
AMBIVALENCE IN MOHAMMED KAMICI EL-HASSANI'S *LE MOUCHOIR*

Ida Bagus Putra Ananta Sidhiswara

Aix-Marseille University

29 Av. Robert Schuman, 13100 Aix-en-Provence, France

Email: Ida-bagus-putra-anan.SIDHISWARA@etu.uni-amu.fr

ABSTRACT

The present study discusses the ambivalent behavior found in the character(s) in a francophone novel written by a third world writer. This ambivalence is represented by the attitude of the East that is against the colonialists on the one hand, but admires them and imitates their identities and attitudes on the other. This ambivalent discourse is widely represented in a francophone work entitled *Le Mouchoir* (1987) by Mohamed Kacimi El-Hassani. This novel satirically tells about Algeria in the post-colonial period and the narrator's efforts to oppose colonialism. Textual citations and pieces of evidence from the novel that are used to support the analysis are those that are related to postcolonial and ambivalence issues. The analysis is also supported by historical evidence of French colonialists' behavior towards indigenous Maghreb. The interpretation of the findings is supported by Homi Bhabha's ambivalence theory. Moreover, this study was conducted using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis methodology with which the textual analysis of the novel follows three levels of discourse, namely micro, meso, and macro levels. This study found that the hypocritical nature of the characters such as that demonstrated by the narrator and Mahfoud reflects the postcolonial nature of "ambivalence". This characteristic places Algerians in a "liminal space" of contestation between the narrator and Mahfoud and between Algeria and France.

Keywords: *ambivalence, Homi Bhabha, French colonialism, Algeria, Mohamed Kacimi El-Hasani*

INTRODUCTION

One of the prominent left-outs from colonial era is the colonized country's mindset that glorifies the attitude and the characteristic of the colonizing country. There is deep-rooted and unconscious insecurity in the people of the colonized country that makes them think highly of western life style, beauty standard, human resources, competencies, and many more. Meanwhile, they are of course against war and colonialism, regretting the dire effect of colonialism on their country. A classic example includes the relationship between Algeria and France. The two countries had colonial contact in the 19th century, which resulted in the unconscious ambivalent nature of the Algerians.

There are two possibilities of how the colonized subject develops an ambivalent attitude. First, a

colonized person follows the colonizer's way of thinking, behaving, and acting. However, he is bound to the prevailing indigenous culture and norms. Second, he has a strong desire to be accepted by the colonial culture, sometimes by getting recognition from his people. This phenomenon has generated a concept called liminal space because he is not accepted in both worlds: the colonial world and the indigenous world. As a result of years of cultural exchanges, the colonialists has succeeded in instilling a perception in the colonized without coercion that the colonizers' culture is more superior. Therefore, to build their self-esteem, the colonized people may attempt to make themselves equal with their colonizers. Such equality is achieved by intimidating and imitating them to

show their abilities, a process that is called mimicry (Bhabha, 1994). Faruk (in Suwondo, 2017) says that sometimes this mimicry process is not only seen as the colonized's inferiority, but also as a way of making fun of their colonizers and showing the possibility of ambivalence (both resistance and indulgence in the colonizer's culture). The colonized people want to equalize social position between them and the colonizers, but at the same time they also want to maintain the differences (Suwondo, 2017).

The ambivalence that develops in the colonized subjects can be identified in the process of mimicry or hybridity. On one side, the colonized subjects use the colonialists' cultural products or imitate them (mimicry). On the other side, the mimicry is also used as a mockery of them. Ambivalent attitude in this mimicry shows the colonized's resistance towards cultural domination created by the colonialists (Bhabha, 1994: 126). In contrast, hybridity involves a process in which members of a cultural group makes collective efforts to preserve their native culture, although at the same time they also negotiate with the new culture.

Bhabha presents an interesting terminology concerning ambivalence in post-colonial discourse. Bhabha (1994: 131) says that ambivalence does not concern contestation between a master and a slave but the issue of inequality between the master and the slave who experiences inferiority mentality. It means that ambivalence is a contradictory attitude that develops in a person. However, the colonized subjects are not the only one who have such attitude. The colonialist subjects can also behave ambivalently. As an example, the process of applying western cultural standards to the colonized subjects may give them power or domination in education sector, but those standards may eliminate differences between the colonialist and the colonized. The possible threat to their domination can make the colonialists ambivalent about implementing their standards on the colonized. According to Bhabha (in Lears, 1985), colonialism is not always faced with the acquisition of territory but with cultural issues, ways of thinking, behavior, language and other aspects that are always related to the identity of the colonized. Their identities are not self-determined but are constructed by the ruler or the colonialist (Suwondo, 2017).

