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**Oppression in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's
Memory in the Flesh:
A Postcolonial Psychoanalysis^(*)**

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological dimensions of oppression in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novel *Memory in the Flesh*, employing psychoanalytic literary theory as its primary analytical framework. Drawing on the theory of Sigmund Freud, the study investigates how the novel's characters; particularly Khaled and Hayat, manifest internalized trauma, repression, and identity fragmentation as a result of personal and national histories as a result of colonial domination. Through a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, the study offers a close reading of the text to uncover how psychological oppression operates beneath the surface of the characters' actions, memories, and language. The analysis reveals that the novel is not only a reflection of Algeria's postcolonial disillusionment, but also a narrative of personal psychological entrapment. By situating the characters' emotional struggles within broader psychoanalytic and postcolonial contexts, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature can encode the invisible burdens of historical and psychological conflict.

Keywords: Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, oppression, psychoanalysis, postcolonial literature.

الاضطهاد في رواية "ذاكرة الجسد" لأحلام مستغانمي: دراسة تحليلية نفسية من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار
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الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الأبعاد النفسية للقمع في رواية ذاكرة الجسد للكاتبة الجزائرية أحلام مستغانمي، معتمدةً على نظرية التحليل النفسي الأدبي بوصفها الإطار التحليلي الرئيس للدراسة. واستناداً إلى نظرية سيغموند فرويد، تبحث الدراسة في الكيفية التي تتجلى بها الصدمات الداخلية والكبت وتفتت الهوية لدى شخصيات الرواية، ولا سيما خالد وحياة، بوصفها نتاجاً للتاريخين الشخصي والوطني في ظل الهيمنة الاستعمارية. ومن خلال منهج وصفي تحليلي نوعي، تقدم الدراسة قراءة دقيقة للنص للكشف عن الكيفية التي يعمل بها القمع النفسي تحت سطح أفعال الشخصيات وذكراياتها ولغتها. وتكشف نتائج التحليل أن الرواية لا تمثل انعكاساً لخيبة الأمل التي سادت الجزائر في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار فحسب، بل تشكل أيضاً سرديةً للاحتجاز النفسي والمعاناة الداخلية على المستوى الشخصي. ومن خلال وضع الصراعات العاطفية للشخصيات في سياقات أوسع تجمع بين التحليل النفسي ودراسات ما بعد الاستعمار، تسهم الدراسة في تعميق فهم الكيفية التي يستطيع بها الأدب تجسيد الأعباء الخفية للصراعات التاريخية والنفسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أحلام مستغانمي، ذاكرة الجسد، القمع، التحليل النفسي، أدب ما بعد الاستعمار.

Introduction:

Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novel *Memory in the Flesh* (1993) stands as one of the most emblematic works in modern Arabic literature, a revolutionary novel, not merely for its artistic eloquence but for its profound engagement with postcolonial identity and psychological fragmentation. Published in Beirut and widely celebrated across the Arab world, the novel achieved both popular and critical acclaim, marking a defining moment in the emergence of women's voices within Arabic narrative traditions. Mosteghanemi's choice to write in Arabic itself represents an act of linguistic and cultural decolonization, reclaiming national and personal identity after years of French colonial dominance.

The novel intertwines the personal and the political through the reflective voice of Khaled Ben Toubal, a war veteran and artist whose emotional and physical wounds mirror Algeria's collective trauma after independence. His unfulfilled love for Hayat, the daughter of a fallen revolutionary, symbolizes the betrayal of revolutionary ideals and the disillusionment that followed liberation. Khaled's physical mutilation further embodies the fractured postcolonial self, reflecting both bodily and psychological scars left by colonial and internalized oppression. Memory, loss, and desire function as central motifs that transform individual suffering into a broader commentary on national consciousness.

Although *Memory in the Flesh* has been widely studied from political and historical perspectives, its psychological dimensions remain relatively underexplored. The novel provides fertile ground for psychoanalytic interpretation, revealing how colonial domination continues to shape the inner lives of individuals through repression, trauma, and lingering loss. By adopting both postcolonial and psychoanalytic frameworks, this study highlights how oppression operates not only as an external force but also as an internal psychological condition. Ultimately, the novel emerges as both a literary act of resistance and a powerful psychological allegory of Algeria's struggle to reconcile its colonial past with a fragmented postcolonial identity.

Statement of the Problem:

Memory in the Flesh by Ahlam Mosteghanemi has garnered critical acclaim for its poetic language and its depiction of postcolonial Algeria. Therefore, there remains a significant gap in scholarly engagement with the novel from a psychoanalytic perspective; particularly concerning the theme of oppression. Existing studies have predominantly focused on its political symbolism, national identity, and gender discourse, often overlooking the psychological dimensions that shape the characters' inner lives. The problem lies in the insufficient critical attention paid to the unconscious motivations, desires, and fears that cause Khalid's and Hayat's behaviour; areas that psychoanalysis is uniquely equipped to illuminate. Therefore, the central problem, this study addresses, could be tackled through how psychological oppression manifests in the characters' behaviour of the novel.

Significance of the Study:

This study is significant because it advances psychoanalytic literary criticism in the postcolonial Arab context by offering a focused psychoanalytic reading of *Memory in the Flesh*. It is significant since it reveals how oppression, trauma, repression, and fragmented identity shape the characters' lives, particularly Khaled, in response to colonial violence and national disillusionment. The study also highlights the gendered nature of psychological oppression through Hayat's experience within a patriarchal, post-revolutionary society, showing how psycho-political structures constrain female desire and agency. By situating the novel within postcolonial psychoanalysis, the study demonstrates how literature critiques the psychological legacy of colonialism and affirms the novel's lasting relevance in linking the personal with the political.

