

## **Tapping the Power within the Self and the Community in Ahlem Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine***

**Hana Bougherira**  
**University of Jordan**

### **Abstract :**

As a result of the rising corrupt atmosphere that overtook Algeria during the decades following independence, there has emerged a strong desire to use memory to reconnect with the past times from which some Algerians have felt cut off and disconnected. Ahlem

Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine* (1993) is a text that artistically and profoundly tackles the rising sense of despair and disillusionment permeating the newly independent Algeria. This paper explores how Mosteghanemi has rendered the theme of empowerment within her novel to help the Algerian subject reconstruct his postcolonial community. The focus of this paper is on how empowerment is relational in a way that empowering the individual leads to the empowerment the whole community

### **الملخص :**

نتيجة لظواهر الفساد المتزايد الذي اجتاحت الجزائر خلال العقود التي عقيت الاستقلال، برزت رغبة قوية في استخدام عامل الذاكرة لإعادة الاتصال بالأزمنة الماضية التي شعر بعض الجزائريين بقطعها و الانفصال عنها. رواية ذاكرة الجسد (1993) لأحلام مستغانمي تعالج بطريقة فنية وعميقة الشعور المتزايد باليأس و الخيبة الذي تخلل الجزائر المستقلة حديثا. يكشف هذا البحث كيف أدمجت مستغانمي موضوع التمكين في روايتها لمساعدة الفرد الجزائري في إعادة بناء مجتمعه عقب الاستعمار. يركز هذا البحث على علائقية موضوع التمكين بحيث ان تمكين الفرد يستلزم تمكين المجتمع.

Ahlem Mosteghanemi<sup>1</sup>'s *Dhakitrat Al-jasad* (1993), *The Bridges of Constantine* (2013), is a text that artistically and profoundly tackles the rising sense of despair and disillusionment permeating the newly independent Algeria. Without a doubt, what accounts for its success is the depiction of one of the most critical chapters in the history of Algeria, for the first time written in Arabic by a woman. Mosteghanemi successfully breaks the shackles of a French language that chained Algerian novelists even after years of liberation. Despite her distance from home Mosteghanemi confesses, "I don't live in the city. She lives in me,"<sup>2</sup> reflecting the profound love, which her father has planted in her heart and which she faithfully carries with her ever since. The story of *The Bridges of Constantine* represents the Algerians' struggle against the harsh French colonialism and its lasting manifestations. Khaled Ben Tubal, the protagonist, is a warrior and later a painter who resorts to exile so as not to compromise and conform to the corrupt life Algerians maintain after independence. Unconventionally, Khaled leaves for France carrying with him a beautiful image of home and a lovely memory of a pristine past time. In exile, however, Khaled experiences an array of confronting emotions that leads him to a serious stage of puzzlement and emotional upset. He simply becomes highly consumed with passion and longing for home, which he soon imagines incarnating in the daughter of his former commander in army. This paper explores the theme of Empowerment in Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine* in the light of the degrading Algerian community after independence.

The novel has been a subject of an array of interpretations ranging from literary criticism to psychological analysis. In *Dhakitrat Al-jasad (The Body's Memory): A New Outlook on Old Themes*, Aïda A. Bamia acknowledges the new dimension given to a number of exhausted themes relating to war and after war hurdles. She argues, "Just when it was believed that Algerians exhausted the topic of the war of independence as well as the major issues of the immediate post-independence years, a new novel revived the subject with virulence and frankness" (85). Ahlem then peppers her treatment of old issues with a deliberate hatred towards oppressive powers in their distinctive forms and voices what has been previously unvoiced. The translation of the text into numerous languages has been fostered by the work's success since its first publication. The early translation of the work to French language, *Mémoire de la Chair*, has been a failure. In "In a Language That Was Not His Own": On Ahlām Mustaghānamī's "Dhakitrat Al-jasad" and its French Translation "Mémoire de la Chair", Elizabeth M. Holt notes, "This translation of Dhakitrat Al-jasad seems able only to omit, elide, stay silent on, or render unintelligible the original novel's investment in the politics of writing in Arabic" (140). Ahlem's legacy lies in the fact that she is the first Algerian woman to write in Arabic shedding light on what has

been suppressed during the years of oppression like Arabic language and Arab-Islamic tradition.

