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Writing the Female Body in Mosteghanemi's Chaos of the Senses: A Counter Narrative Discourse

كتابة الجسد الانثوي في رواية فوضى الحواس لمستغانمي: خطاب سردي معاكس

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Abstract

By being represented in the mainstream national discourse as national symbols and their bodies as boundary markers, Arab women tend to lose their right of being significant members in their nations. In order to empower their heroines, a number of contemporary Arab women writers appeal to their female protagonists' erotic bodies as a language to voice loud their womanhood. In her attempt to transform the female body from a national symbol into a private erotic dominion, the Algerian novelist Ahlam Mosteghanemi adopts a unique approach in writing about her heroine's body and sexuality in her second novel Fawda al-Hawas (Chaos of the Senses). As such, drawing upon Hélène Cixous' theory of écriture feminine, this paper aims at shedding light on Mosteghanemi's special approach of sexual politics which saves her text from falling in the pitfalls of linguistic pornography. The novelist astutely deploys metaphors and poetic expressions in depicting her heroine's body and sensual desires.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الكاتبات العربيات،
جسد المراة العربية،
الكتابة الانثوية،
احلام مستغانمي،
اللغة الشعرية.

ملخص

المرأة العربية معرضة من خلال تمثيلها في الخطاب الذكوري الوطني السائد كرمز وطني وجسدها كعلامة لحدود الوطن و تمييزه ، إلى فقدان حقها في أن تكون عضوًا مهمًا و فعالا في بناء وطنها. من أجل تقوية بطلات روايتهن و ابراز الدور المحوري الذي يمارسنه في مجتمعاتهن ، تلجأ عدد من الكاتبات العربيات المعاصرات إلى الأجساد المثيرة و الجنسية لبطلاتهن كلغة للتعبير بصوت عالٍ عن انوثتهن. في محاولتها لتحويل جسد الأنثى من رمز يرسم حدود الوطن إلى ملكية جنسية تنتمي اليها و فقط، تتبنى الروائية الجزائرية المعاصرة أحلام مستغانمي نهجًا فريدًا في الكتابة عن جسد بطلتها والجنس في روايتها الثانية من ثلاثيتها فوضى الحواس. على هذا النحو ، بالاعتماد على نظرية الكتابة الانثوية للفرنسية هيلين سيكسوس ، تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تسليط الضوء على نهج مستغانمي الخاص للسياسة الجنسية الذي يحفظ نصها من الوقوع في مطبات الإباحية اللغوية الادبية. توظف الروائية بذكاء الاستعارات والتعبيرات الشعرية في تصوير جسد بطلتها ورغباتها الجنسية.

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1. Introduction

In Arab patriarchal culture, traditional gender roles play a pivotal part in the construction of national barriers. Not only are women's bodies symbols of the fecundity of the nation and the vessels for its reproduction, but they are also territorial markers marking the nation's difference from alien others (Kandiyoti, 1991: 434). They become boundaries of the nation. Women designate the space of the nation and are, at the same time, the property of the nation. As markers and as property, women require the defense and protection of patriotic sons. According to Matthew Evangelista (2011), common metaphors like motherland, mother tongue, and the birth of the nation are representative of the "link between gender and nationalist movements" since "women in general and mothers in particular are responsible for inculcating the key characteristics that define cultural or ethnic identity," and "serve as 'boundary markers' between different national, ethnic, and religious communities" (1).

Arab women's bodies are perceived as biological and cultural reproducers and hence they turn out to be battlegrounds in Arab nationalist narrative discourses. Anne McClintock (1993) argues that as figurative representations, women "symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men [. . .] women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit" (62). Given that women are by and large labeled as the symbolic carriers of the national community, they turn to be "metaphorical images" in the male nationalist narratives symbolising the nation. By conflating women's bodies with national frontiers, Arab national discourse tends to further limit any tangible contribution of Arab women in the nation. In this connection, Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) asserts that " [w]henever women[']s bodies] continue to serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic and religious collectivities, their emergence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardized, and whatever rights they may have achieved during one stage of nation-building may be sacrificed on the altar of identity politics during another" (435). As such, Arab woman's status in the national sphere will never be on equal footing with men as long as she is associated with the national task of demarcating the boundaries of the nation.

In an Arab context, the act of a woman writer writing about female desires and sexuality is considered an act of audacity and a subversion of the sacred social literary and national discursive network which casts Arab women at diverse historical moments as speechless, subalterns, and stripped of their agency. By being represented as national symbols and their bodies as boundary markers, Arab women tend to be erased from the national agenda of their nation-states, denied their legal right of having a tangible and influential participation in the nation-building project.

