

Negotiating Feminine Identity in Selected Novels by Ahlam Mostaghanemi

Bensafi Fatiha^{*1}; Khelifa Arezki²

1- Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou,

fatiha.bensafi@ummtto.dz

2- Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou

Arezki.khelifa@ummtto.dz

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Abstract:

Drawing on Spivak's concept of the subaltern, this article discusses the ways Ahlam Mostaghanemi's artistic and literary imagination operate in her novels: *Memory in the Flesh* (1993) and *Chaos of the Senses* (1997). It explores her negotiation of feminine identity and her resistance to both colonial French and patriarchy. It also highlights how her imagination evolves across the novels as she searches for a suitable narrative perspective. The findings suggest that in her quest for recognition within the literary world, the author employs two strategies: she writes in Arabic, and she employs a male voice in her first novel and a female one in the second to voice her concerns, and assert agency as an Algerian woman writer

* Corresponding author.

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1- Introduction :

In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak? (1985), a founding work in postcolonial studies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that women’s voices often go unheard even by women themselves. *HERE IS A WOMAN WHO TRIED TO BE DECISIVE...She* ‘spoke’ but they did not ‘hear’ her voice- thus defining her as a ‘subaltern’- a person without lines of social mobility (Spivak,1995,P.28). Facing this situation some female authors like Ahlam Mostaghanemi , have tried to assert themselves and amplify their voices by resorting to literature. The latter is regarded as a means to claim space and visibility as they have often been marginalized in social and artistic spheres. The female authors articulate the anxieties of women and their aspiration for change by examining social ills and condemning hostility in all its forms. Writing for these women becomes an act of self assertion, not only as writers but also as women and members of the third world. Ahlam Mostaghenemi, the main focus of this article, daringly challenges the patriarchal hegemony. She has reacted to this plight by writing essays, poems, articles, and novels in which she overtly expresses her reactionary opinions about the social ills of post independent Algeria, and tries to reshape modern Arabic narrative traditions in order to secure a deserved place in the literary world. She is, indeed, among those literary figures that come to confront Maghrebean women’s subjugation. In this sense, the act of writing is perceived as a means of liberation and a strategy to resist patriarchy. Throughout her writings she has imposed herself in the literary field and has gained worldly success.

In a career of 25 years, she has established herself as a prominent figure in contemporary Arabic literature. Her novels such as *Memory in the Flesh* (1993), *Chaos of the Senses*, (1997), *Passer-by a Bed* (2003), and *The black Suits You so Well* (2012) achieved widespread commercial success and solidified her reputation as a bestselling author. Ahlam Mostaghanemi is now regarded as the first Algerian woman to write novels in the Arabic language, yet it is important to acknowledge Z'hour Ounissi's earlier contributions written in Arabic during 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless it is Ahlam Mostaghanemi who stands out as the first contemporary Arab author to reach mass readership and sell hundreds of thousands copies of her work in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria Tunisia and UAE.

2- Review of the Literature.

Memory in the Flesh (1993) and *Chaos of the Senses* (1997) which constitute the corpus of my study have received considerable critical attention. For instance, the former was criticized for being written from a masculine perspective, with some critics questioning whether it could be the work of a female author, as it is stated in Feriel Ghezoul's article titled "The Memory of Literature in "The Memory in the Flesh" (2010). Ghezoul observes that Mostaghanemi herself has responded to these critics by emphasizing that the male dominated society rejects women to such an extent that even if a female writer or a poet appears, it is said that a man wrote for her. As a matter of fact, she demanded that criticism should be honest, correct and not descend to the level of gossip (Ibid). Second, Building the novel on true historical facts led some critics like Aida A. Bamia to focus on Mostaghanemi's assessment of the Algerian revolution. In this context, She writes in "Dhakirat al-jassad " (The Body's Memory): A New Outlook on Old Themes"(2010) , " While the love for the woman-

country serves as a background for Mostaghanemi's novel, the author's primary aim is to assess the Algerian revolution, three decades into its post colonial age" (Bamia,2010,p.85). Third, in "Unlocking the Female in Ahlam Mustaghanami" (2002), Ellen Mac Larney affirms that while the masculine voice prevailed in Mustaghanemi's first novel *The Memory of the Body*, in *Chaos of the Senses* the author "rewrite Khalid in accordance with her own dreams and desires" (Mac