Algerian literary works represent various forms of ambivalent attitude of Algerians. One of

them is *Le Mouchoir* (1987) by Mohamed Kacimi El-Hassani. It tells the story of the life of an employee of a Socialist Party in Algeria who is committed himself to maintain the party's good name. The storyline uses the first-person perspective as the narrator who is also anonymous. As a politician and an office employee of the Socialist Party in Algeria, the narrator investigated a possible scandal that had happened on Sunday. He found a splotch of fluid in his office toilet that looks like sperm, which means a sexual intercourse has occurred in there. Seeing something that might damage the party's image, he decided to investigate the suspicious finding himself and make sexist assumptions and prejudice about all of his subordinate employees in the process. His investigation process alludes to the social and cultural life of the Algerians in the novel. He assumes that religious dogma is still powerful in influencing society's way of thinking. The story does not end with the mystery solved. Instead, it ends with the narrator's testimony about the Commissioner and the janitor who were seen coming out of the toilet, laughing while fixing their belts.

The postcolonial concepts explained above are used as a basis for reading *Le Mouchoir*. In particular, this study uses Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence to examine the postcolonial mentality of the characters in the novel. It also tries to understand the narrator's position when criticizing his country. In short, the focus of this study is the ambivalent aspect of the characters' attitude in *Le Mouchoir*. Two questions that this study attempts to answer are: how does the ambivalence of East-West perspective appear in the novel? And how are colonial practices are perpetuated in the novel?

Several previous researches have discussed the notion of ambivalence in post-colonial literature. Farahbakhsh and Sheykhan (2018) and Rahmayati (2021) are the examples of current leading researches regarding this topic. Farahbakhsh and Sheykhan (2018) offer a reading of a novel titled *Disgrace* that shows the superiority complex expressed by white male in post-apartheid South Africa while he needs to adjust to the suburban African lifestyle, which leads to an identity crisis and ambivalent position experienced by the colonizer. Rahmayati (2021) offers an analysis about the resistance of Rohanna Koeddoes against Dutch colonialism in Indonesia in a short story called *Belunggu Emas*. Rahmayanti (2021) reveals a broad range of inescapable colonial unconscious thoughts

experienced by Rohanna Koeddoes in the forms of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. Unlike these previous studies, the present study focuses on the ambivalence issue within critical discourse analysis framework proposed by Norman Fairclough (1989) by reading the text at micro, meso, and macro contextual levels of language use in narrative.

As mentioned previously, the present study discusses a narrative that is related to postcolonial issues, particularly the ambivalence issue reflected in the story in El-Hassani's *Le Mouchoir*. Details or pieces of evidence from the novel that are related to the ambivalence issue were obtained through the close reading of the text of the novel. They were categorized and analyzed using Fairclough's analysis method that involves three levels of context: micro, meso, and macro (Fairclough, 1989; Udasmoro, 2017). Micro dimension addresses the lexical uses in the text (Andriani, Udasmoro, & Suhandano, 2019; Firmonasari, Udasmoro, & Mastoyo, 2020). Meso dimension analyzes the ideological concept and the intertextual clauses, sentences, and paragraphs (Udasmoro, 2018). The macro-structural dimension looks at the ideology practiced by the characters. The supporting details/examples/pieces evidence were analyzed on the basis of ambivalence theory with the help of historical records about French colonialism in the Maghreb that are related to the reproduction of colonial practices in which ambivalence and liminal space are part of them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ambivalence phenomenon in post-colonialism reveals the paradoxical attitude that is present in the colonized subjects. They stand in the middle space or what Bhabha (1994) calls the liminal space where he both admires/imitates and hates his identity. At the same time, they also deny the presence of the Colonialists and everything related to them.