In order to empower their heroines and draw out their suppressed voices, a number of contemporary Arab women writers appeal to their female protagonists' sensual desires and erotic bodies as a language to voice loud their womanhood. Their aim is to transform Arab woman's body from a national boundary marker into a private realm marking nothing but itself. In so doing, they are intent to cast Arab women as individualised full-fledged citizens accomplished both emotionally and intellectually, with a new transgressive role in her national community, far away from the traditional role tailored to her by a purely androcentric society, and with equal rights and status in their national community. Thus, they resort to a female body liberating discourse as a counter-narrative strategy to the preeminent masculine national discourse. By writing about their heroines' bodies and sexuality, those Arab women, among them Algerian female authors of French expression, announce their departure from the literary traditions of their male compatriots in their descriptions of Arab woman as a subservient asexual mother in the confines of her kitchen.

Belonging to an Arab patriarchal society, the Algerian novelist Ahlam Mosteghanemi is part of this generation of Algerian women who break the silence created by men on what is woman's body and sexuality. In so doing, she announces her departure from the literary masculine traditions of Algerian novelists who more often than not figure their heroines

as mere symbols of the nation. Eventually, she joins the feminist pens of her compatriots like Assia Djebar and Malika Mokeddem who restore through their fiction the individual character to Algerian women. In her attempt to transform the female body from a boundary marker of the nation into a private erotic dominion, the novelist makes use of a specific approach in writing about her heroine's body and sexuality. Applying Hélène Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine*, and after an overview on the Algerian masculine and feminine literary portrayal of Algerian woman, this paper discusses the special approach to sexual politics Mosteghanemi has adopted in her second novel *Fawda al-Hawas* (1997) to write female sensual and erotic bodies. The novelist has chosen metaphors and poetic expressions in an oblique style in depicting her heroine's body and sexuality. Indeed, Mosteghanemi's astute deployment of metaphors saves her text from falling in the pitfalls of linguistic literary pornography.

2. Women in Algerian Francophone Narratives

While the majority of wartime Algerian male novelists portrayed their male characters as great heroes bravely confronting the coloniser in their quest for national community and identity, they remarkably cast their female characters to the margin. Apart from a few cases, those female figures are more often than not used as minor characters to serve the plot of the story. They neither share the nationalist zeal of the male heroes, nor suffer any sense of colonial alienation. Indeed, their roles are confined to those of wives and mothers who struggle relentlessly for insignificant everyday problems. In addition to those socio-realistic portrayals of the Algerian woman during colonisation, other writers give a symbolic dimension to their female protagonists.

In relating the love of woman and the symbiosis of a people, Kateb Yacine proves unique in rendering the Algerians' struggle for liberty and search for identity in his 1956 novel *Nedjma*. Indeed, the writer's success in internalising the pains and aspirations of his people makes his novel emblematic of Algeria searching for itself. Critics have contended that Yacine's heroine Nedjma symbolises the spirit of the entire nation, she speaks to Algeria itself. Yacine himself admits: "Nedjma is the soul of new disreputable Algeria from the beginning". In the novel, the heroine Nedjma is portrayed as a beautiful mysterious young woman quested by four friends (Rachid, Lakhdar, Mourad, and Mustapha) who undergo numerous tribulations to capture the elusive woman. The latter is for the most part revealed through the dialogues of the four lovers who talk about her in turn. The four companions might well symbolise the four Algerian pre-war nationalist factions: the U.D.M.A., M.T.L.D., P.C.A. and the Ulema Association debating and discussing over the future of the imminent nation (Déjeux, 1980: 241).

Nedjma stands as a living proof of its creator's prophetic consciousness, that at the core of the colony, a nation was imagined and emerging. It is the advent of such a landmark historical transformation, that *Nedjma* constantly plumbs (Irele, 2009: 109). The political, national and anti-colonial commitments of the novel in defining the Algerian nation cast it as a foremost magnum opus in the Algerian cultural and literary landscape.