The first Arabic version of the novel has been initially accused of not being originally written by Mosteghanemi. The text has been attributed to a number of Arab male writers one of whom is the Algerian novelist Wassini al-Araj who writes similar poetic novels. The major reason for such accusation is the male perspective dominating the text. Mosteghanemi subsequently deciphered the riddle of the use of such mode of representation, which she chooses to convey her message elucidating how, as a technique, it compares to the idea of the veil. In developing such narrative strategy, Mosteghanemi breaks up both the literary and the social traditions of silencing women permeating the Algerian society before and after independence. In "Unlocking the Female in Aḥlām Mustaghānamī", Ellen McLarney argues, "Dhakirat Al-jasad is not only a reflection on, but a reflection of the modes of representation have come to dominate the field of contemporary Algerian literature, dominated by male writers" (2002, p. 25). In this vein, Mosteghanemi herself explains that the issue relates to a mere patriarchal conspiracy the purpose of which is marginalizing women achievements contending that,

The matter is not that of Dhakirat Al-jasad and the issue is not that of Ahlem Mosteghanemi; it is rather the fact of belonging to a patriarchal community which despises the female and marginalizes women that whenever an Arab female writer or poet appears, there comes who says that a man writes for her. (16)<sup>3</sup>

The reader of the trilogy<sup>4</sup> may easily notice how she gradually recovers the female voice and empowers women. All the writers, who are believed to be the owners of the work, later have spoken up denying their legitimate parenthood to it praising Mosteghanemi as phenomenon worthy of attention. Moreover, Most of the critics' positive response focuses upon the high sense of fidelity in evoking the Algerian spirit and milieu, which are hard for a foreigner to know about<sup>5</sup>. Hafiz Sabri attributes the novel's success to the profound impact it has on readers<sup>6</sup>.

Those who condemn the work on the basis of its abundant sexual imagery fail to grasp the essence of its use. Yet there are no pornographic scenes; the only sexual image in the text is that of the kiss in Khaled's house in Paris. In the "the Impossibility of Telling: Of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh", Tanja Stampfl maintains that Mosteghanemi "introduces the body as object of desire, as an allegory for the nation, and a symbol for the physical connection to and the responsibility of one's country and its people".<sup>7</sup> Stampfl does not deny the implementation of sexual allusions in the text showing how it is not the focal point, which the work stresses. A few critics

do actually grapple with the issue of Nostalgia in the text reducing it to a mere love story and a desire for the other. The title of the book (Dhakhirat Al-jasad) is oftentimes misleading as it induces a sexual connotation relating to the body. The latter in the title tells a whole history of resistance of a people who wanted to be free. The wounds in their flesh now are eternal reminders of their heroic endeavors and unprecedented endurance. McLarney, one of the voices who grappled with the subject of nostalgia, explains how Khaled has fallen in the trap of idealizing the past, which he cannot forget and constantly longs for. She notes, "The temporal framework of the text is the most succinctly expressed through Khaled's body itself, wounded and disfigured in the present, leading [him] to nostalgically romanticize the past as a time of wholeness and harmony" (2002, p. 29). Khaled's sense of lack of a part of him enhances his feeling of dissatisfaction with the present and prefers the past during which he has enjoyed his wholeness.

Empowering the postcolonial subject and community is one the themes that literature implicitly endorses. What can be noticed in some postcolonial works is that the authors' prime objective is not only to subvert the colonial discourse, but rather to call for reconstructing the devastated communities. After long struggles under oppression, the newly emancipated community would focus more on its future and that of its members. Postcolonial novelists' constant treatment of matters relating to the experience of colonialism is to hearten the growth of postcolonial subjects who are able to empower their communities. Fanon concludes his *The Wretched of the Earth* with a number of dynamic notes that prompt action which the oppressed communities need to constantly elevate. Fanon urges the emancipated to "shake off the heavy darkness in which [they were] plunged, and leave it behind. The new day, which is already at hand, must find [them] firm, prudent and resolute (1963, p: 311). Fanon tirelessly aimed at raising the consciousness of the oppressed to reclaim the lost self under oppression through means of language and culture. This actually accounts for his naming of the third phase of writing 'the awakening phase' whereby the novelists should be the awakeners of their people. The latter is not confined to reminding them of their rights only, but also of their duties towards their communities. In so doing, they unmask the colonizers' failures and duplicities facilitating the task of shedding otherness for the oppressed. In this vein, Fanon observes, "For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience. Look at them today swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration" (1963, p: 311). Fanon and Raymond Williams both see that the power of change lies at the hands of man; the prototype of the dynamic formerly colonized subject is the one who engages in an automatic mission of bettering and rising up his community which comes against and the rising individualism in the world. In his concluding notes, "The Idea of Community", to his *Culture and*

*Society*, Raymond Williams, refers to the phraseology of “making a man a useful citizen [through] equipping him to serve the community” (1958, p: 330). He adds that the idea of service “is no substitute for the idea of mutual responsibility, which is the other version of community” (1958, p: 330). Fanon, too, believes in the usefulness of the citizen and sees that after the liberation movements, “It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man” (1958, p: 315). He further explains, “We must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man” (1958, p: 316).

