Reconfiguring the Self: A Study of Latifa Ben Mansour's L'Année de l'éclipse through Political, Psychological, and Stylistic Lenses

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RECONFIGURING THE SELF: A STUDY OF LATIFA BEN MANSOUR’S L’ANNÉE DE L’ÉCLIPSE THROUGH POLITICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND STYLISTIC LENSES

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Latifa Ben Mansour, author, linguist, and psychoanalyst, is one of the estimated 400,000 Algerian intellectuals who have chosen exile from their country rather than risk the possibility of retaliation by the religious fanatics that have reduced executive power in Algeria since 1988; it was then that President Chadli Bendjedid was obliged to allow the formation of new political parties, including the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), an Islamic fundamentalist group, founded on “la sacralisation systématique de la violence” (Mortimer 52-53, Meynier 450). Ben Mansour has lived in France for over thirty years and has written both non-fiction and fiction.1 In the former category, Frères musulmans, frères féroces: voyage dans l’enfer du discours islamiste (2002) provides a psycholinguistic analysis of Islamic fundamentalist discourse, whereas Les Mensonges des intégristes (2004) delves into the cultural roots of Islam in order to further illustrate the distortion promoted by religious fundamentalist rhetoric. Ben Mansour, herself, has described the two works as a product of her outrage (Frères 12-13) and “colère” (Mensonges 11).

Like her non-fiction, Ben Mansour’s novels, Le Chant du lys et du basilic (1990), La Prière de la peur (1997), and L’Année de l’éclipse (2001) contrast traditional and modern Algerian culture with today’s fanatical Muslim views, through the life of a female protagonist. As such, Ben Mansour’s fiction belongs to the “littérature de témoignage” of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Marcus xx; xxviii, n. 26). Testimonial literature is characterized as “Foreground[ing] the subaltern as subjects of history and agents of their own destinies” (Sánchez-Casal 76).2

Ben Mansour’s third novel, L’Année de l’éclipse, the subject of this study, features Hayba, a Muslim woman living in Paris, France who has survived an attack by Muslim religious extremists in her home country of Algeria. The book’s title signals both literal and figurative meanings of the term, “eclipse.” An eclipse of the sun lasts only a few minutes, as the moon moves between the earth and the sun and causes twilight to fall. The term “eclipse” may also refer to a catastrophic life event that darkens one’s horizons, often resulting in depression. Both connotations of the word “eclipse” figure in the novel, which tells the story of protagonist Hayba’s cataclysmic year from 1998 to 1999 in which she experiences the loss of her daughter and husband, followed by
personal growth and motherhood once more. In this article, Hayba’s journey towards reconfigured selfhood as an exiled, independent, pregnant widow will be examined under political, psychological, and stylistic lenses.

Ben Mansour relies on a third-person narrator to present the events in *L’Année de l’éclipse* as imaginary, albeit bolstered by historical truth. The author sees herself as speaking against “la dénonciation sans nuance de l’arabo-islamisme” as well as the murder of Algerian intellectuals in the 1990s (Chaulet-Achour 168, 165). Ben Mansour prefers writing fiction because it affords her the freedom to be more “lyrical” in her accounts of living through three wars: the Algerian war for independence which coincided with her childhood, the civil war in Lebanon with her Lebanese husband, and the civil unrest in Algeria during the past two decades. Moreover, writing fiction enables her to transmit what she loves about the Algerian culture, including women’s strength when faced with tragedy (Chaulet-Achour 167-68). Ben Mansour considers her witnessing to the plight of Algerian women a moral obligation (Hatley 3); as a psycholinguist and intellectual, she is no doubt well versed in the use of “scriptotherapy or the process of life-writing” as a means of alleviating the emotional damage that she has personally suffered as a result of her war experiences (Henke xii-xiii).