An example of ambivalence in *Le Mouchoir* can be found in the part when the narrator compares the two systems, the French colonialist system and the pre-independence Algeria. The narrator mumbled and romanticized several facts related to France, such as French center-left political newspaper *Le Monde* that he just bought. From the narrator's point of view, as he observes the prevailing system in his office, the Algerian system is full of collusions. Later in the story,

the narrator and his party colleagues tried to get rid of the French communist who was considered a threat to the stability of the Socialist Party. The behaviour of the ambivalent narrator described above (admiring the current French system today) is an expression of his disapproval of the Algerian system. Ironically, he and the Socialist Party drove a Frenchman out of the country and used oppressive measures (such as French colonialism) in the process. Other examples of the narrator's ambivalent behavior are presented in the following sections along with the analysis and interpretation of them.

The Ideas of Women's Positioning in the Maghreb

There is little documentation and research on the situation of indigeneous women in Maghreb region, particularly in Algeria, in the colonial and post-independence eras. Even in France during the colonialist era, research on this topic was scarce. This probably indicates that Maghreb women did not get critical attention during colonial period or that their situation was suppressed by the patriarchal system in their cultural origin. The history of women written by Maghreb people is often responded with unfair judgments (Taraud, 2011).

The social issue mentioned above shows the marginalized position of the native women. In 2009, Claudine Guiard published a book entitled *Des Européennes en situation coloniale*. It talks about Algeria in 1830-1939 and provides an overview of the social position of European women in Algeria. The native and European women in the hierarchical structure of French colonialism were not particularly equal. However, the way European women were treated during the colonial era in Algeria can give a general idea of European culture that sees women as inferior to men (Robert-Guiard, 2017b).

The citations below reveals the narrator's ambivalent behavior related to women's positioning. He mimics the Colonialist character in seeing women, but at the same time hates the Colonialist for molesting native women.

[...] moi, l'ancien bedouin, jusqu'au troisième étage d'où je domine le monde. Sentir sous mes pieds se mouvoir les cranes d'incultes fonctionnaires, scruter de la fenêtre la faune désœuvrée qui s'use sur les terrasses des cafés,

guetter les récréations pour admirer la multitude de petits vagins et de seins (el-Hassani, 1987: 9).

I, as the senior, from the third floor, feel superior to everyone, feeling the skulls of uneducated employees hanging under my feet. I can see from the window, unemployed animals that lay in front of the cafes to enjoy the view of many vaginas and breasts.

Quel est donc le père qui a autorisé sa fille à exercer pareille activité, à sortir sans voile en ville pour se mêler à un service d'hommes. Ça ne peut être qu'une orpheline ou une divorcée (el-Hassani, 1987: 25).

Which father has the heart to allow his daughter to move in the city without hijab and work among men? Perhaps that woman is an orphan or a widow.

Je demandai au factotum de l'encadrer, de la suspendre face à l'entrée de mon bureau afin que même ceux qui empruntent le couloir, puissent apprécier le teneur de la culture qui y règne (el-Hassani, 1987: 12).

I asked the maid to frame it and hang it in front of my office so that people who passed by in front of it could get a picture of the ruling culture at that time.

The first piece of evidence shows that the narrator, who had just been appointed as an *adjoint* (assistant), enjoyed his new workspace that was located on the top floor of the building. On that floor, he felt at the top of the hierarchy and enjoyed dominating everything below him. This is emphasized by his arrogance that is demonstrated when he said "*Sentir sous mes pieds se mouvoir les cranes d'incultes fonctionnaires*", which means he felt the heads of uneducated employees moving under his feet. The sentence "*Je domine le monde*" in the first citation also signifies the ideas in the mind of the colonialists. The word *domine* is closely related to the process of mastery and a sense of superiority. Observing the nature of French colonialism in Algeria, the colonialists' control over the colonized was systemic, or in other words, created an absolute domination. The essential sectors such as government, economy, and military were under the French colonialists' control.

In Marxist view, a person's social class is categorized according to the person's awareness

of his position in the production process. However, in French colonialism in Algeria, one's social class consciousness is determined by one's attachment to a dominant or dominated group, regardless of their class in the production process. For example, Europeans identified themselves as the dominant group regardless of their position in the production process (Putri & Destari, 2019). This was supported by their privileges in politics, administration and economy as well as their position as the colonizers in Algeria. On the contrary, the Algerians (the native people) realized that they belonged to the dominant group because of the existing political, economic and social discriminations no matter how high their position was in the production process (Michel, 1965).

