consciousness and time simultaneously. This embodies what Cathy Caruth calls the "repetitive nature of trauma"; the characters do not "remember" the past by choice, but are "assaulted" by unassimilated memories that storm the present, rendering the narrative fragmented and confused as a mirror of the victim's psyche (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

In this sense, the fragmented temporal construction of the novel is consistent with what trauma studies affirm: that the traumatic experience is not assimilated all at once, but returns in the form of fragmented and aggressive images that impose themselves upon consciousness

at unexpected moments. The interweaving of temporalities between the Black Decade in Algeria and the siege of Sarajevo reflects not only the parallelism of historical contexts but also embodies the impossibility of separating past from present in the consciousness of Selim and Ivana, where it becomes impossible to draw a dividing line between what has ended and what continues in memory.

### **C. Metanarrative: Writing and Theater as Acts of Resistance**

Hatab Sarajevo rests upon a clear metanarrative dimension, where the characters are not content with being the subject of the narrative but engage in the act of writing itself. Selim writes a series of articles on "survivors of the flood in Algeria and the Balkans," while Ivana is engaged in writing a play titled "Hatab Sarajevo" as an attempt to transform raw pain into artistic text (Khatibi, 2019).

Thus the novel transforms into a text that monitors the process of its own production from within, juxtaposing the level of the tale with the level of reflection on the act of narration and writing, approaching the definition of metanarrative as "narrative that comments upon itself" (Waugh, 1984). This metanarrative dimension appears not merely as a technical device but assumes an existential and resistant dimension; writing becomes for Selim and Ivana a strategy for saving the self from drowning in silence and nothingness, and an attempt to possess the "authority of storytelling" in the face of the official narrative of war (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992). This parallelism culminates in a metanarrative dimension when both resort to a "symphony of creation" for survival: Ivana through theater, and Selim through writing, so that art becomes the last fortress against the absurdity of death. Ivana's play, inspired by Selim's biography and the wounds of Sarajevo, represents a symbolic act of reclaiming control over both body and memory simultaneously, where she moves from the position of "victim" to the position of "witness/writer," and theater becomes a space for the re-representation of trauma for the purpose of deconstructing it rather than reproducing it (Khatibi, 2019).

### **2.4 Character Structure: The Intersection of Destinies in the Space of Crossing**

The surface structure of the text is founded upon the intersection of two trajectories of two principal characters, united by pain and separated by geography:

#### **A. Selim: The Memory of the Black Decade**

A young Algerian journalist bearing the wounds of witnessing the massacres of Raiss and Ben Talha, who emigrated to Slovenia fleeing "news of death." He represents the generation devastated by the "Black Decade" (the 1990s). He decided to emigrate to Slovenia not in search of prosperity, but "fleeing the news of death" that had besieged him. Selim describes the turning point in his life: "I lived as any nobody lives... before my life was turned upside down, starting from the day Farouk called me... He surprised me with his offer, did he sense my desire to escape the news of death?" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 13). Selim carries a memory burdened with blood; his journalistic assignment required documenting death: "The editor-in-chief asked me... to go to 'Sidi Labqar' to write a report on that village, after the blood of thirty people had been shed there" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 13).

**B. Ivana Pulic: The Memory of the Besieged Body**

A young Bosnian woman, a survivor of the Balkan War, who escaped the hell of the Bosnian war (1992-1995) to Slovenia, bearing the trauma of rape and loss engraved in her body, seeking restoration through writing a play. Unlike Selim, who documents death in words, Ivana carries the memory of war engraved in her body and consciousness. She expresses her ambivalent relationship with her city: "I don't know what they find appealing about Sarajevo: its old neighborhoods, its women, or the scars of war that disfigure its face" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 71).

Ivana seeks to recover the meaning of life through "writing a play," attempting to transform raw pain into art. Thus, the events of the novel unfold in a significant spatial triangle: Algeria (the space of bloody memory), Sarajevo (the space of siege and scars), and Ljubljana (the space of exile and encounter).