In the postcolonial context, community empowerment relates to the process of enabling the liberated communities to augment control over the basic segments that shape their lives after independence. The route of empowerment leads these communities to effectuate reforms and re-own the future. The idea of empowerment entails the idea of acquiring power; Postcolonial novelists, however, hint to the fact that power lies within the self and urge their communities to self-empowerment. Self-empowerment begins with freeing the self and the mind and utterly embracing the idea. After that, the individual has to act upon the new change and spread it in a way that the whole community can embrace it in return. Empowerment then aims at triggering the power within the individuals and not to offer plans or political agendas. This paper discusses how Mosteghanemi renders the theme of empowerment at the level of the self, the community focusing on its relationality in her novel *The Bridges of Constantine*.

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Ahlem Mosteghanemi portrays a dilemma of the group of Algerians in the post-war independence through the character of Khaled, the protagonist of the story. The latter, as a way to save an undistorted image of homeland, takes exile as a refuge refusing to be a witness of its distortion. In exile, Khaled buries deep the memory of homeland, which he oftentimes revives in painting. What Khaled yearns for is not only Constantine as entity but also for a past time of wholeness and pride lived in it. The allegiant warriors and the great Algerian women who are bearers of a whole tradition best represent the time of grandeur that Khaled reveres. The sight of Hayat Abdul Mula is the spark that ignites strong feelings of nostalgia as she best incarnates the time to which Khaled belong. She is the daughter of one of the ideal heroes of the Algerian war, the symbol of motherhood, and thus of a tradition. Hayat’s clothing and comportment; the *Miqyas*, the burgundy *Kandura* and the use of a Constantinian dialect are a deliberate expression of a typically Algerian tradition. Khaled’s tragedy is not the loss of his arm in war, but the loss of the cause for which he has lost it. Disappointment and despair become colonial legacies pestering generations that resist them differently.

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, The Locus of power is Khaled as he could successfully transcend his trauma relying only on himself. His self-

empowerment is entrenched in a number of life experiences that help in achieving his individuation. Khaled leaves his beloved country silencing the pain of his wound to survive. The void that Khaled feels neither France, nor Granada or present Constantine itself can fill it. Khaled's obsession is the genteel past of his home. In an ultimate confrontation with the city, his past and errors, he succeeds in putting an end to his fantasy, freeing himself from the shackles of illusion. The way Khaled retrospectively assesses his victories and failures denotes that he now owns his story; he is no longer its victim. He himself realizes that "As I listened to myself narrating this for the first time, it was as if I were discovering it with you" (p: 71). The most important discovery that Khaled comes to terms with is the futility of continuously reenacting the past; there is no room in the present for the past to inhabit.

Khaled uses his art to put an end to the strange things that have long enslaved him; the love of his city and its epitome, Hayat. The novel, *The Bridges of Constantine*, is an ultimate act of freedom as Khaled wants it to be. In it, Khaled starts by telling the reader about how he has fallen in the trap of depression after his arm-amputation; at that particular moment, Khaled simply feels rejected by life and death. Subsequently, Khaled decides to rebuild his relationship with the milieu through art. He starts with painting to reconcile himself to things and to a world he differently sees embracing the serious turning point in his life and attempting to live with it, he aims at helping a whole nation to survive the calamities of a war fought and won. Khaled's art entails the power of creation; in becoming a painter, Khaled regains control over his life coloring it as he wishes. He becomes "one of Algeria's major artists, perhaps the biggest of all" (p: 41). Art is empowering for Khaled as it complements his handicap helping him recuperate his missing part even for a brief moment. Khaled's missing arm is ironically a source of pride rather than pity. After Algeria's independence the war-wounded have been treated as a divinity whose endeavor saved a people and whole upcoming generations. After years of independence, people have started to be less familiar with the phenomenon of the war-wounded in the flesh. Khaled never surrenders to the sense of pity or disability that the people's gazes leave on him. Even at the Metro where there are some seats reserved for the war-wounded, he never seizes them. He himself declares, "Some vestige of pride and honor made me prefer to stay standing, holding on with one hand" (p: 49). Though people see him as a victim, he sees himself through the lens of victorhood. He believes that he is an extraordinary man who with one hand "mocked the world and recast the features of things" (p: 49). He even mocks the French attempts to cut him short while they were reversely boasting the artist in him. Upon seeing Hayat who automatically revives Khaled's old pain, he becomes further colonized by her and by his obsession with what she represents. Khaled's experience calls