**A Political Lens: Algeria under Muslim Fundamentalism**

Politically speaking, Hayba’s plight in *L’Année de l’éclipse* typifies the victimization of Algerian civilians by armed Islamists. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, ultra-conservative, violent religious factions, known under the umbrella title of *groupe islamistes armés*, or GIA, terrorized Algeria. The extremists used violence to illustrate their rhetoric. The religious terrorists’ thinking included a redefinition of *shari’a*, whose original meaning is “the canon law of Islam” (Messaoudi 155). Led by Ali Benhadj and Adassi Madani, the GIA understood *shari’a* to be a strict interpretation of the law, their interpretation, relying on violence and murder of more liberal Muslims as purifying measures (Ben Mansour, *Frères* 115-17).

Mainstream Muslims perceived the fanatics as outsiders to their faith: no longer were the latter submissive to their religion, but they had perverted Islam for their own violent purposes. For instance, the extremists shaved their eyebrows, ringed their eyes with kohl, shaved their beards, and even cut off the first digit of their right index fingers so that they would be unable to raise this phalanx in the traditional sign of submission at the end of prayers (Ben Mansour, *Frères* 133). The *Coran* orders none of this for men’s behavior. Algeria was seen by the religious fanatics as merely one “domino” in their game of converting the entire world to their brand of faith (Ben Mansour, *Frères* 168-70).

The Armed Islamist Groups especially targeted non-practicing, westernized Muslims, whose modern ideas were considered a betrayal of rigid conservative values. Uncovered or unveiled women were easy prey, identifiable by their European-style clothing. Innocent children murdered by fanatics served as an
example of the religious perverts’ strength. Algerians in both cities and small
towns feared for their lives, and an estimated 300,000 were killed. Others
escaped to France. In terms of intellectuals, among those who remained in
Algeria throughout the last two decades, at least sixty were struck down by
religious fanatics intending to purge Algerian society of liberal, cultural, and
anti-shari‘a ideas (Ben Mansour, Frères 253-57).

The final number of Algerians victimized by religious extremists remains a
mystery. Over 6,000 Algerians are still listed as missing. Families whose loved
ones had disappeared in the 1990s continue to experience a lack of closure
(Dridi 3). Governmental amnesties directed at armed religious extremists in
1999 and 2005 have intensified this non-closure and awakened angry feelings
about pardoning the extremists (Hélie-Lucas 1). However, the tremendous
participation of “former” Islamic terrorists in the amnesties has resulted in general
peacefulness and the existence of only one terrorist “cell” operating in southern
Algeria before being forced to flee in late 2003 (“Algerian Civil War” 9).

Religious fanatics did not attack civilians in Ouargla, Algeria in early
December 1998, as L’Année de l’éclipse depicts, although they could have. On
December 9, 1998, three small towns to the west of Algiers lost a total of 81
men, women, and children to the fanatics’ cause. Armed bands of men tortured,
slashed, mutilated, and killed their victims (“Children, infants butchered” 1).
Even though L’Année de l’éclipse departs from historical facts in its portrayal of
an Islamist attack in 1998 on Ouargla, its political and psychological
representations contain truthful elements. Someone like Hayba, female,
professional, highly educated, and westernized, could easily have had to face the
hardships that Ben Mansour’s protagonist encounters, including the absence of
loved ones and a new life in exile.

A Psychological Lens: The Phases of Grief

Having recently immigrated to Paris, France, protagonist Hayba not only
grieves the death of her husband and daughter, but she has many other losses to
confront besides: her family, her home, her job, her town, and her health. She
must acknowledge her bereavement before she can move forward in her life.
According to experts on grief, the grieving process passes through five distinct
stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, whose lengths
vary from one person to the next. Depression slows us down and thereby allows
us to take full stock of our bereavement. It is a time when we soul-search rather
than engage in activity. Our dreams sometimes give us a respite from our painful
reality by becoming an in-between space where the world of the living overlaps
with the world of the dead: it is not uncommon for our loved ones to appear
happy and healthy in our dreams, which tells us that at death the essence of our
loved one left its corporeal form and lives on (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 5, 24,
53). Yet dreams in the form of nightmares may cause us to relive our trauma,
thereby becoming part of our repeated hurt. As we dream, we may revisit an
atrocities only to be awoken by an ironic element that extricates us from sleep in
order to remind us not only of the terror through which we have lived, but of the nightmare that has reminded us of it (Caruth 102-04).