**Section Three: Politics of the Body and Geography of Violence (Thematic Analysis)****3.1 Ivana and the Violated Body: The Body as Political Map and Arena for Ethnic Cleansing****A. The Shattered Identity: Between Belonging and Exile**

Ivana Pulic, the central female character in the novel, represents a model of the woman living at the heart of the storm; a woman subjected to the most severe forms of violence (war, rape, loss), yet who insists on resistance through creation. Ivana embodies the conflicted identity: a torn national identity (Bosnian from Sarajevo), a violated bodily identity, and a wounded memory seeking refuge. Ivana describes the national fragmentation she experienced: "We were born brothers, then they divided us into a handful of names, into sects and groups. I believe there is no longer a Serb or a Croat or a Bosniak in this country: there is a friend or an enemy" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 71).

This declaration reveals that Sarajevo is no longer a geographical place, but has become a "diaspora of identity" torn apart by war. Her lover Goran, who "felt alienated in Sarajevo," fled the country "not from the war, but from a shattered identity," without bidding her farewell (Khatibi, 2019, p. 71). This double abandonment (abandonment of homeland and abandonment by the lover) makes Ivana a quintessential crossing being, searching for an alternative existential space.

**B. Ljubljana: Exile of Creation and Bridge of Cultural Crossing**

Ljubljana (the capital of Slovenia) becomes for Ivana not merely an "exile," but an "escape route toward the creation of her theatrical text" Hatab Sarajevo (adapted from the film Hiroshima Mon Amour). This play is the greatest embodiment of cultural crossing; it is inspired by the autobiography of Selim, the Algerian journalist fleeing the Black Decade. At the same time, Ivana inspired Selim to write his journalistic series "Hatab Sarajevo: Survivors of the Flood... in Algeria and the Balkans" (Khatibi, 2019).

This creative exchange creates what might be termed a "symphony of life" that transcended the identity of diaspora; creation here is not a luxury, but a mechanism of survival and resistance. Ivana says of her play: "I made this play a dream, perhaps to lift it out of the nightmare I live in" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 203).

### **C. The Body as a Bridge for Crossing: Linguistic and Gendered Alienation**

But this "creative dream" conceals a deeper tragedy: Ivana, as a woman in the space of war and exile, also carries a gendered identity subjected to the logic of masculine domination, where her body was transformed into a "theater for the assassination of femininity." Boris (the English language teacher) raped her under the pretext of "education," and the cafe owner in Ljubljana exploited her in the name of "earning a living."

Ivana describes her relationship with Boris: "Boris asked me to lend him money... He provides no service without return, he robs my body and wants to steal what is in my pocket. I told him: Tavrish Boris, I don't have money right now. But I will try to arrange the amount you need. I call him by the title 'Tavrish,' meaning comrade in Russian" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 37).

Here the glaring contradiction is revealed: the English language, which was supposed to be a "bridge to liberation" (for writing a universal play), transforms into a bridge for bodily alienation. Linguistic crossing requires a "principle of subjection" according to the logic of masculine power; writing a play in English requires bodily subjection to Boris.

Thus, the novel reveals that the "space of crossing" (Ljubljana) is no paradise, but an extension of the same logic of exploitation that Ivana experienced in Sarajevo, albeit with different instruments: alienation by war is replaced by alienation through language and economic need.

### **3.2 Shadow Characters and Survival Strategies (Silence and Madness)**

#### **A. The Mother: Traumatic Silence and Withdrawal from Life**

The character of Ivana's mother represents a model of the woman who chose "radical silence" as her sole strategy for dealing with the trauma of war. In the chapter titled "Searching for a Mother," Ivana reveals the deep fissure that the war created in her relationship with her mother, who was no longer a mother in the biological and emotional sense, but had been transformed into a "silent witness" to the catastrophe.