Some critics claim that, with the exception of few writers, the majority of the wartime Algerian novelists tended to symbolise the Algerian woman by concealing her body and sexuality for reasons connected to protecting their honour. Ellen McLarney (2002) rightly puts forward: "While the association between national honor and women's honor is an ancient political and literary concept, the linking of the two was particularly strong in Algeria, for reasons too diverse and complex" (35). In *Algérie: femme et écritures*, Mosteghanemi explains the Algerian male writer's complex in writing about his female counterpart's sexuality and relates it to "the quasi-general tendency, due to the circumstances of colonial occupation, to worship the body of the Algerian woman, a factor that contributed to placing the Algerian writer in front of a practically empty feminine presence" (qtd. in McLarney, 2002: 35). The novelist contends that in contrast to the Algerian woman, the male Algerian author is able to represent the Western woman realistically, as such only the foreign woman can evolve as a fully individualised character in masculine Algerian fiction. In *The Eloquence of Silence* (2014), Marnia Lazreg

rightly positions this allegorisation in Maghrebi literature: "Women as tropes for culture, identity and nation will continue to be used in postcolonial society. Well-known contemporary authors such as Mohammed Dib, or Kateb Yacine, wrote of women as symbols of the nation suffering from the inequities of the colonial order, or the redemption of a colonised society searching for its soul" (188).

Unlike their male compatriots whose representations of the Algerian woman did not go beyond the traditional and symbolic dimensions, Algerian female novelists of the colonial time undertook to disencumber their female comrades from the webs of alienation, both in the social and the colonial sense of the word. While the male novelists sympathised with their female compatriots' status, they tended to portray them as silent and submissive, stripped of a strong will that would propel them to rebel and change their lives. Conversely, the heroines in the female novelists' texts, such as those of Assia Djebar, are figured in a manner that exposes the courage of the Algerian woman in revolting against her victimisation under a twofold repressive system. Those heroines come to believe in their equal status with men both in the private and public spheres.

Djebar's first novel La *Soif*, which appeared at the intense climax of the Algerian Revolution in 1957, aroused a wide ire among Algerian nationalists for its outright discussion of Algerian women's sexuality which, according to them, was alien to both the social traditions and the national cause of the country. The nationalists did not hesitate to indict Djebar for serving the coloniser by emulating its literature and reiterating its themes, namely those relating to Algerian women's body and sexuality. Indeed, instead of showing allegiance to the Revolution by writing about her people's sufferings and resistance, Djebar seemed to be locked in a fancy realm made up of the sensual desires of her heroines, whose experiences and worries proved far away from those of the colonised Algerian woman (Smail, 1991: 217). According to Algerian male nationalists, it was indecent for Djebar to deal with such a "purely" Western concern at a time when the country was waging its War to liberate the country (Khatibi, 1997: 62). Nevertheless, for Djebar, the heroines of La Soif do wage their own war of liberation in their quest to rediscover their buried womanhood and sexuality.

In her postcolonial novel *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), Djebar takes up the mission of re-inscribing the Algerian women in the centre of national history by relating and reproducing the narratives of women who took an active part in the Algerian Revolution. In this novel, Djebar recreates an atmosphere of revolt and traces the pivotal role of women in Algerian history from Bourmont's expedition (1830) to Algeria's independence. Indeed, by juxtaposing official written historical accounts with the oral testimonies of ordinary women, Djebar shows that the women's stories are as worth valuing and exploring as the official documents. Djebar's novel opens a space for those women to tell about "herstories", their experiences and sufferings under the colonial regime and during the war. Not only does the novel valorise women's participation in the Algerian Revolution and acknowledge their sacrifices, but it also suggests a vision of nation-building that incorporates both genders, men and women. By replacing the Algerian woman at the core of the national resistance and reclaiming her active role in rebuilding the nation, Djebar's narrative helps redefine woman's status in the postcolonial national agenda.

Giving those long silenced subalterns a voice to express themselves openly was for Djebar an urgent cause (Igoudjil: 176-177). The novelist attempts to fill the socio-historical and cultural gaps created by androcentric political and cultural institutions by rewriting women as active historical agents and potential nation-builders. By presenting her view from a female perspective, Djebar is able to contest power structures that buttress the preeminence of French colonial discourse whilst subverting the boundaries with which Algerians have besieged their women since time immemorial. Her fiction is exemplary of how "female writers have challenged the fundamental definition of war itself" (Higonnet, 1993: 208). With a unique mastery of language and without resorting to a trendy avant-gardism, Djebar remains one of the most distinguished Algerian women writers.