The Socialist Party for which the narrator worked did not promote social hierarchy in the office. According to the party's ideology, an employee's position should not define his/her social class in the workplace. The narrator was aware that, because of this ideology, his position in his office would not make him superior to other employees. However, the narrator's position gave him more power or dominance than the others since he was close to the party director. The sense of dominance that he felt is apparent in the phrase *je domine le monde*. Moreover, the expression of his sexual desire is evident in his behavior that is described in the sentence *guetter les récréations pour admirer la multitude de petits vagins et de seins* (enjoying the view of vaginas and breasts). The objectification is clearly addressed to women, which he considers an entertainment/recreation. In short, the narrator's negative behavior towards women is represented by his lewd mind when looking at women (Putri & Destari, 2019).

Furthermore, the ambivalence in women's positioning in the novel can be observed in the narrator's attempt to imitate the West but despise it at the same time. In the colonial era, European men were more motivated to migrate to Algeria than European women. This is due to the limited information about the available accommodation and the condition of European colonies in the early 19th century. European women wanted to join the French colony in Algeria, but they could not do that unless they were accompanied by their family or had some friends that had been living in the country. Another reason why some of them are willing to come to Algeria was economic gain. However, they had hesitation in coming to Algeria. The

reason is that Algeria at that time was still seen as a place for barbarians and a place where women were abducted to be sold into harems. However, women in the country's workforce was eagerly anticipated by the Europeans because they were expected to fill in some "necessary" job positions, especially when the role of women at the time was limited to domestic and sexual space.

In the chapter titled *Des compagnes, des épouses, des mères*, Robert-Guiard (2017a) describes European women's role in the "expected job positions" that were mainly controlled by men and the state (French colonialism in Algeria). Women were expected to play the roles of *compagnes*, *épouses*, and *mères* (partners, life companions, and mothers) (Robert-Guiard, 2017a). This implies that during the period of French colonialism, women were still seen as domestic workers and had no opportunity outside that role. The limited role of women created problems such as husbands marrying another women, miscarriage, and children born outside wedlock. These problems affected the demography of European colony in Algeria, where the number of children born outside wedlock (*enfants naturels*) was three times higher than in *métropole* or mainland France.

The second evidence in the novel that shows the narrator's patriarchal positioning of women that is parallel to the Colonialist's is in the sentence "*Quel est donc le père qui a autorisé sa fille à exercer pareille activité, à sort sans voile en ville pour se mêler à un service d'hommes*" (Which father has the heart to allow his daughter to go out into the city without hijab and work among men). The narrator believed that women should not get a job like men. Therefore, he blamed fathers who were not taking care of their daughters. Also, the narrator argued that women should not work in a professional jobs and should always fully covered their body and wore hijab. However, he also did not fully agree with the Colonialists' treatment of native women. In the third evidence, he misunderstood the Italian Mona Lisa painting by Leonardo Da Vinci. He thought that it is a painting of an Arab woman by a European Colonialist that showed the exoticism of Arab women and the immorality of the Colonialist's culture.

The ambivalent behavior shown by the narrator can be observed in his perception of women's position, as represented in the second evidence mentioned previously, which is similar to the Colonialist's

perception of European women. He condemned the Colonialists for seeing native women as erotic objects, but ironically he looked at women under his office with the following phrase in his mind: "*la multitude de seins et petits vagins* (the view of breast and small vagina)." This ambivalence suggests that the novel tries to highlight how Algerians inherited European colonialists' mindset unconsciously, particularly in the way they see women. The novel depicts the irony of how the narrator thought about Algerian woman in a derogatory way but saw Mona Lisa painting as a beauty standard for Arab women, which has completely different culture and physical features.

Ambivalence between Racial Discrimination and The Space of Colonial Representation

Colonial system shamelessly allowed discrimination during colonial era. Even as immigrants in a colony, the Colonizers felt the need to separate themselves from the Colonizeds for believing that they were superior to the Colonizeds (Suciati, 2014). Discrimination was not considered a criminal act. Rather, it was a necessity to set a clear boundary between the Colonializer and the Colonized. It functioned as a justification for the colonialists to reinforce its existence as a superior nation and also as a "*civilisateur*" nation or a nation that civilized the indigenous. In order to legitimize discriminatory practices against the colonizeds, colonialism usually requires a tool called stereotype discourse (for the natives) (Adzhani, 2013). Stereotypical discourses can develop into a basis for prejudice against colonized people or *métropoles* in seeing the natives. Prejudices that are generated by stereotypes can in turn produce a dichotomy between one group and the other.