Larney, 2002,p.36) . She adds that Mostaghenemi is calling "for a renewal of these forms through more frank treatment of women's bodies...they are not to be hidden and disguised, but expressed" (MacLarney, 2002,p.36). In the same vain in an article titled "Writing the Female Body in Mostaghanemi's Chaos of the Senses" Amel Khireddine explores Ahlam Mostaghanemi's poetic and metaphorical style as a strategy to present female desires in a conservative society.

3-Research Problem and Hypothesis

Building on the insights provided by previous critiques, this study seeks to examine two novels stated above by Ahlam Mostaghanemi to trace the evolution of her treatment of feminine identity which is intertwined with the national one. The debate surrounding language in Algeria, for instance, reflects broader post colonial concerns. Arabic has occasionally been stigmatized as conservative or regressive, particularly in relation to Islamic fundamentalism. For women writers like Mostaghanemi embracing Arabic becomes an act of cultural and political resistance, enabling the articulation of feminist and nationalist perspectives. Thus, in her effort to affirm herself in the context historically dominated by patriarchal and colonial discourse, Ahlam Mostaghanemi chooses Arabic as a significant step to assert cultural

and linguistic identity within a post colonial context strongly influenced by French colonial legacy. It can be hypothesized that the use of Arabic and postcolonial themes is a deliberate strategy to assert a specifically female cultural and linguistic identity against patriarchal and colonial discourse challenging the critical assumption that sophisticated literary production in Arabic is necessary male.

The study explores also how story telling functions as a form of resistance and examines the perspectives from which the stories are told. *Memory in the Flesh* (1993) is the first novel of her trilogy which comprises *Chaos of the Senses* (1997), and *Passer-by a Bed* (2003) - also translated under the title *Dust of Promises*- (2016). The trilogy revives the subject of war and the betrayal of the revolutionary principles, themes treated earlier by francophone Algerian writers such as Aicha Lemsine and Assia Djebar, but she rekindles the past through a new perspective. Mostaghenmi's use of the male voice in *Memory in the Flesh* is justified by the fact that she does not want to be classified under the label of Feminist writing as she referred to this in an interview. However her use of the male voice in her first novel and the female one in the second one tells a lot about her strategy to negotiate and claim a place of merit in the realm of literary production in Arabic. She may possibly also want to cover episodes in political history of Algeria in which men were instigators. This implies that she wants women to be also instigators in unfolding the history of their nation.

Chaos of the Senses (1997) tells the story of Hayat, a character who also appears in *Memory in the Flesh* but she is seen through Khalid Ben Toubal's eyes. The latter goes back in memory in a kind of inner monologue to recall the time of the Algerian revolution and his meeting with the daughter of Si Tahar, the Algerian martyr who died during the war of

liberation. Hayat/Ahlam in *Chaos of the Senses* is this same daughter whom Khalid cherishes and idealizes in the first novel because she represents his mother, Algeria, and Constantine. In *Chaos of the Senses* the author enables Hayet to retrieve her concealed voice by letting her tell her own story. It is precisely this shift of the narrative voice used by Mostaghanemi that this article also seeks to investigate. While the story of *Memory in the Flesh* is told through Khalid authoritative voice, *Chaos of the Senses* is told through Hayat who, to use Spivak's words, speaks for herself. She is that daring woman writer about whom the reader knows little about her true traits in *Memory in the Flesh* since she is portrayed through Khalid's eyes who regards her as a national symbol, his mother and Constantine, rather than as an individual who has her own agency and capacity to make her own choices in life.