Objectives of the Study:

This study aims at:

- 1- Investigating the oppressed and the oppressor in *Memory in the Flesh*.
- 2- Examining how psychological oppression is represented in the characters of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh* through a psychoanalytic theory.

- 3- Exploring the influence of trauma, repression, and unconscious desire on character development and interpersonal relationships in *Memory in the Flesh*.
- 4- Analysing how *Memory in the Flesh* reflects the psychological aftermath of colonialism and socio-political disillusionment in post-independence Algeria.

Methodology of the Study:

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach grounded in psychoanalytic literary theory to examine the psychological dimensions of oppression in *Memory in the Flesh* by Ahlam Mosteghanemi. Drawing mainly on Freudian concepts such as repression, the unconscious, trauma, and desire. It analyses the inner conflicts of the main characters, Khaled and Hayat, using the English translation by Baria Ahmar Sreih as the primary source text. The study explores how identity is shaped by trauma, colonial history, and socio-political disillusionment without generalizing about Algerian society.

Theoretical Framework of the Study:

This study is based on Freudian psychoanalytic literary theory to examine unconscious motivations, repression, and internal conflict in *Memory in the Flesh*. Psychoanalysis provides an effective framework for analysing psychological oppression and the internalization of personal and colonial trauma. Freud's concepts of repression, neurosis, and the return of the repressed are applied to Khaled Ben Toubal, whose recurring memories of war, loss, and unfulfilled love reveal unresolved trauma and fragmented identity. Hayat's character similarly illustrates repression shaped by socio-political and gender constraints. By integrating psychoanalytic and postcolonial perspectives, the study shows how the novel represents oppression as both a psychological and historical legacy rooted in colonial experience.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study:

This study is limited to a psychoanalytic interpretation of *Memory in the Flesh* by Ahlam Mosteghanemi, focusing on the psychological dimensions of oppression experienced by the main characters, especially Khaled and Hayat. It is based on a close analysis of the English translation by Baria Ahmar Sreih. The study concentrates on representations of internalized

oppression, unconscious conflict, trauma, and memory, seeking to show how the novel explores the psychological impact of colonial and personal trauma on individual identity.

Previous Studies:

- 1- **Freud (1940)**, in his original work, *Freudian Psychoanalytical Theory*: An outline of psycho-analysis, tackles the Psychoanalysis as a theory that deals with the interactions between the id, ego, and superego, according to Freudian Psychoanalysis, these sense structures have an impact on human behaviour. In this regard, Freud believes that mental illnesses are caused by the unconscious mind which remains one of the most influential foundations of psychoanalytic theory, shaping critical approaches to understanding the unconscious dimensions of human experience. In postcolonial contexts, the legacy of colonial subjugation often persists as a psychic wound, manifesting through feelings of inferiority, dislocation, and identity crisis. When applied to literature, Freudian psychoanalysis enables a deeper exploration of how colonial trauma becomes embedded within the unconscious of individuals and communities, transforming external power structures into internal psychological conflict. Thus, Freud's theory not only addresses individual neurosis but also provides insight into the collective emotional disarray produced by socio-political upheaval. Within Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, Freud's framework becomes a useful interpretive tool for uncovering the psychological dimensions of postcolonial oppression. Khaled's relationship with Hayat reflects the return of the repressed. The novel's narrative of longing, loss, and disillusionment mirrors the Freudian process of internal conflict between the desire for liberation (the id) and the constraints imposed by socio-political morality (the superego), mediated through a fragmented ego struggling for coherence.
- 2- **Schmidt (2013)** presents a feminist analysis of Joanna Russ's *We Who Are About to* (1977), arguing that the unnamed female narrator embodies women's collective resistance to patriarchal domination. Using feminist theory, particularly the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Judith Butler, the study explores how the narrator's refusal to submit to male authority-especially in relation to her body and reproductive

autonomy-symbolizes defiance against oppressive gender norms. The novel's themes of isolation and violence are read as highlighting the psychological and existential costs of resisting male control. In addition to textual analysis, Schmidt incorporates a pedagogical perspective, suggesting that teaching feminist science fiction can enhance gender awareness and critical thinking. The study concludes that the novel functions both as a powerful feminist critique and as a valuable educational resource for promoting gender equality.

- 3- **Jamil, A. (2014)** investigated the characters of the novel, using Freudian Psychoanalysis theory of neurosis. According to the findings, societal constraints are impeding people's ability to express their actual selves. The societal forces are responsible for a wide range of psychological problems. In many respects, society dictates what people are permitted to do and what they are not allowed to do. Throughout their life, people are bothered by this restraint, they are controlled and are caught up in an endless loop of expectations. Individuals perceive themselves as slaves of societal powers as a result of these expectations. They are stuck in their inner world and, like a prisoner they attempt to flee but are unable to do so. The character's inner world has been repressed as a result of this. And due to these societal impositions and refusals to allow people to live according to their own will, making them neurotic and psychologically unwell to suffer as being oppressed. Jamil stated in the abstract of her study: "In contemporary world, we often confront the incidents when people fall sick mentally and suffer from behavioural and personality disorders. The present research paper seeks to point out the reasons behind neurotic disorder with special reference to social aspect of individuals' life applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory of neurosis.
- 4- **Fathi & Abdul Wahhab (2022)** examined a compelling exploration of female identity and national consciousness through the lens of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh* (1993). This literary work as per the study becomes not merely a narrative of love and loss but a profound site for the reconstruction of identity, aligning closely with the thematic framework of resistance. At its core, the study reveals how Mosteghanemi intertwines personal and national memory, where the female voice transcends its romantic confinement to emerge as a vehicle

of historical remembrance and resistance. The narrator's emotional entanglement with Khalid parallels the Algerian struggle for postcolonial self-definition. Thus, love operates as a metaphor for the fractured relationship between the colonized self and the homeland, and the disillusionment that follows mirrors the betrayal of revolutionary ideals in independent Algeria. Furthermore, the study underscores the novel's role in giving voice to the progeny of martyrs, a generation long excluded from the literary canon. This narrative intervention contributes to a collective reconstruction of identity, bridging gendered and national struggles. The woman writer here does not merely depict memory; she embodies it, transforming personal suffering into cultural testimony.