Malika Mokeddem is another Algerian francophone novelist who communicates her struggle in her 1998 novel *The Forbidden Woman* as a means of literary resistance to the Algerian male-led cultural canon. In the wake of the murders which plagued the nation in the 1990s, Mokeddem recovered her pen to utilise against any sort of cultural subjugation. She urges Algerian women, long oppressed and marginalised, to use their voices for a real change of their position (Igoudjil: 180). Mokeddem writes her novels first and foremost to voice her indignation against all injustices exerted on her people as well as her support for all Algerian novelists who were subjects to threats and violent actions from Islamist activists. Through her fiction, the writer speaks out both her indignation and rebellion by depicting the bitter reality of her countrymen while aspiring to weave a better one. The novel becomes thus the site where antithetic realities confront each other.

The Forbidden Woman describes the life of Sultana Medjahed, a young Algerian doctor whose society's prejudiced traditions incite her to leave Algeria to France. Yet, a letter from her former lover Yacine is sufficient to make her back to her country. In addition to meeting again the love of her life, by returning to her motherland, Sultana takes up the mission of supporting her female compatriots' cause in their struggle to unfetter the society and cure it from obsolete traditions. Being a woman doctor, Sultana is entitled for this role, she succeeds in escaping not only the pitfalls of both traditions and modernity, but also more importantly, the temptations of two men, Vincent and Salah.

Through their fiction, both Djebar and Mokeddem appear concerned with breaking the silence imposed on Algerian women, a silence which constantly casts them as mere objects rather than active subjects. They use female voices as a medium to speak loud the oppression and the silencing of the subordinated objectified Algerian women.

For her part, Mosteghanemi readily joins her female compatriots in stressing Algerian woman's femininity and agency, figuring her as an active subject rather than a symbolic object. Unlike the masculine narratives of her countrymen which tend to foreground the symbolic dimension of the female character, Mosteghanemi presents Algerian women as fully individualised subjects, fulfilled both emotionally and intellectually. She goes further on breaking the sacred taboo of the female body and sexuality; yet approaching it with a totally different manner than that of her contemporaries.

3. Female Eroticism through Metaphors

In Mosteghanemi's debut novel *Dhakirat al-Jasad* (1993), the heroine Hayat is narrated by a male voice; however in the sequel text Fawda al-Hawas, the heroine's feminine voice spontaneously renders her inner self. The female "I" relates her own story of love and expresses her desires. Mosteghanemi, as Ellen McLarney (2002) aptly argues, "uses her own novel to open up the female body, exposing it to the light of day, depicting the details of women's most intimate emotions and sensations. For her, only when the inner elements of women's lives are included within the literary corpus will it become more hospitable to their presence" (43).

Inscribing the female body in the literary text is an idea expounded and advocated by the French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous as a means of creating *écriture féminine* or feminine writing that would counterbalance the patriarchal realm of language. Cixous (1976) writes, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring them to writing [. . .] Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement" (875).

In her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous propounds an alternative writing for women which would destabilise the limited composition of phallocentric discourse, but which, more importantly, would help women retrieve their voices, silenced throughout history by the male voice. According to Cixous, *écriture féminine* is the demonstration of the feminine body in writings, as an instrument towards a thinking that would subvert the very fundamentals of androcentric discourse, and which would speak in a female voice, allowing women to uncover their unconscious self, "the Other" in phallocentric

writings. Cixous (1976) writes:

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display_the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. (880)

Cixous urges women to unleash, through their writings, all their suppressed desires and impulses and to write about their sexuality. Only when women voice out the pleasures of their sexuality and describe their feminine desires in their writings, Cixous asserts, will they be able to get back their buried voices and to break away from the masculine language.

Cixous argues that, by inscribing their feminine bodies, long repressed within the masculine stranglehold, women will not only be able to liberate their bodies in writing but will also establish a new signifying order. They will no more be under the subjugation of the patriarchal order, rather will surface as a source of power: "Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem" (Cixous, 1976: 881).

Mosteghanemi depicts the only love-making scene in the novel with a lot of attention to details, wherein bodily signs are the only valid language. In her chapter "La Femme s'affirme" in *Algérie: femme et écritures*, the novelist examines Djebar's intricate portrayals of her heroines' coming to sexual and political awareness. In her view, writing the feminine body and sexuality is one of the most crucial first steps in women's literature and the "women's awakening" (qtd.in McLarney, 2002: 38). Mosteghanemi describes realistic representations of women's bodies and sexuality as a literary unveiling: "we witness an upheaval in the young girl's life. Her body is henceforth revealed by unveiling and no longer by veiling" (qtd. in McLarney, 2002: 38). Although Mosteghanemi celebrates a realistic depiction of women's bodies and sexuality in the literary text, she herself opts for a conservative style. The novelist maintains a linguistic reserve in order to escape falling in the trap of literary pornography. Still, her description of the female body and sexuality has a seductive effect on the reader.