Besides surfacing in dreams, our memories of traumatic experiences may even be "recorded" on our bodies themselves (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 2, 8). The former victim may sense pain in a physical area long after it has healed and returned to normal functioning (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 2). Psychological therapy for grief and trauma therefore focuses on two procedures: the client's narration of her trauma and loss and the desensitization of the client to stimuli that may trigger overwhelmingly painful memories ("What is Grief?" 1-2). Until the client regains control over her emotional responses by reclaiming the "alien, the unacceptable, the terrifying, the incomprehensible [memories of what she has suffered]... as an integrated aspect of [her own] personal history" (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 8), these charged memories are stored long-term and are easily evoked by a smell, a touch, an image, or other sensory stimuli (Carranza 189).

The protagonist's grief over the deaths of her husband Abd el-Wahab and daughter Dounia and her ensuing psychological therapy provide the framework for L'Année de l'éclipse: structurally, the novel contains four livres titled "Illusions," "Crépuscule," "Ténèbres," and "Renaissance." Of these titles, the last three refer to the stages of a solar eclipse. All four refer to a phase in Hayba's physical and mental healing, at the end of which she will experience a rebirth by giving birth herself.

**Phase One: "Illusions"

In Book One, "Illusions," Hayba mourns her previous life in Ouargla as a successful gynecologist, wife, and mother. She also grapples with her new existence as a pregnant widow living in France. She cannot believe that she and her late husband Abd el-Wahab, medical doctors committed to the modernization of Algeria and non-practicing Muslims, were targeted by Muslim extremists engaged in a different sort of battle or jihad, the jihad de la guerre sainte (Ben Mansour, Frères 75-76). Hayba has fled from Algeria to France to put physical distance between herself and the site of her loved ones' deaths at the hands of armed Islamic fundamentalists. Moreover, she hopes to protect her unborn child, conceived just before her husband's murder, from any further danger. Both her mother and mother-in-law have urged her to leave her homeland following the observance of the requisite 130 days of mourning according to the Coran (Sura II: 234-35). As the narration opens, Hayba is in her fifth month of pregnancy.

The image of her future motherhood compounds the protagonist's present grief. The demise of her daughter Dounia has affected her as a mental and physical shock. Hayba watched helplessly as Dounia was raped and killed. Not only must Hayba come to grips with the illogic of her nine-year-old preceding her in death, she must also forgive herself for not having been able to prevent the atrocities performed on her child. Further, Hayba has been physically abused.
herself. The armed fanatics forced her to have sex with them too, and then slashed her thighs and abdomen. Miraculously, the fetus was unharmed during these violent acts.

Hayba’s body “remembers” the oppressive weight of the terrorists who lay on top of her: the “memory” still causes her abdominal pain. Her reaction resembles the phantom pain that amputees “feel” in a missing limb. This phenomenon typifies the continuing psychobiological response to traumatic events whose memories have been “dissociated from other life experiences” (Van der Kolk, McParlane, and Weisaeth 2). In other words, Hayba’s torture has been recorded both physically and mentally even though she has not consciously verbalized the effects of her sexual abuse. Similarly, her rape has eradicated the memory of her pregnancy with her late daughter Dounia. Thus, it is no wonder that Hayba feels estranged from her physical self. She has become addicted to warm baths for the purpose of washing away her contamination. She has lost her appetite, but ingests some food every day in order to nourish her unborn child.