Ivana describes this transformation with piercing precision: "She is a mass of silence... She has eyes unlike ours, she understands things that are difficult for us to grasp, but she does not explain them to us. My relationship with her has become cold, a long autumn separating us... And were it not for the bond of blood... I would not say that this woman who retreats into her silence is my mother" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 92).

This "withdrawal" is not a voluntary relinquishment of motherhood, but an inevitable consequence of double masculine domination: the betrayal of the husband who was "of great physical strength" yet incapable of protection, and the tragedy of the rape of the eldest daughter that broke the last moral pillar of the household. The mother was transformed into a "sponge that slowly absorbs hatred," incapable of expression except through cryptic phrases such as "the bitterness of things increases their sweetness" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 94). This silence represents what critics term "traumatic silence" (Traumatic Silence), where the experience exceeds the capacity of language to assimilate it, and withdrawal into the self becomes the last refuge of the bereaved mother (Bouchelagm, 2020, p. 45), serving as a defense mechanism.

**B. The Sister: Madness as Eternal Absence and Unconscious Resistance**

The novel presents Ivana's sister (whom the text does not name, deepening her marginalization) as a model of the complete psychological destruction that befalls victims of mass rape. The text depicts the moment of violation with brutal brevity: "Eight men took turns with her, while she screamed and wept" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 145).

What is terrifying in this scene is the "anonymity of the executioner"; the text asserts: "The eight men who raped Ivana's sister: have no names" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 146). This anonymity signifies the impossibility of justice and the impossibility of recovering the usurped right, plunging the victim into the abyss of madness. Madness here is not a mental illness in the purely medical sense, but an unconscious "existential choice"; it is a refusal of silence (which the mother chose) and a decision for total absence from a world that no longer has room for humanity. The sister was transformed into a "burned body" and a living witness to a heinous crime, choosing to depart from this reality through the gateway of madness, becoming a symbol of the victim killed by war twice: once physically, and once psychologically.

**3.3 The Parallelism of Hells (Algeria/Bosnia): A Comparative Anatomy of the Mechanisms of Violence and Massacres in Both Experiences**

The novel draws an implicit and explicit comparison between the two wars, revealing terrifying parallels in the mechanisms of violence: Internal war: In both cases, the enemy is not an external invader, but the "neighbor" who suddenly became a killer, signaling the total collapse of the social fabric. Targeting of civilians: The common denominator is "mass massacres" that make no distinction between child and elder. Instrumentalization of the sacred: The dangerous role of exploiting "religion" as fuel for inflaming hatred and justifying extermination in both wars. Through this parallelism, Khatibi affirms that the "firewood of Sarajevo" and the "firewood of Algeria" burn in the same hearth: the hearth of blind fanaticism.

**3.4 Textual Applications: Manifestations of Masculine Domination in Hatab Sarajevo A. Symbolic Violence (Silencing the Voice)**

Ivana describes how she and women were viewed during the war, not as active subjects but as numbers on victim lists or objects of pity. She says in one scene: "They spoke of the war as if we did not exist, as if bullets chose only men, while we were merely a silent backdrop to death" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 70). This passage embodies Bourdieu's concept of symbolic marginalization, where men monopolize the narrative of heroism and death, while women are relegated to the silent margin.

**B. The Body as a Site of Control (Political Rape)**

In a scene of extreme cruelty, Ivana recalls the moment of violation, describing it as not a sexual desire but a political act: "He was not looking at me, he was looking through me at a map he wanted to tear apart... My body was the enemy's land that had to be occupied" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 143). This testimony is the literal application of Susan Brownmiller's theory; the body here is stripped of its human character and transformed into "land" and a "map." Masculine domination here reaches its zenith: the transformation of the human being into a thing (Objectification).