Unlike *Dhakirat al-Jasad*, where the forbidden love spawns a sort of erotic frustration embodied in one single kiss between Ahlam/Hayat and Khaled, the passionate relationship in Fawda al-Hawas culminates by the sexual intercourse. The libidinal desires and carnal encounter between Hayat and her lover are lessened and hijacked by the astute deployment of language, yet never misses its emotional literary quality. Mosteghanemi depicts the sexual encounter through implicit images veiled under metaphors:

In the presence of Zorba, the sea took off its dark glasses and black shirt and sat gazing at me. A man who was half ink, half sea denuded me of my questions between high and low tide, and drew me towards my destiny. A man who was half timidity, half seduction inundated me with a feverish torrent of kisses. Holding me with one arm, he cancelled out my hands and began writing me, pondering me in the midst of my perplexity. (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 214)

The moments of intimate intercourse between the two lovers are rendered through poetic images. The nudity of the two bodies is present through metaphors as, "the sea took off its dark glasses and black shirt and sat gazing at me." This nakedness is obscured by the use of poetic expressions through which physical intimacy between the two protagonists becomes a textual intimacy:

He said, 'This is the first time I've looked off the page at your body. Let me see you at last.' I tried to seek refuge behind a blanket of words. He said reassuringly, 'Don't hide behind anything. I'm looking at you in the darkness of the sea and nothing but the lamp of craving is lighting your body now. So far our love has lived its entire life in the darkness of the senses.' I wanted to ask him, 'Why are you so sad?' But a storm at sea swept my questions away, scattering me like foam. (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 214)

The novelist sails nudity by poetic expressions, and represents the real image in an abstract language. She depicts the scene when the two lovers engage in

sexual intercourse through images of darkness and sea: "I'm looking at you in the darkness of the sea" symbolises the darkness of the room and the readiness of the protagonists to make love. Also, the metaphor "a storm at sea swept my questions away, scattering me like foam" represents the beginning of the sexual intercourse between the heroine and Khaled.

In her imagery, Mosteghanemi makes use of water aspects to express a growing pleasure: "When the storm subsided, the sea left me a corpse on the shore of bewilderment, and cast me a fleeting glance. One kiss, two kisses, one wave, two waves, and the sea had withdrawn furtively in anticipation of an approaching tear" (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 216). On the other hand, the images of fire come to give that pleasure a climax: "Suddenly his words, like his fingertips, turned into matchsticks that set fire to everything they touched. I didn't know what he meant, nor why he wanted us to be consumed in such a huge, frightful conflagration" (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 215). Female orgasm is present in the text but still veiled by the poetic language: "Overwhelmed by his manhood, I floundered in his arms like a fish out of water before entering little by little into a state of surrender" (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 215).

Mosteghanemi manages to depict the sensual erotic scene of the heroine without falling into vulgar or pornographic language. This passage, which evokes the after orgasm, is a telling example: "The sea had receded, leaving my body between two poems and two tears, and nothing but salt remained. As for me, I stayed where I was, a sea sponge" (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 216), "The sea had receded" evokes the completed act and the calm the heroine senses when she stays as "a sea sponge". Indeed, this moment of intense pleasure experienced by Hayat will not escape the national melancholy of the 1990s, thus recalling the context of political crisis that set the country on fire. While making love, Khaled grieves his murdered companion Said Mekbel, another victim of the pen. However, Khaled insists that only a lot of love could cure the injuries of the nation: "Don't think that it's easy to approach pleasure through pain, or to have sex because one of your comrades has died. We need a lot of love to take revenge on death.'" (Mosteghanemi, 2015: 220).

4. Mosteghanemi's Approach to Sexual Politics

Instead of an overt description of the sexual act and the female body, Mosteghanemi appeals to a language rich in metaphors and images in order to convey female physical and psychological moments. Yet, the absence of an explicit expression does not detract the sensuality of the text. On the contrary, the poetic style maintains the mystery of the literary text while preserving the eroticism of the image. In an interview with *"Almothakkaf al-Arabi"*, Mosteghanemi clarifies: "I did not write about sex in its conventional sense, and my texts are living proofs of that [. . .] In my novels, the reader reaches the end without knowing what truly happened between the hero and the heroine, what I do is to convey the emotions that follow desire." Furthermore, in making her heroine desires and being desired, the novelist subverts patriarchal traditions which strip Arab woman of her sexuality, making her a mere object and her body a symbol of national frontiers.