In addition to accepting her daughter’s death, Hayba has to acknowledge that Abd el-Wahab will not be there to share the responsibility of their second child. This, like Dounia’s death, is an incomprehensible fact. Women, for the most part, outlive their husbands, but Hayba’s young husband has been brutally taken from her, decapitated by Muslim terrorists. She sees his absence as belonging to her “cauchemar” (9), although he visits her in her dreams. As a matter of fact, Hayba does most of her initial grief work while sleeping. Her reliance on sleeping pills prescribed by her psychiatrist enables her to seek this escape as often as she likes. Like a warm bath, cocooning in her bedclothes comforts Hayba. The notion of her swaddled in blankets repeats the idea of the unborn child nestled in her womb. Both images illustrate the idea of the lunar eclipse casting the earth in twilight in that Hayba and the fetus exist in shadowy worlds rather than in full light. By submerging herself in sleep, the protagonist avoids confronting an even more incredible phenomenon: her current pregnancy. She had been told that she would not conceive any more children after Dounia was born, and that if she did, she would imperil her own life. Despite her recent physical and mental trauma, Hayba has carried her second child for a full five months. Although she struggles with the simplest daily activities, such as eating and walking, the fetus is thriving.

At the beginning of L’Année de l’éclipse, Hayba’s psychotherapy has not been progressing because she has refused to speak to her doctor about the terrifying incidents of December 1998. He does not know that her husband was decapitated, or that the box containing his head was sent to her; neither does her psychiatrist know that masked men subsequently tortured Hayba and Dounia at home. By not narrating these moments of her life, Hayba ultimately denies the “story” as her own. Traumatic events outside the normal realm of human experience can retard the grieving process. Hayba’s memories of sexual abuse, flashbacks of her family members’ murders and extreme sensitivity to visual sensations are symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Her non-linear recall of
her trauma underscores the fact that some things are too painful for the conscious mind to retrieve in an orderly manner (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 176-77).

**Phases Two and Three: “Crépuscule” and “Ténèbres”**

The title of Book II, “Crépuscule,” sums up Hayba’s depression at this point in the novel: she functions at minimal energy and seemingly accomplishes very little between naps. She exists in the darkened confines of her rundown studio apartment. Nevertheless, a quote from Maurice Blanchot: “Le souvenir est la liberté du passé” (107), found on the title page of this chapter, reminds us of the work awaiting Hayba. Becoming psychologically healthy once more implies being able to examine or squelch her memories at will rather than waiting their appearance in dreams. This is the gist of Blanchot’s “La Solitude essentielle” from which the above quote is taken (30). In the work in question, Blanchot speaks of one’s power at being able to remember as one desires instead of being caught off guard by memories that summon us (30-31). This is indeed Hayba’s case; as she progresses in her grief, she becomes better able to let go of her past and lay the foundation for new psychological growth (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 54-55). Similarly, Book III, “Ténèbres,” offers a further allusion to the reintegration of Hayba’s selfhood through a poetic excerpt from *Les Mille et Une Nuits* on its first page. The verses exhort a “friend” to desert his oppressive birthplace and grief-filled home. Moreover, the verses in question warn that the friend will find another country in which to live, but that his soul, a single entity, will not be found again, “Mais ton âme est une et tu ne la retrouveras pas” (155). The above quote, reiterating Blanchot’s concern with the control of one’s memories and relating to Hayba’s exile far from her homeland, raises a new question: whether or not she will end up with a reintegrated self or soul as a result of her grieving process.

The previously mentioned titles and paratexts summarize and symbolize the mental regrouping in which Hayba engages in order to become psychologically healthy once more. Blanchot’s idea that conjuring memories implies freedom is well taken: Hayba experiences both a catharsis and a distancing from the past as she revisits her former life while dreaming. By probing the best as well as the most painful memories of her former life, the protagonist starts to emerge from the depths of her depression. The image of darkest night, “Ténèbres,” used in Book III’s title, succinctly captures the course of Hayba’s emotional healing. She has spent weeks preferring sleep to establishing a daily routine. Once she admits to her psychiatrist the losses that she has suffered during the past year, however, she begins to be freed of her guilt feelings and despair. She consequently accepts invitations to meet friends and even starts a new job as a medical receptionist. Little by little, she understands that she is worthy of motherhood and love once more.