- 5- **Ahmad, S., et al (2024)** explored the impact of gender oppression on the psyche of female characters in the context of the novel "The Pakistani Bride". Hence, the main objective of their study is to investigate what sort of gender roles are assigned to the female characters in that novel what types of suffering they experience in terms of the fulfilment of those assigned roles which ultimately push them into an impulsive and neurotic state of mind. Their study was based on Freud psychoanalytic model that has been applied as the theoretical framework of the study along with (Beauvoir, 1949) feministic approach. However, a particular sample of paragraphs from the particular novel has been drawn by applying the purposive sampling technique. The findings of this study revealed that in the novel "The Pakistani Bride", the female characters are being oppressed by patriarchal constraints and have no right to speak. They are being perceived as subordinates, others, and minor species and have been pushed to the periphery of society by male supremacy in nearly every aspect of human existence. The findings asserted that the inability of women to speak for themselves is a result of patriarchal oppression and gendered roles.

Analysis:

Colonial Oppression from the point of view of Khaled Ben Toubal:

In *Memory in the Flesh*, Ahlam Mosteghanemi portrays the impact of French colonialism on Algerian identity through a deeply personal narrative that reflects a collective national pain. Colonial oppression in the novel is not shown only as a political force but as an inner wound that shapes

memory, language, and the sense of self. Watts & Griffith, (1999) defined oppression as:

It begins with the concept of asymmetry-the unequal distribution of coveted resources among politically salient populations. As critical consciousness develops, a person gains an understanding of the historical, racial, social, political, and cultural concomitants of asymmetry. Oppression is both a state and a process (Watts, 1999).

Through the protagonist of the novel, Khaled's physical and emotional experience, the author reveals the struggles of a postcolonial generation torn between a painful past and a confused present. Mosteghanemi turns writing itself into an act of resistance, using poetic language to reclaim dignity and reconstruct the memory of a nation scarred by occupation:

I went back to Constantine Secondary School. I had missed one year, but found the same syllabus, the same philosophy books, and the same French literature waiting for me. Some of the students were still absent, either prisoners or martyrs. Most of these were students in the senior grades who were expected to graduate among the first batch of real Algerian-French intellectuals and officials (MitF, 17).

This text refers to the narrator's return to Constantine Secondary School as a symbolic confrontation with the enduring structures of colonial domination. The unchanged syllabus, the repetition of French philosophy and literature, and the absence of students who became "prisoners or martyrs" collectively reveal how colonialism infiltrated not only Algeria's political institutions but also its intellectual and cultural systems. The "same syllabus" stands as a metaphor for the persistence of colonial ideology even after the physical end of occupation. It is a reminder that decolonization is not merely a political act but an epistemological struggle over knowledge and identity. The narrator adds:

One day over thirty years ago, I followed these roads and chose these mountains to be my home and my private school where I learned the only subject that was not allowed to be taught. I knew then that among its graduates there my destiny would be determined in the slender gap between freedom and death (MitF, 13).

From a postcolonial perspective of Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism, this study unearths how the colonial power shapes the minds of the

colonized by imposing its own intellectual canon. French education, presented here by the philosophy books and the French literature, served as a mechanism of cultural hegemony; a means of producing “Algerian-French intellectuals” who would internalize colonial values while appearing modern and civilized.

Mosteghanemi exposes the irony of this process. Those who were expected to become symbols of progress under the colonial system have either been killed or imprisoned in the struggle for liberation; as in chapter one, too, while facing death. Khaled recalls:

Death was then walking at our side, sleeping, then hastily eating bread with us. Just like patience, faith, and longing, an ambiguous joy never deserted us. Death was walking and breathing at our side. Days came back harsh as always, different from the earlier days only in the tally of martyrs, mostly those who nobody ever expected to die, ... nobody figured would be so near and so painful. That was the logic of death that I had not, till then, fully comprehended (MitF, 13-14).

By recalling this experience, Khaled, the narrator articulates a postcolonial consciousness that recognizes the subtle violence of cultural domination and the necessity of reclaiming education as a site of liberation or facing death in reality. He adds:

They were not mass-produced martyrs. Each one was a martyr in his own right. One was killed in the first battle as if he came specially to die. Another fell only one day before setting out on a secret visit to his parents, after he had spent weeks studying and preparing the exact details of the visit. A third got married and returned to die a married man. Yet another was dreaming to come back one day to find a bride for himself, but never did. In wars, the sad ones are not always those who die. The most wretched are those who are left behind, orphans, widows, and those with broken dreams (MitF, 14).

Ultimately, Mosteghanemi transforms this personal memory into a broader commentary on Algeria's postcolonial condition while people are facing real death. The persistence of the colonial syllabus becomes a powerful symbol of how liberation must extend beyond political independence to include the decolonization of thought, language, and culture. The passage therefore invites readers to reflect on how education can either perpetuate

oppression or become a tool for reclaiming identity, as a theme in both works of Mosteghanemi's novel and Said's postcolonial critique; and as in the novel there is that kind of "... The revolution was entering its second year and I was in my third month as an orphan. I cannot remember now exactly when the country took over the character of motherhood and gave me an unexpected and strange affection and a compulsive sense of belonging" (MitF, 14).