4- Theoretical Framework

The study as it can be inferred from what it has been said so far, draws on post colonial literary theories exemplified by Spivak's concept of the subaltern and Ngugi's "Decolonizing the Mind". The concept of the subaltern is originally from Antonio Gramsci and expanded by her to denote marginalized groups silenced by hegemonic powers. In this regard, marginalized women speak but remain unheard due to intersecting colonial and patriarchal structures, rendering them voiceless in male dominated discourses. Spivak argues that representation inevitably silences the truly subaltern. She refers also to what she calls "epistemic violence" which is a kind of harm done through knowledge: how it is produced whose knowledge counts and who is erased or silenced. Epistemic violence refers to practices

that delegitimize, suppress or distort certain ways of knowing while enforcing others as universal or superior.

The study, integrates also Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African literature* (1986) to interpret Mostaghanemi's choice to write in Arabic as linguistic resistance against French language. Ngugi Wa Thiongo argues that language is the primary battlefield of colonialism and that genuine decolonization requires restoring African languages to the centre of African culture, education, and literature. Across its essays the book links linguistic domination to cultural erasure class inequality, and ongoing neocolonial control. Ngugi defines language as the key medium through which people understand themselves and their relation to the universe. In this sense, the choice of language and the use of language is central to a people's definition of themselves. He argues that colonial languages like English impose spiritual subjugation alienating Africans from their cultural identity and worldview. He calls for linguistic revolution urging writers and educators to embrace indigenous languages to reclaim mental sovereignty and foster true decolonization.

5-Mostaghanemi's writing of her First Novel: *Memory in the Flesh*

Memory in the Flesh is Ahlam Mostaghanemi's first "experimental" novel (it is a work that deliberately challenges traditional conventions of narrative structure, style, language, or form combining fiction with history and autobiography) of her trilogy. It was published simultaneously in Algeria and Lebanon in 1993, and it was dedicated to both Malek Haddad and her father whom she regarded as her idols. The dedication deserves to be

replicated here in full because it effectively carries the author's literary mission. She writes:

To the memory of Malek Haddad,
son of Canstantine , who swore after independence of
Algeria not to write in a language that was not his. The
blank page assassinated him. He died by the might of his
silence to become a martyr of the Arabic language and
the first writer ever to die silent, grieving, and,
passionate on its behalf
And to the memory of my father,
who may find someone there who knows Arabic
to read him this book, his book.

(Mostaghanemi, 1993, Dedication)

The dedication reveals clearly the emotional and linguistic struggle of writing in Arabic in postcolonial Algeria. The author's determination to write in the language in which Malek Haddad so badly desired to write in, but could not, due to language issue mapping contemporary Algeria (French colonization declared Arabic as a foreign language in 1938) indicates her desire to, in Ngugi's words "decolonize her mind" and get rid of the colonial legacy.

The author's life and experiences have contributed a lot in shaping her fiction. Although Ahlam Mostaghanemi's father, Mohamed Cherif was a teacher of French language and was greatly attached to French classical poetry, he was firm to send his daughter to study in Arabic rather than in French, in order to escape the linguistic isolation imposed on Algerian intellectuals by French colonization. In this sense, for instance, the late francophone Algerian novelist and poet Malek Haddad (1927-1978) decided

to no longer write in foreign language after independence .Mohamed Cherif's daughter was then the first of her generation to receive instruction in the national language. The choice of Arabic as the language of her writings can be regarded as an act of resistance and self definition. It reflects her own identity, which is tied up with the myth of 'common identity between language and nation' (quoted in khaye and Zouhour 1990, P. 22). She often attests that she is among the generation that dreamt of nationalism and the cancellation of the Arab frontiers. This is emphasized by Hayat's words reported by Khalid when she confesses "I could have written in French, but Arabic is the language of my heart. I can only write in Arabic; we write in the language in which we feel" (Ahlam Mostaghanemi, 1993,p. 56).