Hayba thus exemplifies the paratext from *Les Mille et Une Nuits* that frames Book III: she has advanced beyond the automaton phase of merely eating, sleeping, and walking through Paris to the point where she has tentatively begun
to enjoy life again in the company of her new employer and friend, Jacques Najac. Her former self has not been lost. Rather, it has been subsumed by the new Hayba as she surfaces from her depression. Nor has she ended up without a soul. On the contrary, she has begun to reevaluate her faith in Islam. By recalling and then recounting her personal memories during therapy, Hayba rediscovers meaning in her own life, as a kind of inverse Shahrâzâd or ‘Scheherazade.’ In *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, Shahrâzâd entertains King Sharryar nightly with her storytelling at the risk of being put to death if her imaginary tales bore him (28). Hayba, on the other hand, is her own arbiter on living or dying. Through grieving and voicing her traumatic lived experiences, Hayba undertakes the difficult process of rewriting her life’s “script” herself, or in other words, of reconstructing herself psychologically.

**Phase Four: “Renaissance”**

Like the names of the two preceding books, “Renaissance,” the title of Book IV, captures once again the ideas of moving from obscurity into light and of recasting the self. A paratext from Omar Khayyâm containing an imperative summarizes this process of rebirth: “N’oublie rien de ton passé / Tu n’y repasses pas” (199). The advice from this twelfth-century Persian poet states that our memories should not impede our forward motion. This idea is repeated in modern-day grief therapy (American Acad. of Family Physicians 1). By adjusting to her widowhood, impending motherhood, and new job in an adopted country, Hayba’s “rebirth” amply illustrates Khayyâm’s verses as well as her response to psychological counseling.

Ben Mansour’s portrayal of grief and healing as a journey from darkness into daylight along an unfamiliar road, as per the above paratexts to Books Two, Three, and Four, re-echoes in the framing of *L’Armée de l’éclipse* by the August 10, 1999 eclipse of the sun, visible in Europe and North Africa in the early afternoon. The obfuscation of the sun by the moon cast an eerie shadow on the earth’s surface for approximately two and a half minutes (Ionicbond 1). The eclipse of the sun also provides an apt metaphor for Hayba’s suffering and pregnancy in *L’Armée de l’éclipse*. She spends several months escaping her dark despair through sleep before she can even tolerate daytime and its responsibilities. Accompanying Hayba’s figurative passage from debilitating sadness to joy is the very real image of her imminent delivery: her twins will move blindly through the birth canal before they reach the brightness of the outside world.

**A Stylistic Lens: Images and Tropes**

Besides chapter titles and paratexts alluding to the protagonist’s psychological journey, the novel’s key image of a dark passage leading to (re)birth is sustained stylistically through spatial references, tropes and idiomatic expressions. For example, when Book I, “Illusions,” opens, Hayba is in the Paris subway. The *métro* is one of the semi-dark places in which she can relax. The
train cradles her to sleep as she thinks about the changes in her life over the past few months. The reader learns that besides witnessing her daughter’s rape and murder, Hayba herself was forced to fellate her armed assailants. Although the train consoles her and puts her to sleep, her violent dreams counteract this comfort. Later, Hayba refuses to take the subway because she does not want to feel like a “prisonnière du métro, coincée sans air au milieu d’inconnus au teint blafard” (16-17). Her revulsion “la dissuada de pénétrer dans la première bouche venue” (16-17). The words “pénétrer” and “bouche” remind the reader of the sexual abuse that the protagonist endured. In brief, the maternal comfort of the rocking train contrasts sharply with the content of Hayba’s nightmares.