Then, it becomes a real oppression that people of Algeria are facing along with death, as depicted in chapter one as usual:

Al-Kudya prison was, at the time, like all prisons in eastern Algeria, suffering all of a sudden from an excess of manhood. This was immediately after the demonstrations of May 8, 1945, when the cities of Constantine and Setif and their suburbs offered the first down payment for the revolution. Some thousands of martyrs fell in one demonstration, and tens of thousands of prisoners crammed the cells. This led the French to make one of their dumbest mistakes, mixing together political prisoners with criminals in the same cell and for months at a time.

Sometimes cells had more than twenty men in them (MitF, 16-17).

Mosteghanemi, here, powerfully depicts how French colonial repression transformed Algerian prisons into suffering and resistance. By portraying the overcrowded cells as a "sudden excess of manhood," she exposes the brutality of colonial violence while celebrating the collective awakening of a nation whose courage and sacrifice laid the foundation for revolution as it was found obviously, hence:

They made the revolution contagious, passing the message on to the criminals who discovered political consciousness and the chance to redeem their honour by joining the revolution, for the sake of which many were afterward killed in battles. Some of them are still alive, now living blameless lives as important people, the way historical leaders of liberation live, after history has taken care to rewrite the records to establish their state of innocence (MitF, 17).

The former and the following passages reveal the deep facts on colonial oppression, showing how Algerians who embraced French culture and language, once labelled as traitors, and became among the first to awaken

politically, recognizing that France's promise of civilization masked exploitation and the perpetuation of their own enslavement:

That was the privilege of those who had been marked by some as traitors, simply because they chose French culture and French secondary schools in a city where nobody could ignore the power of the Arabic language or the impact it had in the hearts and memories of the people. Is it strange then, that among those who were imprisoned and tortured after those demonstrations there were many who, because of their exposure to western culture, enjoyed an early political awareness and were full of patriotic dreams? They had paid the price of thousands of lives in battles that did not concern them, only to return to their own slavery (MitF, 17-18).

That kind of absence of Algerian fighters underscores the high cost of resistance and the refusal to become agents of colonial continuity. The tone of quiet disillusionment in this excerpt also highlights the narrator's awakening to the illusion of intellectual advancement under colonial excessive power. The French rule, unchanged and unchallenged, represents a system that seeks to preserve the colonizer's worldview while silencing indigenous perspectives. This critique echoes Said's argument that colonial discourse constructs the colonized subject as both dependent and derivative; it is always measured by the intellectual standards of the West, as Said believes. And because of that there are always innocent oppressed victims, just like those of Algerians as in *Memory in the Flesh*: "The French authorities who tortured him and locked him up for three years knew that very well, but they did not know that Si Tahir would extract his revenge years later, becoming the most wanted man after each operation undertaken by the mujahidin in eastern Algeria (MitF, 18).

Another psychoanalytic consequence of oppression is evident in the following passage:

You were a copy of Si Tahir, but more attractive. You were female, but could you be the baby I last saw in Tunis in 1962 immediately after independence? I called to mind the details of your return to Algeria after Si Sharif contacted me from Constantine... years before to provide a refuge for his little family. Then France had exiled him from Algeria in the 1950s,

after imprisoning him for a number of months on the charge of political insurrection (MitF, 32).

Investigating the question of identity-conflict Jamal, Anila goes on: "Understanding of psychoanalysis, with its double identity of being a theory as well as a therapy to cure mental diseases is the fundamental tool to equip with in order to explore the metaphorical world" (Jamal, 2014, p.81).

She adds: "... authorities and the world outside are the real threatening forces for any individual as these are the powers meant to destroy the individuality and personal vision of the individuals" (Ibid, 2014, p.81).

Comparing Jamal's analysis of the excessive power against the innocent people who belong to their own country, this study finds out that there is that same miserable life Algerians were facing by the authority of the French colonizer in *Memory in the Flesh*. Nuha Baaqeel, on the other hand, finds out that a kind of pain the protagonists are facing; Khaled and Ahlam or Hayat.

Hayat's Oppression and the Fragmented Female Voice:

Oppression transcends gender boundaries. Algerian women experienced significant oppression under French colonial oppression and patriarchal constraints. As Khalid is the icon of the male oppressed, Hayat is also the epitome of the female oppressed and the fragmented female voice. Guémar (2023) highlighted the multiple forms of violence endured by Algerian women during the *Black Decade*, showing how many were forced into exile as a result of conflict and insecurity. Hayat in *Memory in the Flesh* is a typical example of these women who often encountered difficulties in obtaining protection suited to their gender in foreign contexts, while simultaneously striving to sustain social ties and cultural belonging to Algeria through transnational networks. Overall, Guémar (2023) employed innovative research approaches to understand Algerian women's experiences of conflict, migration, and life in diaspora. Linking this study to Guémar (2023), there are conceptual boundaries adopted by Hayat herself as a clear example of patriarchal oppression by the French: "No, you shouted. Please do not mention the name of that city to me. I've just got back from there. I can't stand the place: it's designed for suicide or insanity" (MitF, 131).