The author encountered numerous challenges and criticism, particularly from Algerian men well before publishing her novels. She declares in an interview that when she publicly read some of her verses, she received sharp criticism regarding her audacity in treating taboo themes. It was her father who came to her defense. This incident deeply affected her and paved the way to a writer she has become nowadays. More to the point, trained as a sociologist (She was awarded a doctorate in sociology from the Sorbonne in 1982) the author critically examines various dimensions of Algerian society and becomes more aware of the weight of patriarchy on women particularly female writers. It is for this reason, we consider, *Memory in the Flesh* is told from a masculine voice incarnated in Khalid Ben Toubal , a name which is recurrent throughout all her trilogy and carries symbolic continuity (the name is also the name of the main character of a novel by Malek Haddad *Le quai aux fleurs ne repond plus*1961)

The choice of a male narrator is a deliberate intentional decision as Mostaghneimi declares in an interview in which she emphasizes that in

patriarchal Algeria, history cannot be written only by men to be plausible. This echoes Spivak's notion of epistemic violence and her idea that the subaltern cannot be heard. The choice of a masculine voice in the novel is a successful alternative which contributed a lot in the negotiation of her place in the literary world which has been dominated by men for years. Actually, thanks to this novel Ahlam Mostaghanemi was awarded The Naguib Mahfouz Medal for literature, by the American university in Cairo, and from then on she began to be known by publishing many novels that have even been translated into different foreign languages.

6-Hayat Ben Cherif through Khalid's Gaze

The story of *Memory in the Flesh* is told by Khalid who reminisces through inner monologue his life and his struggle during the Algerian revolution, for the liberation of the nation. Si-Tahir, Hayat's father, considers him as a son and relies on him in most of military plans. Khalid is injured in one of his battles due to a fragment that pierces his wrist, making amputation necessary to save his life. He is taken to Tunisian boundaries, where he is treated. Before his departure Si-Tahir asks him to carry salutations to his mother, with a sum of money, and requests him to register the new born in the municipality, Khalid does so in 1956, and Four years later Si-Tahir dies living behind a mother, a wife, two children (Hayat six years old and Nasser two years old).

It is in France that Khalid encounters the grown-up Hayat, during the exhibition of his paintings, and thanks to that meeting, he recalls his mother, Constantine and Algeria. Khalid declares to Hayat, "My constant convictions and the first dreams I have of my country are embodied in one woman, a woman who happens to be you, a daughter of none other than Si

Tahir!” (Mostaghanemi, 1993, p.57). Throughout the novel Hayat is portrayed as a symbol. Khalid confesses that it is beautiful for martyrs to return in that way in her looks; he adds that it is also beautiful for his mother to return on her wrist, and for his homeland to return that day in her presence. He also reveals, “How beautiful it is that you are you!”(Ibid) . Ironically in the novel Hayat is not herself, for she does not speak for herself but all her utterances are reported by him. This can be read through spivak’s idea about how representation perpetuates silencing. Hayat is seen through Khalid’s fantasies, illusions and reveries as an emblem, a symbol of the country- Algeria. While her voice remains little more than a shadow, Khalid’s instead is authoritative, dominant and often eclipses hers. The reader is truly amazed by her conventionality and how she does not show any rebellion particularly when it comes to her marriage with the officer. This apparent passivity, however, can be interpreted as a deliberate narrative strategy by the author. By portraying Hayat as docile and silent, features that are praised by patriarchal societies, the author may be seeking to ensure the novel’s acceptance.

7-1- Hayat Ben Cherif Writing Herself in *Chaos of the Senses*

Chaos of the Senses is set in a period of violence and social malaise due to the events of 1990s. Mostaghenemi faithfully engages in recording the realities of that dark episode in the Algerian history through her female character’s authoritative voice. The story begins from which *Memory in the Flesh* ends, by introducing a woman writer who has not written a word for two years, but feels compelled to write to resist the traditional code of behavior which confines her into domesticity.