for the avoidance of the extremes of either memory or oblivion. That is to say, Algerians should not idealize the past completely neglecting the present like Khaled or occupy themselves with a present literally detached from the past like Hayat. Khaled's healing moment occurs when he finally realizes that the idea of memory that torments him is not actually his, but one he shares with Hayat; "each of [them] had a copy of it even before [they] met" (p: 284). What helps Khaled maintain his sanity is the fact that loyalty to the shared memory is the responsibility of every Algerian. The memory which he transmits through the act of telling Hayat her story, the story of Constantine and thus of all Algeria; making her, the present, a replica of him, the heroic past.

What is striking about Khaled's character is how the warrior in him never dies. Like a warrior, he ceaselessly adapts his weapons to overcome his trauma; he becomes a painter, then a writer and ends being a prophet like instructor whose empowerment heralds the empowerment of his community. Hayat begs him, "Don't be a false prophet Khaled. I need you" (p: 286). What prophets do is the transmission of a message that will better the whole community; they become examples to follow. Hayat willingly asks for the Ten Commandments that she should obey. Khaled answers back confessing; "you [have] an inner light I [have not] seen it in a woman before. A seed of purity I didn't want to disregard". The purity that Khaled detects is a sense of authenticity and willingness to remain close to the roots. Accordingly, he gives her an eleventh to carry her name with "greater pride...with profound awareness that [she is] more than a woman [she is] an entire nation (p: 287). What Khaled means is that every Algerian needs to assume responsibility reconstructing the nation, each believing himself more than a mere individual.

During Khaled's madness, he could not see things as they are; he filters his world through the lens of the past. After recovery, however, he starts to reconcile with the things he used to intentionally ignore for no reason. What Mosteghanemi seeks to engrain is a sense of balance in love and hatred because too much of one of the two will blind the beholder. Khaled's reconciliation is not a sort of assimilation; Khaled successfully preserves his identity just ridding himself of the exercise of imagination and illusion. Mosteghanemi actively reminds the younger generations of their mission for it is not time to rest dreaming, they should wake up, revive the dream of the former generations and turn it into reality.

Khaled proffers to use the concept of dance as a cleansing power to transcend his pain. When Hassan dies, Khaled dances "like [he] has never before, like [he] longed to dance at [Hayat's] wedding but [he] didn't. Khaled hallucinates, "I'll leap as though my feet have grown wings and my missing arm has grown back again" (p: 295). Within that much of destruction and in the midst of ruin, the leap that Khaled dreams of is that of

transcendence. Khaled's pain is too real that he cannot bear. What he aspires to go beyond is the sense of loss which his missing arm incarnates. When the latter imaginatively comes back again, comes with it all what has been lost; the dream for which he has lost it, the genteel past, the time of wholeness, a dead mother, friend and brother. Khaled's experience is very much like that of all Algerians who have paid so dear, but never complained. His experience urges Algerians to skip all the pain and cease the passive lamenting of a lost dream. Dance entails the power of optimism that defies pain; that is why Khaled chooses to dance as an ultimate attempt to self-empowerment. Khaled is originally a descendant of a *Aissawi* man who "sways[s] and dance[s] madly and plunge[s] that skewer right through his body in the ecstasy of pain that transcends pleasure" (p: 295). Khaled ends his novel on a challenging note addressed to the new thieves saying that they can steal as much as they can "we will keep blood and memory...we will haunt you with them and *rebuild* this homeland with them" (*My italics*, p: 298). Memory and blood have a constructive power. Memory recalls both glory, which needs revival, and hatred that will continuously fuel the need to empower. Blood in the novel is referred to as a subversive entity and a cleansing power. The blood of martyrs is what irrigates the seeds of victory in the Algerian land.