The notion of patriarchal oppression in Hayat's life is conceived as a multifaceted experience that encompasses social, psychological, and linguistic dimensions. While oppression can manifest through external constraints imposed by patriarchal or colonial systems all together, it simultaneously produces internalized forms of suffering that border the life of Hayat. Oppression on Hayat refers to the systemic subjugation that limits agency and voice; trauma reflects the psychological imprint of such subjugation; and alienation emerges as a consequence, representing the individual's estrangement from self, language, and community. In Mosteghanemi's narrative world, the intersection between gender, language, and identity constitutes the core of this experience. Hayat's identity unfolds through the dual burden of patriarchal and postcolonial realities, where language becomes both her medium of expression and her site of confinement. Through a feminist psychoanalytic lens, Hayat's struggle reveals the psychological mechanisms of repression, silence, and displacement; mechanisms that articulate the invisible violence embedded within gendered and colonial discourses. Her oscillation between speech and silence symbolizes the fragmented consciousness of the postcolonial woman, torn between inherited cultural scripts and the desire for self-definition. Hayat's patriarchal oppression as was expressed by Khalid on the inner conflict of Hayat in chapter five:

Constantine! Two more hours for the heart to go back a lifetime. A flight attendant opens the door, unaware of the heart she has just forced open. Who can stop the hemorrhage of memory now? Who will be able to close the window to nostalgia now? Who can face the wind that will raise the veil from the city's face and look her in the eye without shedding a tear? (MitF, 185).

Hayat's silence functions not as mere absence of speech but as a profound mode of resistance and survival. Her fragmented voice, interrupted narratives, and hesitant self-articulation reflect the internalization of patriarchal control and the deep scars of colonization. The suppression of her agency mirrors the psychological paralysis experienced by individuals who internalize domination as a natural condition. Through the tension between speaking and being silenced, Mosteghanemi dramatizes the psychological cost of living within structures that deny women the right to

self-representation as by her oppressor husband. Hayat's constrained subjectivity therefore becomes a metaphor for the collective female psyche within postcolonial Algeria. One that speaks through absence, memory, and emotional displacement thereby intensifying her suffering.

The contrast between Khaled's physical wound; the loss of his arm, and Hayat's emotional injuries offers a compelling parallel of patriarchal oppression. Khaled's mutilation signifies the tangible consequence of colonial violence, while Hayat's silenced voice represents the intangible yet equally destructive impact of psychological subjugation. His wound is visible, hers is internal; yet both signify the fragmentation of self and identity in a world marked by patriarchy and loss. Together, they embody the dual narrative of a nation and its people; one wounded in body, the other in soul.

Through this symbolic symmetry, Mosteghanemi transforms personal pain into collective testimony, revealing how the remnants of colonialism and patriarchy continue to shape the Algerian subject's sense of self and belonging.

Oppressed People Fighting Back the Oppressor: The Painful Reaction:

At the beginning of *Memory in the Flesh*, in chapter one, the refusal of such colony of France started:

October (25, 1988). Banner headlines and a lake of black ink, much blood and little sensitivity. Some newspapers sell you the same pictures on their front page every day, adding just a new twist. Some papers sell you the same lies every day in a less intelligent way. Others sell you a ticket to escape from your own world-nothing more than that (MitF, 6).

The above text presents a postcolonial-psychoanalytic reading of *Memory in the Flesh*, where Ahlam Mosteghanemi exposes the lingering effects of colonialism on Algerian consciousness after independence. This text portrays the media as a "lake of black ink," symbolizing the distortion of truth and the repetition of colonial violence. The narrative voice reflects collective disillusionment, where past trauma reemerges as compulsive repetition and inner alienation. The press becomes a new form of repression, numbing rather than awakening public awareness. Thus, ink, once an icon of freedom and expression, turns into a mark of corruption and the unhealed wounds of colonization. Through her protagonist, Khaled,

Ahlam Mosteghanemi writes from the tensioned space between colonization and its psychological aftermath. The text emerges from Algeria's post-independence struggle to reclaim identity, voice, and memory after French domination. The repeated imagery of "same pictures" and "same lies" signals the persistence of deception, now institutionalized through the press. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, the above-text articulates the continuity of refusal to the lies of colonial domination, as in chapter three:

On Independence Day, my grandmother cried as she had never cried before. I asked her, Granny, why do you cry when Algeria is independent? She said, I always waited for Independence Day so Tahir could come back to me. Today, I realize I'm no longer waiting for anything. The day Father died; Granny did not go about trilling cries of joy as we read in the fictions about the revolution I read later on (MitF, 68).

Freedom has not restored authenticity; it has mutated into mimicry. The ink that once promised narrative agency now stains the collective consciousness. Mosteghanemi's language thus performs an act of resistance.

To name the contamination is to reclaim a fragment of psychological and cultural integrity:

Only then did I feel that it was the right time to tell you the story of my last day at the front, the day Si Tahir pronounced your name before me for the first time. He was bidding me farewell when he charged me with the task of registering you on his behalf if I managed to get to Tunis alive. As I crossed the frontier between Algeria and Tunisia with a feverish body and a bleeding arm, I kept repeating your name to myself. I was having hallucinations. Your name became, amidst all my struggles and wounds, the title of the last mission Si Tahir assigned to me. I wanted to fulfil his last request successfully and give you a legal and official name that had nothing to do with legends and saints (MitF, 71).

Elhajibrahim (2009) depicts the same picture of resistance against the colonizer, saying that:

The Algerian war of independence demonstrates a heroic resistance and struggle against colonization. It is considered to be one of the most brutal colonial wars. However, the colonial system and the war of independence left a wound on the face of Algerian society that has not healed yet.

Many intellectuals and artists, such as Ahlam Mosteghanemi believe that it is their responsibility to heal their societies of their wounds, establishing healthy societies, proud of their past and looking forward to a better future (Elhajibrahim, 2009).