The same sort of sheltered, yet violent image comes to mind as Hayba awakens in bed from one of her numerous pharmaceutically-induced naps. She wonders if her tranquilizers have knocked her out or if the dream image of her being forced to perform oral sex on her Allah-crazed torturers has done so (32). Hayba’s memories of being raped have overwhelmingly intruded again upon her repose. A third example of antithetical images reiterates the invasion of a safe space by Hayba’s traumatic memories. She has entered the Saint-Sulpice Church where the silence and half-light trigger a series of happy reminiscences concerning her daughter and husband. When the priest tells her that the church is closing, however, Hayba likens his kind face to that of a monk friend who was killed by the intégristes, or religious extremists. Once more, Hayba overreacts to her surroundings, which unceashes painful memories that shatter her reverie.

Not only does Hayba’s past encroach upon the soothing, half-lit places into which she ventures, such as the church, it also colors her waking thoughts. Initially, Hayba is overwhelmed by the prospect of the impoverished, single motherhood looming before her. Hayba’s thoughts rendered by metonymy are stylistic reflections of her feeling out of her depth. Metonymy consists of designating a physical object or an abstraction not by the term that usually defines it, but by a word that is associated with it: expressing the container for its contents, the cause for its effect, and the part for the whole entity. In psychoanalytic terms, metonymy is considered infantile thinking (Ben Mansour, Frères 194). Hayba considers her unborn child “la vie [qui] lui [donnait] des coups de pied”(13), “Cette énergie qu’elle portait en elle” (12), and “La boule [qui] grossissait dans son ventre” (11). In each of these instances an idea associated with the word “fetus” replaces the common term. “La vie,” “cette énergie,” and “la boule qui grossissait” are all aspects of the unborn child rather than a reference to the entire fetus. It is as if Hayba’s mind cannot fully grasp the concept of her pregnancy, so she thinks incompletely or indirectly of the baby inside her.

If metonymy indicates the continued effect of Hayba’s shock over her current pregnancy, another stylistic detail in L’Année de l’éclipse illustrates the protagonist’s emotional upset: her thoughts about the armed religious fanatics’ destruction of her family rely on animal metaphors connoting evil and violence (Ben Mansour, Frères 194). She remembers her assailants as “les chiens
sanguinaires" (12), their neighborhood networks as "l'hydre" (119) and the town of Ouargla as "leurs nid de vipères" (160), to mention only a few examples. Ironically, the ultraconservative Muslim leaders invoke similar imagery in their sermons about those who do not follow their rigid interpretation of the 
Coran
(275).

Unlike her thoughts relating the armed Islamists to dangerous animals, Hayba's recall of entire conversations with her departed loved ones relies on idiomatic expressions connoting light. For instance, in discussing Abd el-Wahab's conference presentation on the telephone with him, she calls him "lumière de mes yeux" (49). Abd el-Wahab uses similar terms of endearment with Dounia, addressing her as follows: "lumière de mes yeux, mon coeur, mon foie" (125). In this case, he associates his daughter with new sight as well as organs that are vital for life. From the above expressions we understand that the love between Hayba, her husband, and her daughter was visceral; now that she is alone, Hayba's broken-heartedness is one indication of her physical bereavement. A third instance relating the protagonist's loved ones to light appears in the litany recited to Dounia by her entire family just after her birth. One of its lines repeats the theme of the baby girl's gift of light: "Bienvenue, lumière de nos jours" (65). From these idiomatic expressions, the reader grasps that Hayba is suffering both physically and mentally in the early stages of her grief because the "lights" of her eyes, body, and life have been murdered.

Even the depiction of Hayba giving birth on the day of the eclipse is filled with images of darkness and light. The protagonist remains on the brink of death during her twins' delivery. When she regains consciousness, she discovers that her newborn son and daughter both lack the first digit of their right index fingers. Is this the result of Hayba's sexual trauma by Islamist radicals? Injuring the uterus and amniotic membrane during the first trimester of pregnancy can cause the fetus to lose digits and limbs (Do 2-4). Or perhaps this serves as a reminder of the religious fanatics' perversion of Islam. Hayba accepts the latter theory especially, and gives her newborns an additional Arabic first name, "Ghadab Allah," or "La colère de Dieu" (271).