Indeed, the poetic language and evocative style are deliberate literary choices employed by the Algerian novelist whose choice of the Arabic language as a medium of literary expression punctuates the modesty that typifies her writing with regard to the taboo of female sexuality. In other words, although Mosteghanemi embarks on writing of the female erotic body in her fictional text, which is not a common narrative device for a woman writer in the Arab Muslim world, she depicts the sexual scene with a certain discretion far from lewdness and perversity. In this connection, Ahmed Kharraz (2013) explains the difficulty for women of art from the Arab world to express themselves without taboo on the question of the body,

La pression culturelle est toujours présente et engendre un type d'écrit qui tend à dissimuler des détails même anodins. La discrétion et la pudeur sont deux vertus censées garantir les valeurs éthiques. Ces deux vertus sont recommandées aux femmes arabes et doivent caractériser leur comportement intime et social. Ainsi, toute déclaration directe est interprétée comme une résiliation du pacte social qui, comme

l'ordonne la religion, doit rester une règle majeure à respecter. (200)

As an arabophone writer, Mosteghanemi faces the difficulty of treating the taboo of female sexuality in a language considered sacred in the Arab Muslim context, that of the Quran. Her literary experience in Arabic therefore has to face not merely the male-dominated linguistic and literary conventions but also the socio-cultural ones.

Even though Mosteghanemi does not appeal to the daring explicit language and style in depicting her female character's sensual desires and eroticism, her writing still forms part of the transgressive literature produced during the Black Decade in Algeria. It is transgressive in the sense that it is written by a woman, and in a society clad in prohibitions, the writing of women is seen as a deliberate act of transgression, even if it is not designed in a subversive perspective. She writes in Arabic, in the violent chaotic reality, in the emergency of lifting the taboos surrounding the Algerian woman. The fundamentalist diktat stifled the freedom of the Algerian woman and deprived her of expressing herself, which further imposed a climate of threat and violence on her. Indeed, many women writers and feminist activists were murdered. Simultaneously, the threat of rape and abduction weighed heavily on all women without distinction. The Algerian writer is one of the women who led the struggle to emancipate Algerian women through writing.

In a nutshell, Mosteghanemi seems to fail escaping her conservative cultural background. While she daringly voices her heroine's sensual desires, she is still unable to face her Arab traditional community with a more daring feminist style. Although her feminist stance witnesses a notable progression in this second novel, it is still moderate when compared to other contemporary Arabophone women writers. Mosteghanemi is unable to draw explicit scenes relating to Algerian or Arab women's body and sexuality, which would provoke the feelings of an Arab Muslim conservative audience. In one of her interviews, she asserts that she cannot write in a similar manner as the Egyptian Nawal El Saadawi or the Lebanese Hanan Al Shaykh since she thinks that they convey wrong images about the Arab woman or the Arabian homeland

where the hero becomes a pimp or gay or the Arab woman turns out to be a prostitute. This is something I would never attempt in my writings because it feels like a forgery of reality under the canopy of literature. I know that Arab society is not absolutely pure but it is also not corrupt to the extent this writing suggests. We cannot change Arabian society nor send it any message by provocation. (Baaqeel, 2015: 152)

She proceeds: "I choose to serve my nation and Arabism as the first priority. It is my pleasure [. . .] that I am considered [. . .] an advocate for Algeria with its whims, modesty, defects, courage, history and massacres" (Baaqeel, 2015: 152). As an Algerian Arab novelist, Mosteghanemi does not attempt to transgress those boundaries dictated by her Arabness and Algeriannes.

5. Conclusion

Mosteghanemi's approach to sexual politics is quasi-conservative or moderate. In this respect, the Algerian writer, albeit concerned with speaking out the intimate sensuality of her female protagonist, she is still unable to depict explicit scenes describing female eroticism the way other arabophone women novelists audaciously enact in their fictional narratives. The above analysis has shown that the novelist makes use of special narrative strategies to write about Arab woman's body and sexuality. Mosteghanemi is conscious of the fact that voicing loud her feminist concerns might disrupt the conservative cultural and religious values of her society. She seems unsuccessful in fully escaping the limitations and conventions imposed by her community. The novelist deploys the language for her own advantage, using metaphors and poetic expressions, in a way that serves her feminist causes while maintaining the conservative dimension of her Arabic text and conservative context.

Conflict of Interest

I, the author of this article, I declare that I have no conflict of interest.

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