To comment on such a critical passage in Mosteghanemi's novel, it is found that the Algerian war of independence stands as a powerful testament to both resilience and enduring oppression. Its deep scars continue to shape the nation's identity, demanding cultural and intellectual efforts toward healing and renewal. Through such endeavours, Algerian fighters seek reconciliation with their past while nurturing a vision of collective progress and dignity to reach their own freedom, especially when the author writes in Arabic as a symbol of her identity and a powerful refusal to the colonizer as her father does:

The complexity of her novel reflects the complexity of the Algerian experience during and after colonization. Through her work Mosteghanemi continues what her father started in the 1940s, namely the process of decolonization. According to Mosteghanemi, the liberation of the land was the beginning of decolonization, not the end of it. By writing in Arabic, Mosteghanemi accomplishes another victory over the system of colonization. Her use of the Arabic language helps erase the barbarian marks of colonialism (Elhajibrahim, 2009).

Accordingly, this provides a compelling entry point into a deeper critical exploration of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, particularly in how it articulates the continuity between national liberation and cultural decolonization. This analysis unfolds across several interrelated dimensions; historical, linguistic, thematic, and symbolic, to show how Mosteghanemi's literary project redefines resistance through narrative, memory, and language. In historical and political context, the statement situates *Memory in the Flesh* within Algeria's long struggle against colonialism and its aftermath. Mosteghanemi's father's involvement in anti-colonial activism in the 1940s embodies the physical and political struggle for independence, while her own literary endeavour continues this project through cultural means. The novel, therefore, functions as an instrument for reimagining Algerian identity beyond the colonial gaze. It confronts the lingering residues of French domination that persist in social structures, education,

and self-perception. Secondly, decolonization through language emerges as a central motif in Mosteghanemi's novel. Writing in Arabic represents an act of reclaiming voice and authority, an assertion of identity against the linguistic imperialism of French colonial rule. The colonial system imposed French not merely as a means of communication but as a symbol of superiority, marginalizing Arabic and the cultural heritage it carries. By choosing Arabic, Mosteghanemi reclaims the power to narrate Algeria's story, transforming linguistic choice into an ideological stance. Her decision aligns with Frantz Fanon's notion that decolonization involves the recovery of native language as a means to restore dignity and cultural continuity. The "erasure of the barbarian marks of colonialism" thus refers not to forgetting the past, but to cleansing it of imposed inferiority and distortion." Thirdly, the novel works as a site of memory and healing. *Memory in the Flesh* intertwines personal and collective memory, turning the protagonist's love story into a metaphor for Algeria's postcolonial identity crisis. The complexity mentioned in the passage reflects how emotional suffering parallels historical wounds. Through intricate narrative layers, there is a shifting between past and present, love and loss, art and politics. Mosteghanemi mirrors the fragmentation of Algerian consciousness. The novel's painter protagonist embodies the struggle to reconstruct meaning from the ruins of war and colonization, suggesting that remembrance itself becomes an act of resistance. As one of the first Algerian women to publish an Arabic novel of such prominence, she redefines authorship in a male-dominated literary tradition. Her continuation of her father's mission acquires a dual meaning as far as she inherits the national struggle while transforming it through a feminine voice. The private sphere of love, desire, and memory becomes politicized, revealing how colonial and patriarchal powers intersect in silencing both nations and women. Thus, the act of writing in Arabic is not only anti-colonial but also feminist, reclaiming language as a medium through which women can articulate postcolonial subjectivity. Thus, literature as the second revolution ultimately plays a huge role in Mosteghanemi's artistic mission. The decolonization of the mind and the reassertion of linguistic sovereignty are as vital as the liberation of territory. Through her lyrical prose, Mosteghanemi transforms literature into a continuation of revolutionary struggle. That is to say the

aesthetic revolution that challenges historical amnesia and reclaims the narrative of Algeria from colonial and patriarchal systems alike. The novel hence becomes a living archive of resistance, memory, and renewal, proving that writing can indeed accomplish “another victory over the system of colonization”.

The Psychological Aftermath of Colonialism: Fragmented Identity and Inner Conflict:

The colonial oppression left psychological scars focusing on the fragmented sense of self that emerges in postcolonial societies. It establishes how the political patriarchy lingers beyond political independence. This point of view links these psychological scars to Frantz Fanon’s concept of “double consciousness” and the psychoanalytic tension between the colonized self and the internalized image of the oppressor. In *Memory in the Flesh*, Mosteghanemi’s characters embody this fragmentation between the yearning for authenticity and the haunting presence of colonial influence:

In the midst of my tears, my happiness, my pain, and all sorts of conflicting emotions, on behalf of Si Tahir and other comrades who, since they joined the front, had not seen their children. Also, on behalf of those who died while dreaming of a simple moment such as this, when they would hold not rifles, but children who had been born and raised where their eyes would never see them (MitF, 74).

This asserts that colonial oppression continues to shape the subconscious of the formerly colonized. Through Mosteghanemi’s narrative, the reader perceives that identity reconstruction remains an ongoing struggle marked by both resistance and vulnerability.

Moreover, another instance of marginalization was described, precisely in chapter five, as for a fragmented identity and inner conflict:

With all my wounds I return home. No excess personal luggage, only the burden of a memory I bore alone, of no interest to anyone else. No personal baggage. No extra weight, no extra expense. The ticket was the heaviest thing to carry. Walking on my last wound, I hastened back to Algeria. An unexpected return after a decade of exile. I had expected another kind of reunion. I could have reserved a first-class seat. It happens that those with such tickets are not allowed to sit at the back... those front seats are already reserved by those who have taken the

nation's front seats. So, I went home the way I left, on a seat at the rear, a seat of sorrow (MitF, 184).

