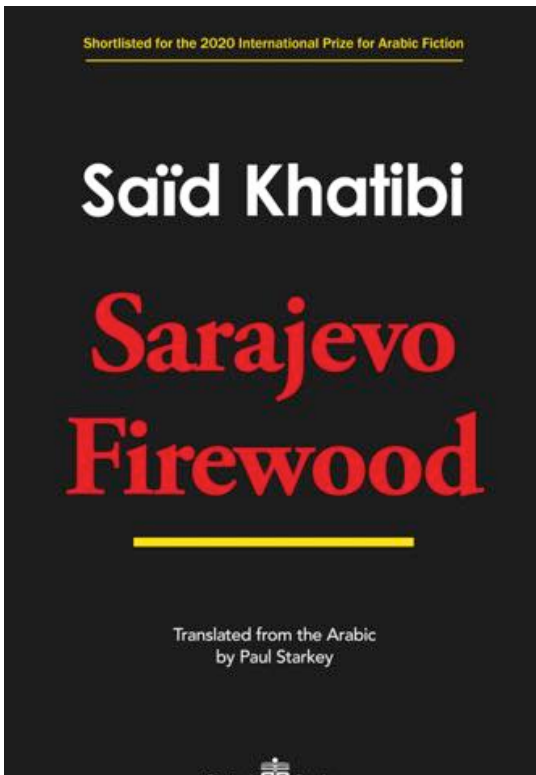


Sarajevo Firewood

by Saïd Khatibi



Saïd Khatibi. Photo © Sonja Ravbar

- Shortlisted for 2020 International Prize for Arabic Fiction
- A new understanding of the 1990s civil wars in Algeria and in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Algerian Salim and Bosnian Ivana reveal uncanny connections as they separately try to build new lives in Slovenia
- Rich fictional memorial to the thousands lost in the civil wars
- Timely, powerful exploration of the experience of exile

Sarajevo Firewood is a searing narrative by Algerian author Saïd Khatibi about two countries – Algeria and Bosnia and Herzegovina – both of which experienced traumatic and destructive civil wars in the 1990s. It is told through the voices of Salim, an Algerian journalist, and Ivana, a young Bosnian woman, both of whom have fled the destruction and hatred of their own countries to try to build new lives in Slovenia. As Ivana pursues the goal of writing her ‘dream play’, and Salim discovers he is not his father’s son, Khatibi’s novel brings to life in a rich fictional form the memories and experiences of the countless ordinary people who survived the atrocities linking the two countries.

Sarajevo Firewood is both a lasting memorial to the thousands of dead and ‘disappeared’ of these two countries’ civil conflicts, whose lives ended like charred firewood, and a powerful and innovative exploration of the experience of exile to which so many have been subjected over the last few decades.



“Saïd Khatibi’s courageous and extraordinary novel, *Sarajevo Firewood*, is a labyrinthine journey, with Algeria at one pole, Bosnia at the other, and Slovenia serving as neutral ground in-between. As the two narrators, Salim from Algiers and Ivana from Sarajevo, discover and are exposed to shocking knowledge of their respective family origins, we are taken on a journey within the journey. Along the way, we are forced to reconsider what we think we know about liberation, nationalism, decolonization, and war, as Khatibi masterfully shifts our focus from the state to the family and the continual trauma of self-understanding in the process of becoming an individual.”

AMMIEL ALCALAY

“Khatibi’s style is simple, precise and beautiful. A true sculptor, he shapes his sentences and eliminates the superfluous. We face both Ivana and Salim in the first person, head on.

“The author has been living outside his native Algeria for a decade. This migration has afforded him new worldviews, new languages, new cultures and experiences. His is a true expression of freedom for which, unfortunately, the Arab world is still struggling with censorship and self-censorship. Without freedom of expression, there is no creativity.

“*Sarajevo Firewood* is an astonishing novel and Khatibi is one of the most original voices in Arabic literature today.”

AMARA LAKHOUS, author of *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*



Saïd Khatibi is a novelist, travel writer, translator and cultural journalist, born in 1984 in Bou Saâda, Algeria. He writes in Arabic and French and translates between both. He has a BA in French Literature from the University of Algiers and an MA in Cultural Studies from the Sorbonne.

Sarajevo Firewood is his third novel in Arabic (first in English translation) and was shortlisted for the 2020 International Prize for Arabic Fiction. His other novels are *Kitab al-Khataya* (Book of Errors), Editions ANEP, 2013, and *Forty Years Waiting for Isabelle*, 2016, about the real-life Swiss traveller Isabelle Eberhardt (1877–1904), for which he won the 2017 Katara Award for the Novel.

He has a travel book about the Balkans, *The Inflamed Gardens of the East*, 2015, and has written extensively on rai music, including a book (*Wedding Fire*, 2010) that tells its story. He lives in Slovenia.



Paul Starkey is Emeritus Professor of Arabic, University of Durham, UK, and an award-winning translator of contemporary Arabic literature.

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