Khaled ends up giving all his *tableaux* to Catherine asking her to "hang [his] memory on [her] wall; a symbolism which she fails to grasp (p: 301). Khaled purposefully leaves Algerian memory to hang on the walls of French history. Catherine's failure to understand Khaled's gesture recalls Khaled's aim behind his exhibitions in France which the French respect not knowing Khaled's real intentions behind. Until the last minute in France, Khaled does not give up on transmitting Algerian culture to France and never surrendering to theirs. His resistance manifests itself in an ultimate refusal from Khaled to make love to Catherine rejecting any sort of connection again. When turning back home, Khaled declares memory as his only possession in the airport. Khaled's return with memory alone is so promising.

During the Algerian war of independence, Fanon wrote, "Women's status had been changed as a result of their participation; they [are] now equals" (p: 58). After the war, however, the change that Fanon has spoken about has not become a part of the Algerian women's reality. In "Between Two Jailors: Women's Experience during Colonialism, War, and Independence in Algeria", Adrienne contends, "Despite their brave actions and sacrifices during the revolution, women's contribution to the liberation struggle was largely seen as symbolic at best" (p: 15). Leonhardt quotes Fadila Ahmed who best describes the status of the Algerian woman noting,

We the women of Algeria; have two jailors:  
colonialism [...] and the apathetic creatures who cling

on to customs and traditions inherited not from Islam but from their ignorant forefathers. The second jailor is worse than the first. (As cited in Leondhardt, p: 7)

In *The Bridges of Constantine*, Ziyad laughs at Khaled's idea of getting him acquainted with a writer saying, "I hate women when they try to have literature instead of having something else. I do have no patience for such type" (p: 143). Against such background, Mosteghanemi uses the character of Hayat, her knowledge, her attitudes and comportment to colonize Khaled treating him the way men formerly treated women in literature. More importantly, Hayat does not only colonize Khaled, but also she is the one to heal him, showing him the way to self-emancipation. In the midst of destruction, Hayat gives Khaled the weapons to transcend his trauma; the first weapon is to internalize the Arab-Islamic tradition; the second, the return to home; and finally the implicit promise of loyalty to the shared memory. Their empowerment is relational as they both take power from each other. Hayat empowers Khaled, and he simultaneously empowers her too. In one instance, Khaled says, 'I listened to you as you repaired the ruin in your depths" (p: 72). The act of telling is an act of healing; Mosteghanemi gives Hayat the chance to tell her story in order to recover her trauma. In so doing, she encourages every female to tell her story. A fact that further stresses that is Hayat being a writer who exposes the female experience of love and sexuality. When Khaled reads her novel, he falls prey to his illusions and questions the truth of what is written. Khaled's reaction mirrors that a whole community that condemns the initiative of women. In an attempt to put an end to that, Hayat firmly comments, "I think critics really ought to resolve this once and for all either you admit that women have more imagination than men, or they put us all on trial" (p: 90). Her choice of Arabic alone is another proof of her resisting spirit.

Mosteghanemi's fictional heroine is a seeker of oral tradition that marks the postcolonial return to roots as a way of resistance. She starts with referring to her grandmother's telling of stories and her stagnation in the past. Her eagerness reflects the awakened consciousness of a whole generation characterized by a thirst for knowledge. Hayat's little knowledge of her roots does not push her to be completely submerged by the French culture. Though she lives in France, like her foremothers, she preserves her identity. She is not submissive in any way; she rather knows what she wants and what she needs to know. She is a writer, and this connotes her ability to be the owner of her story. Mosteghanemi intentionally empowers Hayat to do justice to the status of women in a society that never acknowledges women endeavors and capacities. Especially during the war of independence, the names of Algerian heroines are generally forgotten or simply erased, for example, LallaFatmaN'Soumer who is one of the most

important figures of the Algerian resistance whose name is rarely mentioned to in fictional and non-fictional narratives.

Mosteghanemi takes the idea of empowerment a step further showing how it is actually relational. She renders that within her text through reviving the national Anthem of Ben Badis in which he says, “youth; you are our hope/ the dawn is close thanks to you” (p: 238). This anthem actually has long before united Algerians throughout the huge Algerian territory. It is empowering as it raises the sense of belongingness, unity, confidence, and hope. Due to it, Khaled contends, “We [Algerian prisoners] were one people whose voice made the walls shake, before our bodies shook under torture” (p: 239). Mosteghanemi intentionally restores confidence in the Algerian dream which will materialize at the hands of Algerian youth. Ben Badis had a strong faith in the new generation to complete the mission of bringing about a new dawn. The dawn that Ben Badis talks about and Mosteghanemi is trying to spread again within the Algerian community is that of genuine independence whereby Algerians would start reconstruction from their former, precolonial self. The latter relates basically to the tenets of Arabism and Islam.