The disillusionment of the returning exile, with wounds that have not been transformed into recognized testimonies, means the memory of the wounded remains an unwanted burden in a homeland that replaces the struggle of exiles with the privileges of the elite. The symbolic metaphor of seats evokes the class-based privilege that divides citizens, thereby reducing individual pain to a worthless ticket on the nation's airplane. Thus, the exile returns disillusioned, moving from the exile of the body to an internal exile within the homeland itself. In this regard, Alamri (2024), presented similar ideas on Algerian trauma and its postcolonial sufferings:

Given the psychological, cultural, and historical impact of the Algerian civil war and colonialism, critics and writers often delve into the controversial topic of Algerian trauma. Postcolonial scholars were interested in discussing Ahlam Mosteghanemi's works and contribution as a North African writer to examine the postcolonial dominance over Algerian people during and after the Civil War. Many scholars and reviewers have challenged official narratives by providing rich empirical data gathered through extensive fieldwork with the male and female survivors, contributing significantly to the study of Algerian postcolonial history (Alamri, 2024).

Alamri (2024) concluded that art and love act as liberating forces capable of mending the fractured psyche of the colonized subject. Through narration, the silenced voice of history is reawakened, and through love, the individual reclaims their capacity to feel, create, and resist. That highlights Mosteghanemi's aesthetic strategy transforming personal pain for both male and female into a collective affirmation of identity and endurance.

Reconstructing Identity through Memory and Artistic Resistance:

In *Memory in the Flesh*, the reconstruction of identity emerges as a psychological and cultural process that unfolds within the depths of trauma, exile, and creative memory, where the personal and the collective intertwine to form a single continuum of wounded consciousness. The novel stages a postcolonial psychoanalytic journey in which Khaled and Hayat, though separated by generation and gender, embody the divided self of a nation struggling to reconcile the residues of colonization with the quest for

authentic selfhood. Khalid describes Bilal Husain in chapter five as an example of that, saying:

He left prison and was sent into exile under close surveillance. Bilal Husain lived on as a fighter in unknown battles and on the run after independence. He died quite recently at the age of eighty-one on May 27, 1988. He died in hospital, blind, destitute, and childless. A few months before he died, he told his only friend that when they tortured him, they insisted on mutilating him, so he could never have children. At his funeral some people half attached to the government walked behind his coffin to his last resting place. They never asked what he lived on or why he had no family. After the funeral they went back to their government cars without feeling any inward pain (MitF, 210).

Through the lens of postcolonial psychoanalysis, the narrative reveals that colonialism does not end with the withdrawal of military presence but persists within the psychic structures of those who inherited its wounds; many others, not only Husain, were deprived of family life. Khaled's body - maimed and incomplete - becomes the visible trace of historical violence, while Hayat's fragmented voice represents the invisible injuries inscribed upon the feminine psyche under both patriarchal and colonial domination.

The suffering they inherit is not solely political; it is embedded in the unconscious, repeating itself through dreams, silences, and desires that refuse to be contained by language. Khaled's act of painting and writing functions as a form of sublimation is another artistic transference through which he attempts to master the pain of loss and exile by transforming it into aesthetic order. Khalid admits: "I did not commit adultery. Fifty years of loneliness, half of which I called the broken years, spent with one arm, a mutilated body with mutilated dreams" (MitF, 200).

His creativity, however, remains haunted by the repressed memory of violence that resists full articulation:

By then, we had already been carrying a shared memory, shared roads and alleys, shared joys and griefs too. Both of us were victims of the war. Destiny had placed us in its pitiless quern, and we emerged, each carrying a different wound. My wound was obvious and yours was hidden deep (MitF, 64-65).

In psychoanalytic terms as in chapter three, exactly, art becomes his substitute for the unattainable object of desire: the lost Algeria, the lost arm, and the lost ideal of wholeness. Hayat, in contrast, manifests the return of the repressed through her divided identity. Her struggle to speak, to write, and to love reveals the internalization of colonial and patriarchal voices that police her identity. She oscillates between self-expression and self-erasure, caught in the tension between inherited silence and the impulse to narrate her own story; sometimes by her and most of the time by Khalid. The psychoanalytic dimension of her character reflects the feminine burden of postcolonial theme in order to articulate pain within a language historically used to oppress and define her. Through her, the novel exposes how colonial discourse has been internalized as a superegoic force that reproduces subjugation even after liberation. Yet within this struggle lies the possibility of transformation. When Khaled addresses his memories through art as described above, he engages in a form of working-through, revisiting the past not to relive it but to reintegrate it into a coherent self-narrative. His art thus becomes an act of resistance against the colonial symbolic order, rewriting Algeria's story through the personal psyche. Likewise, Hayat's hesitant emergence as a writer symbolizes the feminine reclaiming of voice, where creativity operates as a therapeutic dialogue between ordeal and renewal. In psychoanalytic terms, both characters inhabit the "third space" of identity described by postcolonial thought as a liminal zone where the conscious and unconscious, the colonizer and colonized, masculine and feminine intersect. Within this hybrid psychological space, the fragmented self seeks integration not through denial of the past but through its imaginative transformation. The unconscious gradually releases its energy through aesthetic creation, converting repression into representation.