### **C. The Division of Gender Roles (Woman as Symbol of Honor/Shame)**

Ivana criticizes the social perception of her after survival, where she was transformed from a "victim" deserving support into a "stigma of shame" to be hidden: "During the war, we were the 'honor of the nation' that had to be defended, and after the war we became the 'shame of the nation' that must be forgotten" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 149). This passage reveals the duality of masculine domination (Cynthia Enloe's analysis); the woman is accepted only when she serves the masculine nationalist narrative (as a symbol of purity), and is rejected the moment this symbol is scratched, confirming that her value is conditional upon her symbolic function for man, not upon her own self.

#### **Section Four: Spaces of Crossing and the Reformation of Identity**

### **4.1 Sarajevo: From Utopia of Coexistence to Circular Memory of Death and Siege**

#### **A. Sarajevo Before the War: The Myth of Coexistence**

In the collective narrative of "before the catastrophe," Sarajevo appears as a utopian space, where it represented a rare model of cultural and religious coexistence in modern Europe. The city was a meeting point of three major cultures (Islamic, Christian, and Jewish), earning it the title "Jerusalem of the Balkans" (Samari, 2008, p. 45). The arts flourished in it (theater, cinema, music), and it formed a space for free creation. This cultural pluralism is what the narrative text recovers through the memory of Ivana as a child, who lived in "paradise" before the city was transformed into hell.

#### **B. Besieged Sarajevo: The Longest Nightmare in Contemporary History**

With the outbreak of war (1992-1995), Sarajevo was transformed from a city of coexistence into a city of death. It endured the longest siege in modern history: 1,425 consecutive days of bombardment, hunger, and isolation (Samari, 2008, p. 46). Daily, shells rained down on residential neighborhoods, and the population suffered from severe shortages of food, water, and electricity. This siege was not merely a military war, but a war on memory and identity; the goal was not to occupy the city so much as to destroy it symbolically as proof that coexistence is possible.

### **4.2 Ljubljana (Exile): The "Third Space" and the Economics of Exploitation in the Land of Asylum**

#### **A. Exile as Coercive Destiny, Not Free Choice**

Ljubljana (the capital of Slovenia) represents the Third Space that gathers the diaspora of characters fleeing from hell. The novel affirms that exile for Selim and Ivana was not a luxurious choice, but a biological necessity for survival: exile or death. Both live in a state of "permanent alienation," where Ljubljana becomes not an "alternative homeland" but merely a cold "waiting station" or a temporary refuge lacking the warmth of belonging (Khalifa, 2020, p. 90).

#### **B. The Interstitial Space: When Pain Unites What Geography Divided**

Ljubljana transforms into what Homi Bhabha calls the "Third Space" (Third Space), where original identities are dismantled to be reconfigured. In this exile, the "Algerian" meets the "Bosnian," discovering that the "language of pain" is the only common language that transcends borders. This encounter creates a fragile glimmer of hope; perhaps from the

womb of this diaspora a new life can be built, or at least a mutual understanding of the tragedy (Khatibi, 2019).

### **C. The Other Face of Exile: The Economics of Exploitation**

But the novel does not fall into the trap of "romanticizing exile"; Ljubljana reveals its harsh capitalist face. It is a space that reproduces marginalization, where refugees are transformed into "cheap fuel" in the labor market (Khalifa, 2020, p. 92). Immigrants are forced to work for meager wages (as happened with Ivana at the cafe), and they face pressures of "forced integration"; that is, learn the language, integrate, or leave. Thus, the quiet European city reveals its own symbolic violence, which does not kill with bullets but kills with marginalization and a position of "inferiority" in the social hierarchy.