In Algeria *femmes et écriture* (1985) introduced by Jack Berque, Mostaghanemi discusses the representation of the female characters in different Algerian literary productions, from 1952 to 1980, and concludes that the portrayal of women is often confined to the notion of the symbolic as in Kateb Yacine's *Nedjema*, militant as in Mohamed Dib's novels or merely objects of desire as Rachid Boudjedra's works reveal. Mostaghanemi refutes this portrayal, which reduces women to simple figures who serve the narrative, and overtly attests, " Cette littérature paraît être dans sa majorité une littérature d'homme s'adressant à l'homme, ou la femme n'est pas une cause en soi, mais simplement un figurant parmi bien d'autre"(Mostaghanemi, 1985,p. 306) i.e. This literature seems to be for the most part, a literature of man addressed to man, where woman is not a cause in itself but simply a figure among others" (translation mine). It is for this reason that the author portrays a character that is perfectly antithetical to this reductionist depiction of women, by endowing her with imaginative powers and skills to speak out and resist patriarchal authority.

7-2- Feminine Identity Negotiated and Asserted through Imagination

The assertion of the feminine identity is embodied in the narrator who also stands for the protagonist. She is none other than Hayet/Ahlam the protagonist of *Memory of the Flesh* (1993), now the second wife of a high ranking military officer who was once Khalid's beloved. However, the way she is depicted in *Chaos of the Senses*, is significantly different: an introspective, detailed depiction of the character is offered, revealing all her thoughts, desires, and even revolts. In *Chaos of the Senses* the character Hayat is a figure that actively resists the patriarchal and conservative norms by asserting her identity as both a woman and as a sharp-eyed Algerian

citizen of the so called “third world”. Hayat vehicles also the complexities of a character shaped by the historical trauma of 1990s, years when brutal backward ideas about women reached their peak. As an answer to these old fashioned considerations, the author challenges the image of the mother which is often considered sacred and symbolic in the majority of the Algerian literature, as it is often associated with the country. Hayat, in fact, is purposefully presented as sterile to condemn the idea that women’s aspiration is limited solely to motherhood. She declares:

My husband , for instance, could never tell the difference between the real furniture and the fake furniture in any text I wrote, I could annoy him by sitting in front of my writing table for hours, instead of devoting the time to a baby that never came .He could never admit that what annoyed him was the writing itself, as an act of confrontation , a silent ruse whose legitimacy he could never debunk, despite his professional capabilities, instead of facing me with his true thoughts he kept taking me to one doctor after another sending me from one city to another, to make motherhood my problem and my most important cause (Ahlam Mostaghanemi, 2004,P.53).

Hayat favors the act of writing over motherhood, but her husband considers it as an act of confrontation since , as the narrator/ protagonist attests, he is annoyed by the act of writing because he not only cannot understand what she writes but he is also unable to make the difference between the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’. Instead of engaging with her thoughts, he is focusing on her perceived “problem” of sterility. The author’s portrayal of such a character that totally argues against the traditional patriarchal view of woman as being confined to their domestic roles is but an overt criticism of the Algerian patriarchal society which is symbolically embodied in the

husband whose main concern is not his wife's passion for writing but her inability to conceive.