The Arab natives in the Maghreb had become the target of stereotyping perpetuated by the West (French colonialism). For example, their cultures were considered not in line with the concepts of "civilization" and "moral" from the West's perspective. The West often justified their stereotyping of the Arabs using the occurrences of particular issues in Arab cultures such as gender inequality, child marriage and polygamy. The West's discrimination did not exclusively target non-western cultures and people. Westerners also showed discrimination against European women by limiting women's role to domestic duties and *maîtresses* (Robert-Guiard, 2017a).

Discrimination against the natives (Arabs), which is rooted in Westerners' stereotypes of them, still occurs today, even among themselves. The evidence from the novel below shows that this discrimination is still perpetuated by a character named Mahfoud and the narrator. Because of his disappointment of his own country, Mahfoud (the narrator's old friend) unapologetically revealed the common characteristic between the Arabs and the Europeans in terms of discrimination. In the story, Mahfoud tried to live in a city called Oran, the place where the narrator went to cool off from his hometown. Oran was a city that can be considered a representation of discrimination and violence encouraged by colonialism and the ambivalence that is exemplified by Mahfoud's discriminatory statements against the westernized Arabs. Below are a quotation of Mahfoud's statement and the one of the ambivalent narrator:

Que les Arabes sont inaptes à toute forme de culture, puis déçu par ce qu'il appelait l'irréparable décadence de l'Occident (el-Hassani, 1987: 37).

That Arab people are incompatible with all forms of culture, then disillusioned by what he calls as the irreparable decadence of the West.

Une chose plus importante nous liait davantage: nos fugues mensuelles à Oran. (el-Hassani, 1987: 39).

The most important thing that brought us closer is the monthly escape to Oran.

The first quotation is the evident of Mahfoud showing the colonialists' stereotyping of the Arabs during the colonial era. "*Inaptes*" or unsuitable is a word that expresses that Arabs do not have the right to behave like people from other cultures or identify themselves with them. Mahfoud did not generalize the Arabs in his statement mentioned above. The Arabs that he criticized is those "colonized" by the West. It is suggested in the sentence "*irréparable décadence de l'Occident*" (Western irreparable decadence). To say that it does not get a place in any culture is a form of racist and structural discrimination, similar to the discrimination against native Algerians practiced by French colonialists. Historically, French colonialism engaged in various forms of discrimination against Arab Algerians that were reinforced by the belief that they did not deserve equal rights with the citizens

of France, "*citoyen français*". One of the examples is Jules Ferry's act of discrimination through his "*civilatrice*" political discourse that recognized two categories of nations in French colony, namely the French "*civilisateur*" and the Algerian nation as "*l'objet civilisé*." This differentiation led to an othering attitude towards the natives that was represented by the differentiation between "us" (the French) and "others" (the natives) (Purwanti, 2014).

In addition to the abovementioned discourse, Jules Ferry also implemented the *Lois scolaires* in the Maghreb in 1882. This system became a form of structural discrimination that denied the indigenous children the equal rights to get education that did not undermine their cultural identity (Adzhani, 2013). Under the system, all learnings in schools used French as the language of instruction because it was considered a superior language in the Colony. Consequently, Arabic, which was the language of the native people was scarcely used. Those who did not speak French would always be in marginalized position in France colony. Unfortunately, only those (natives) living in big cities could enjoy "*école française*" (french school). The natives living in rural areas were increasingly marginalized due to their inability to communicate in French (the colonialist's language) which was caused by the absence of French schools in rural areas. At the same time, the natives who got the opportunity to study at "*école française*" still experienced discrimination. Therefore, the "*civilatrice*" mission was only a cover for French colonialists' intention to establish their social and cultural domination. The natives were expected to learn the colonialist's culture if they wanted to increase their social position. However, it was impossible for them to achieve equal status with the Colonialists because they were always be regarded as "*sujet français*" instead of "*citoyen français*".