### **4.3 Hybrid Identity and Transnational Memory (Textual Applications: Manifestations of Crossing in the Narrative)**

The dynamics of cultural crossing in the novel *Hatab Sarajevo* are embodied through several scenes and narrative positions that make Selim, Ivana, and language itself a bridge for crossing toward universality, including:

#### **A. Crossing Through Language and Memory (Selim: Perforated Memory)**

The narrator says in one of the significant scenes, through Selim: "I carry in my suitcase nothing but a perforated memory and a language that no one here understands" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 18). This passage embodies the first moment of collision with the "Third Space." The suitcase here is not a container for clothes, but a metaphor for portable identity. "Perforated memory" refers to the trauma of the Black Decade whose story has not been completed, and "the language that no one understands" refers to the cultural isolation that precedes the phase of hybridization. Crossing here begins as a communication crisis before transforming into an opportunity for reshaping the self.

#### **B. Crossing Through the Shared Body (Ivana: Firewood for One Hearth)**

Ivana describes the moment of her encounter with Selim, saying: "We are firewood for one hearth, burning in different languages, but the ash is the same" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 78). This sentence is the poetic condensation of the concept of "hybrid identity." Ivana is not seeking ethnic or religious correspondence with Selim, but finds a new transnational belonging based on "the unity of pain" (the single ash). Cultural crossing here is not the dissolution of the Other into the Self, but the discovery of the shared human element that transcends linguistic and cultural differences.

#### **C. Spatial Crossing (Ljubljana: A Waiting Room)**

The text depicts the city of Ljubljana as an isthmian space: "Ljubljana is not an exile, it is a large waiting room, where we take off our old coats stained with blood" (Khatibi, 2019, p. 85). This description represents a spatial embodiment of the concept of "identity reconstruction." "Taking off coats" symbolizes the relinquishing of lethal nationalist identities or painful memory, in preparation for donning a new identity formed in this interstitial space.

**Conclusion: From the Genealogy of Pain to a Poetics of Resistance**

This intersectional feminist reading of the novel *Hatab Sarajevo* has arrived at a set of conclusions that deconstruct the mechanisms of violence and restore the dignity of the resistant female self, which can be summarized in the following points:

1. **The Female as Active Subject in the Space of Crossing:** The analysis has demonstrated that the novel transcends the stereotypical image of women as passive victims of war. Ivana, despite the enormity of the violation, represents the "active subject" (Active Subject) who reshapes the space of cultural crossing. She does not content herself with biological survival, but practices "symbolic resistance" through writing and theater, transforming imposed silence into living testimony that exposes the mechanisms of erasure (Khalifa, 2020).

2. **Gender and the Economics of Violence:** The research has revealed that the experience of "cultural crossing" is an inherently gendered experience; women in exile and war face doubled violence: political violence (war) and gendered violence (rape and sexual exploitation). In this context, the female body transforms from a mere "biological object" into a "political arena" upon which wars of identity and ethnic cleansing are waged.

3. **Writing as a Counter-Strategy Against Oblivion:** The novel establishes what might be termed a "poetics of counter-memory"; writing for Ivana (and Selim) is not an aesthetic luxury but a political act that resists the official narratives that seek to bury crimes. It is an "archive of the victims" that preserves the stories of the forgotten (the raped sister, the silent mother) from oblivion, and demands narrative justice where judicial justice proves elusive.

4. **The Universality of Pain and the Unity of Destiny:** Through the careful parallelism between "Algeria" and "Bosnia," the study has demonstrated that violence against women is a "universal structure" that transcends geographical and religious boundaries. The novel deconstructs the myth of the "cultural specificity" of violence, revealing that the executioner is one even if the names differ (Mokaddam, 2010).

In conclusion, it can be said that the novel *Hatab Sarajevo* transcends being merely a literary text to become a "document of indictment" against human barbarism, and a cry in the face of a silent world. Through the character of Ivana, Said Khatibi presents a feminist manifesto affirming that the female in the space of crossing is not a marginal "passerby," but the faithful guardian of memory and the bridge connecting shattered cultures. She reminds us that war does not end with a ceasefire, but continues in the bodies and memories of survivors, and that literature remains the last fortress for the defense of our shared humanity.

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