In contrast, being childless is not an issue for the protagonist at all, yet it becomes a big one for her mother who incarnates all the traditional views concerning women. The mother's speeches reveal dreadful fears about her daughter's future, but Hayat's commentaries and juxtapositions with her mother show clearly the author's criticism of minimizing the role of women to motherhood and child bearing. She depicts her mother as mysterious and calm like the Mona Lisa painting, and she admits that she hates the Mona Lisa. She also confesses that she hates its calm features, submissive femininity and coldness and she wonders where her mother has acquired such coldness. Moreover, Hayat inquires where she herself has obtained all the flames of passion- whether from her eternal rebelliousness, or from the volcanoes of words constantly erupting inside her. (Mostaghanemi, 1997,p. 57). By comparing her mother to Mona Lisa and expressing her hatred for the painting, Hayat exposes her revolt against the patriarchal principles which limit or often kill women's aspirations and dreams. Hayat's explicit criticism of her mother's life reveals her frustration of living in a society that limit women's aspirations. Therefore, her "volcanoes of words" and "rebellions" operate as a counter point to the patriarchal domination.

Additionally, Hayat's rejection of motherhood goes hand in hand with her criticism of marriage institution exemplified in the failure of her sister in law's marriage when she states , "Farida has spent her life time as a slave to the conjugal home... For her freedom was the ability to look from a balcony by the sea at others, while they lived and swam and sunbathed". (Ahlam Mostaghanemi, 1997, p. 57) Conversely, Hayet is not that passive person who observes through her window - with despair- people enjoying their

lives in the sea, but rather an active individual who, thanks to her abundant imagination translated into words and images, can transcend the bitter reality she was enduring.

7-4- Imagination as the Manifestation of Reality

To assert herself, Hayat tries to escape her sad life and live in the imaginary by writing a short story which seems, from the outset, to help her subvert the patriarchal influence and create a pathway to freedom. However, she soon recognizes that merely escaping through fiction is not enough. In order to affirm herself she feels the need to go outside her home and change this status quo towards a more stirring life that is not limited to domesticity or dream. Accordingly, Ahlam Mostaghanemi urges her protagonist to not only get out of her house but also to transgress the male dominated spaces and patriarchal laws of the 1990s, Algeria.

7-5- Intrusion in the Male Space: the Author and her Protagonist

As the South African author Sindiwe Magona once said, women's voices have often been ignored or hidden by the "noises of men", a phrase cited in Adeola James's introduction of her book entitled *In their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (1990). The critic confirms that the women's problem is that we have listened so rarely to women's voices, the noises of men having drowned us out in every sphere of life including the arts. She accentuates that women too are endowed with a special sensitivity and compassion necessary for creativity. (james,1990, introduction)

Actually, Hayet can be regarded as the author's mouthpiece. Ahlam Mostaghanemi transgresses the literary world that has been dominated by men who often overlook women's issues, and she fashions real fully developed characters rather than symbolic or emblematic ones. In the same way Hayat is a rebel who violates male-dominated spaces. This serves as a

critique of patriarchy and its authority over third world women in general, and on the Algerian women in particular. The latter, precisely in the 1990s, witnessed all kinds of violence, humiliation and even death. This is exactly one of the major issues Mostaghanemi examines in her novel through Hayat's mobility in the public spaces which are culturally reserved for man, like the cinema and the café despite the insecurity at that time. (1990s).

But I was fully aware of the unpredictable stupidity I was committing by going into a movie theatre in a city like Constantine where women didn't go to the movies in the first place. Even worse if that woman were the wife of a high ranking military officer in the city who arrived in a state owned car ...to find waiting there an army of men whose sole occupation was harassing women who were either free enough or crazy enough to sit alone in a movie theatre (Mostaghanemi, 1997,P.22)

Hayat reflects on the risks she faces by going to a movie theater in Constantine where women did not traditionally go to the cinema ; worse still , as the wife of a high –ranking military officer , she faces the added threat of harassment .

Hayat entrance to the cinema, which is a male- dominated space, is motivated by an advertisement of an American movie entitled *Dead Poets Society* whose main theme is the meaning of art, the value of poetry, and the role of the artist in society. The author's choice of this film precisely is significant as it serves as a call to artists to be aware of their role in the society and their potential to better it. As a writer the protagonist tries to step out her private sphere and her fantasies and engage with the public one, which becomes her major cause throughout the novel. Furthermore, the

conversations she overhears in the public taxi about women who were butchered for refusing to abandon their studies and covering their heads—along with witnessing the death of her taxi driver were really enough to remain determined.