Hayba's belief that divine intervention has caused her newborns' deformed index fingers captures the conflicting emotions associated with a solar eclipse, namely reverence and fear. When such an event occurs, Muslim daily prayers include an entreaty to Allah to be merciful and to use the occasion to work miracles. Because the Prophet Mohammed's eighteen-month-old son Ibrahim died in Medina on the day of a solar eclipse, superstition relates such a phenomenon to fear and death ("Significance of Lunar and Solar Eclipses"). Hayba, a medical doctor in her own right, nevertheless welcomes the unscientific explanation that Allah has directly touched her children's lives as well as her own. Her acceptance of Allah as a personal god suggests that her Muslim faith has been reawakened during the months culminating in the twins' births.

As told in L'Année de l'éclipse, Hayba's transformation in recommitting herself to life once she has gone through the stages of grief and depression
stands out as a carefully constructed hymn about the human spirit’s resiliency. The novel’s four chapter titles, “Illusions,” “Ténèbres,” “Crépuscule,” and “Renaissance,” summarize Hayba’s progress, as does its imagery depicting movement from darkness to light. When the hardships of widowhood, depression, single motherhood, and poverty confront the protagonist, she succeeds in overcoming them by redefining herself. Her reconfigured life in France including a new job, a new love, a stronger faith, and a reawakened maternal interest in her newborn twins materializes as the result of months of grieving and rebuilding her “self.” Narrating her story to others, a key component of the healing process for Hayba, resonates beyond the confines of L’Année de l’éclipse: in the life of its author, Latifa Ben Mansour, whose experiences in two wars have served as the basis for her fiction and non-fiction, and in the lives of those who undertake “talk therapy” in the hopes of finding relief from traumatic memories.

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Notes

1 Latifa Ben Mansour has received literary prizes for her fiction. In 1996, she was awarded the Prix méditerranéen de la nouvelle for her short story, “Le Coccio Cadi.” She received the Prix Beur FM Méditerranée in 1997 for her novel, La Prière de la peur. See <http://www.answers.com/topic/latifa-ben-mansour>.

Although her works have been warmly praised in the French press and translated into several languages, she has not been published in Arabic in her native Algeria. In addition to short stories and novels, Ben Mansour has also written for the theater: Dounia dates from 1995 and Trente-trois Tours à son turban from 1997. See Chaulet-Achour, Notin: Algériennes dans l’écriture, “Portrait de Latifa Bennansour (sic): Mémoire et algérienité,” pp. 161-71.


To date, no literary analysis has been done of Ben Mansour’s novel, L’Année de l’éclipse.

2 Testimonial literature, or el testimonio, flourished in Latin America from the 1960s through the 1980s. Typically, the first-person female narrator of a testimonio felt morally
compelled to convey her story and functioned as the spokeswoman for an entire subjugated group; it was up to a more educated person to write down the narrator’s account (Sánchez-Casal 76, 79-80).

3 The Armed Islamist Groups are also referred to as the AIG, or the GIA in French.

4 “Submission” is the translation of the term “Islam.”

5 The Coran is divided into chapters called “Suras” composed of lines called verses. References to the Coran contain the number of the sura followed by a colon and the numbers of the verses, in this fashion: Sura 2: 15-23. See Sura 2 of the Coran for more information on the behavior expected of both Muslim men and women.

6 The novel repeats the fact that Hayba was supposed to be infertile following her daughter’s birth (69); not until the first child is born during the eclipse (263-64) does she learn that there is a second child and that she has been carrying twins.

7 Paratexts, according to Gérard Genette, are the short writings that frame a passage, chapter, or book (Paratexts 1). He called the opening writings the péritexte and the closing ones the épitexte (Paratexts 5). Genette originally coined the term “paratexte” in 1981 (Palimpsestes 9).

Works Cited