Mosteghanemi constructs this process through her lyrical prose, which mirrors the flow of psychic association throughout the rhythm of repression and release that defines postcolonial subjectivity, respectively. Each memory recalled by Khaled or Hayat functions like a dream fragment, simultaneously revealing and concealing the truth of their feelings as in Khalid's depiction in chapter two, in a non-linear form:

What made you stop in front of it? It was not the most beautiful painting in the exhibition. It was simply my first painting, my first

exercise in painting, but I had insisted that it be displayed in this most important exhibition of mine because, despite its simplicity, I considered it to be my little miracle. I had painted it twenty-five years earlier, less than a month after my left arm was amputated. It was not an attempt at creativity, nor was it an attempt to enter history. It was only an attempt to escape from a life of desperation (MitF, 34).

The narrative's non-linear temporality replicates the psychoanalytic structure of memory itself, where the past is never dead but continually returns in symbolic form, demanding recognition. Through this dynamic, *Memory in the Flesh* becomes not only a story of Algeria but a psychoanalytic document of collective healing, dramatizing the slow emergence of self-awareness from the ruins of defeat. Khaled's yearning to paint Hayat, his muse and his mirror, enacts the projection of an idealized national image; a desire to restore unity through artistic re-creation. Furthermore, his art also exposes the impossibility of complete healing, for the original wound - both personal and historical - remains inscribed in the psyche. Hayat's own fragmented existence, her rebellion against both colonial residues and patriarchal control, articulates the double bind of the postcolonial woman who must reconstruct identity from within overlapping systems of domination. Her silence becomes a mode of resistance, a refusal to reproduce the discourses that once defined her. In psychoanalytic terms, she embodies the return of Algeria's repressed feminine. Therefore, the unconscious energy of that, once voiced, disrupts the patriarchal order and initiates a new symbolic structure grounded in empathy and creative freedom. Thus, memory, for both Khaled and Hayat, becomes a space of transference where individual pain is sublimated into collective meaning. The novel suggests that the process of remembering must pass through the aesthetic realm to achieve catharsis; art serves as the mediator between trauma and recovery, between the unspeakable past and the possibility of a new identity. From the very beginning of the novel as in chapter one, Khalid obviously brings such picture:

Then came this furious battle fought on the outskirts of Batna that would turn my life upside down. We had lost six mujahidin in that battle, and I was one of the wounded after two bullets penetrated my left arm. Suddenly my life changed when I found myself among the wounded who

had to be transferred in a critical state to the Tunisian border for treatment. But the only solution for me was to have my left arm amputated (MitF, 19).

In this sense, the act of writing *Memory in the Flesh* constitutes an ethical and therapeutic gesture. It invites Algeria to confront its unconscious, to acknowledge the persistence of colonial and patriarchal residues, and to transform them through the imagination. The reconstruction of identity, therefore, is not a return to an original purity but an ongoing negotiation between memory and creation, between the inherited wound and the freedom to represent it anew. Khaled's and Hayat's trajectories converge in the recognition that to heal is not to forget but to narrate, and to turn silence into form, absence into presence; just like how Hayat confronts her circumstances courageously. Their artistic and emotional struggles mirror the nation's own psychoanalytic journey from repression toward self-articulation more and more. Mosteghanemi's novel thus performs the very process it describes. It transforms trauma into language, desire into art, and fragmentation into the possibility of coherence. The postcolonial psyche, fractured by centuries of domination, begins to reclaim its agency through this act of imaginative resistance. At the end of the day, memory ceases to function as the site of pain and becomes the foundation of renewal; a living archive where art, love, and history intertwine to rebuild the Algerian self from within. Through the interplay of psychoanalytic insight and postcolonial awareness, *Memory in the Flesh* envisions identity not as a fixed essence but as a continuous act of creation born from the dialogue between loss and survival, revealing that artistic resistance is, ultimately, the deepest form of healing.

Conclusion:

To sum up, this study has examined Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh* through the dual lenses of postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis, revealing how oppression transcends physical domination to penetrate the most intimate dimensions of consciousness and identity. The study has shown that colonial power does not end with the withdrawal of imperial forces; rather, it survives in the psychic residues of humiliation, dislocation, and internalised subjugation that continue to shape the postcolonial subject. In tracing these psychological consequences, the study has exposed the

intricate mechanisms through which memory, trauma, and desire intersect within the legacy of colonialism. This study demonstrated that colonial oppression operates not only as a political enterprise but also as a systematic assault on the mind, a process that kills “innocent people mentally and physically”.

Moreover, the study presents that oppression has reached all the layers of Algerian society including women. In this respect, it presents Hayat's oppression and the fragmented female voice silenced by the patriarchal oppression of the French in the novel. Furthermore, the study presented the counter-movement of resistance, emphasizing how the oppressed fight back through both suffering and defiance, embodying the paradox of pain as a form of agency. The fragmented identity emerges in the aftermath of colonial rule, showing that the struggle for selfhood is inseparable from the lingering presence of the oppressor within the psyche. This study also concludes that the process of reconstructing identity works as a creative and resistant act, where individual and collective memory serve as tools to challenge systems of exclusion and cultural dominance. Finally, these findings affirm that *Memory in the Flesh* is not merely a postcolonial novel but a psychoanalytic text of healing. Mosteghanemi's prose transforms Algeria's historical wounds into symbols of endurance and re-creation, suggesting that decolonization must begin within the self. Her characters illustrate that freedom is achieved not only by overthrowing external domination but by dismantling the colonizer's voice within the mind. Through its lyrical interweaving of art, memory, and resistance, the novel becomes an act of writing against amnesia; a declaration that survival itself is a form of resistance. Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, thus, stands as a testament to the resilience of the postcolonial self; a self that, though fractured by history, not the only one but it is true of many postcolonial authors who continue to write, to be remembered by all generations, and therefore, to heal.

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