Another male space that Hayat challenges is the café. In numerous Arab countries, the café is populated almost exclusively by men, and if a woman, especially in the context of 1990s, dares an intrusion to this male space, she may be disrespected, or even treated as a prostitute. This also reflects Nawal Sadaoui's declaration when she often states that she never enjoyed sitting in the cafés of her homeland, for the cafés are for men. Hayat defies this convention using her entrance to the café as a symbolic act of escaping the domestic confines imposed by patriarchy. This act of transgression allows the author to offer a vivid portrayal of Algeria and its people during this time. For instance, the waiter's reactions which the author faithfully records and overtly denounces in the following quotation reflect the deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes prevalent in Algerian society:

Finally, the waiter came with a cup of coffee. He put it on the table—or rather threw it in front of me and left. I noticed that he didn't bring any sugar as was customary. I lifted my hand to call him, but then changed my mind. He was far away, and I didn't want to raise my voice to say something stupid like "God bless you, brother, Bring me a little sugar" (Mostaghanemi, 1997, p. 37)

When he serves her coffee without sugar, Hayat considers calling the waiter back, but decides against it, fearing the consequences of speaking to him. Indeed Hayat cannot raise her voice in the cafe because women's voice is "shameful", as some islamists attest, and the waiter is not supposed to serve her neither coffee nor sugar since it is, as they consider, women's duty to serve men. From their perspective Hayat's entrance in the café itself is a "sin". These are the backward ideas that the author seems to denounce when Hayet attests:

I felt that my silence was too
precious to be broken for a waiter,
especially since the consequences of
whatever I said might not be
commendable, judging by what his
beard implied. He might ask me to go
home to have my coffee with the sugar
or even throw the cup of coffee on me.
(Mostaghanemi, 1997, p. 37)

Words such as 'judging by what his beard implied' are very significant in the sense that it refers to the old fashioned ideas brought by the fundamentalist Islamic parties of the 1990s which do not regard woman as an individual but as source of shame. The novel, definitely, criticizes these ideas, since they have brought years of violence, blood, and fear.

8-Conclusion

This article has examined Ahlam mostaghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh* and *Chaos of the Senses* and has employed Spivak's notion of the subaltern who cannot speak, and if he does, he is not heard, as a relevant theoretical framework to provide compelling evidence that it is difficult for

female Algerians to affirm themselves. Yet they can reclaim voice and agency through literary expression. The close examination of the novels indicates that being aware of this, the author has deliberately opted for Arabic to get rid of the colonial legacy and restore the national language to the centre of Algerian culture. She also employs a masculine voice in the first novel as a strategy to be heard by letting the main character Khalid tell the story in accordance with patriarchal principles which silence women. Then she shifts to a feminine voice in the second novel because she has already secured her place in the literary world. The close examination of second novel's narrative voice and discourse reveals Ahlam Mostaghanemi's strategy to voice women's aspiration to freedom by portraying a female character Hayat/Ahlam as an agent rather than a consumer of the patriarchal traditions and culture. the critic of some old fashioned values concerning the status of Algerian women, for example, expresses the author's rebellion against the culture that confine women to her domesticity. Indeed her fictive character embodies all the traits that have been denied for women for centuries. She is an intellectual woman who transcends her conjugal house to reach universal knowledge. She is also able to reflect on the events of 1990s in Algeria. The article has revealed also how Ahlam Mostaghanemi redefines Algerian literature in Arabic and resists both colonial and patriarchal silencing. Finally the author seems to be engaged and committed in dramatizing the social ills of the Algerian society and the political conspiracies after independence as well, ideas that she has developed also in her last novel of her trilogy *The Dust of Promises* (2003).

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