Mosteghanemi has a strong faith in pride as an empowering force. In this vein, Khaled sadly declares “We hadn’t died from abuse, but from subjugation. Only indignity could kill people” (p: 238). Like Mosteghanemi, Khaled attributes the loss of one’s identity and culture to the trap of indignity. He adds, “A person couldn’t belong to the city if he didn’t share its Arabism, which here meant pride and bravado and centuries of bold defiance” (p: 237). In *The Bridges of Constantine*, the dichotomy of self and other is not confined to the colonial power and the colonized; it rather extends to the Algerian community itself. Algerians are now two major groups; those who refuse to compromise and those who have utterly surrendered to the requirements of the dominant culture. Khaled enthusiastically says, “Nasser is great; I swear he’s one of us” (p: 254). ‘Nasser is one of “us” as he still believes in the need to cling to the root and minimize the impact of foreign influence on local life and tradition. Greatness and pride associate to the “us” that stands for the uncompromising native in this context.

Fiction of empowerment simply calls on people to sustain the integrity of one’s community. It shapes the consciousness of the community, giving it form and contours, opening before it new and boundless horizons. *The Bridges of Constantine* is a piece of empowerment as it calls for assuming responsibility, and as it contains the seeds of freedom expressed in terms of latent, motivating messages. Jameson argues, “The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (1986, p: 69). This means that the fate of the postcolonial subject is that of his own community. The Algerian

postcolonial subject is not a flawed, broken creature; s/he is an active agent who knows his own position in history and community. Finally, what can be said is that Mosteghanemi has proved to be an awakener *par excellence* whose fiction is of transformation and positive change.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Ahlem Mosteghanemi was born in Tunis. She is the daughter of a militant in the Algerian war of liberation and an intellectual with a high-ranking position in the Algerian government whose contribution to the new free nation are undeniable.

Ahlem's first achievement is a daily show "Whisper" on a national radio.

"Whispers" proves the beginning of her poetic style allowing Ahlem to be later the first Algerian to write poetry collection in Arabic under the name of "To the Day's Haven" and "The Writing in a Moment of nudity". Ahlem's decision to write in Arabic comes against the backdrop of the French Language domination.

<sup>2</sup> Khaled in Dhakirat Al-jasad is Ahlem's alter ego which Cambridge online dictionary defines it as the part of someone's personality that is not usually seen by other people.

<sup>3</sup>My own translation. The quote in Arabic is: "المسألة ليست مسألة ذاكرة الجسد و لا القضية قضية احلام مستغانمي و انما كوننا ننتمي الي مجتمع ذكوري يرفض الانثى و يحتقر النساء حتى انه ما ظهرت ككاتبة او شاعرة عربية الا و جاء من يقول ان رجلا يكتب لها" (فريال غزول 167) as cited in

<sup>4</sup>Dhakirat Al-jasad is a prequel to other two novels: "Fawda el Hawas" (The Chaos of Senses) published in 1997 and "Aber Sareer" (Bed Hopper) published in 2003. Each part of the trilogy, now a classic, is a bestseller in its own right throughout the Arab world (Wikipedia).

<sup>5</sup> Ferial Ghazoul, in "Desire and Memory", praises Ahlem's noteworthy ability to embrace convincingly a male voice who forges this exceptional tale of passion. Ghazoul quotes Abdel-Moneim Tallima comment saying, "Ahlem Mosteghanemi goes beyond the common notions of the masculine and the feminine to present a humane horizon." The two critics refer to one of the other reasons why Mosteghanemi has adopted such mode, which is to cover episodes in the political history of Algeria in which men were provocateurs.

<sup>6</sup>As it is cited in Ghazoul, Ferial J. "داكرة الأ(د)ب في ذاكرة الجسد." / "Recalling (Af)iliation in Memory in the Flesh". *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. No. 24, (2004), pp. 166-181.

<sup>7</sup>Tanja Stampfl builds her idea on the theories of Judith Butler and Reda Bensmaia in particular. His essay traces "the quest for the Arab homeland in the love triangle between three artists: the writer Ahlem, the painter Khaled, and the poet [Ziyad]". The three characters use their art of telling and each other to construct a place--a home of sorts. Stampfl's reading of Mosteghanemi's novel aims to "answer larger questions concerning the importance of national identity in a globalized world and the role of art in (re)creating a fragmented nation".