Furthermore, Mahfoud's perception about the "colonized" Arabs discussed above also seems to represent two contestations. He emphasized his disapproval of Arabs who were different from him. He thought of them as "westernized" people. This judgment indirectly shows Mahfoud's contestation with the West. Examined at the meso level, he regarded the Arabs as "absolute retreat from the West" or *l'irréparable décadence de l'Occident*. The *civilatrice* mission and the education provided by the West in Algeria had changed the way some

indigeneous people think. This is also the reason why some Arabs, according to Mahfoud, are *inaptes* or are not compatible with all forms of culture. They have been influenced by Western thoughts. At the macro level, he expressed his disappointment with the Arabs. This is shown in the way the narrator described Mahfoud: "*puis déçu par ce qu'il appelait l'irréparable décadence de l'Occident*" (feeling disillusioned by what he calls irreparable Western decadence).

The micro, meso, and macro levels in the analysis of colonial discrimination that is represented in Mahfoud's disapproval of some Arabs and Westerners. The narrator's position as Mahfoud's friend shows his agreement with his friend. The narrator and Mahfoud show their resistance to westernized Arabs and the West. Furthermore, the three levels of analysis above intersect with the narrator's explanation in the second evidence that suggests their activities imitating French colonial style. The analysis of this evidence reveals Mahfoud and the narrator's ambivalent attitude that is associated with the post-colonial influence on their way of thinking.

The reality of domination can be observed not only in individual experience such as interpersonal discrimination or communal experience such as structural discrimination by the authorities, but also in places (the spatial dimension) that show signs of the occurrence of domination. Domination phenomenon and conflict between the colonialist and the colonized, according to Yacine (2008), can be learned through a place/spatial dimension as a symbol and a setting. In this context, the word Oran is a symbolic place of domination in the novel. Historically, Oran had become one of battlefields between the Colonialist and the Colonized. After French occupation in 1881, Oran became one of three *départements* and also the territory of the French interior ministry.

The context in the second evidence related to the city of Oran must be explained so that Mahfoud and the Narrator's ambivalence can be justified. After the occupation of the city of Alger (the first city in Algeria which was occupied by a French colony), French colonialism in the Maghreb was marked by the occupation of a number of cities in Algeria by French forces, including Oran. Oran fell into French hands after Émir Abd el-Kader lost the battle in the mid-19th century (Leclerc, 2018). These cities are located in the northern area, which is close to the sea and seen as a bridge between the *métropole* and the Maghreb.

Immediately after the announcement of the 1882 "*lois Scolaires*" by Jules Ferry, which regulated the assimilation of native Muslims to French education, protests from the European colonies broke out in Algeria (Leclerc, 2018). They did not accept the policy that obliged the natives to receive the same education as the European colonialists and colonies did. "*Les pieds noirs*" or French colonies in Algeria, which no longer depended on the natives (Arabs) gathered in big cities such as Oran and Alger. These French people lived in the neighborhood of *petit-blancs* or whites. In contrast, the natives gathered in the neighborhood called the "*quartier indigène* (native neighborhood)". Consequently, the French inhabitants and the Arabs were getting more segregated, and the goal of "discrimination" from the occupation was eventually achieved. Thus, the French occupied a place and made it a territory that separated themselves from the natives.

The representation of the relationship between the body and the space can be seen from the colonial spaces described above. When there is a quartier or space where only the colonies/colonialists have the right to enter, the natives' body cannot enter it. Colonialism had built boundaries such as military posts or police posts that could not be crossed by natives. The space protected by this boundary was the place in which the French Colony lived. It means that, when its space is protected, its body is protected. Yacine (2008) describes that a city is a living space; it has color, aroma, and physical appearance. There is a relationship between the space and human for which the colonialist's space is constructed in such a way that suggests aesthetic value, large territory, strong presence, and rationality. On the contrary, the colonized space is constructed in such a way that suggests the lack of aesthetic value, small territory, weak presence and irrationality. Thus, it is clear which space plays the dominant role and which one the dominated role.

From the above perspective, the mention of Oran in the second evidence draws attention to the fact that the city is the place where the narrator and Mahfoud can feel comfortable. Described differently in the novel, it is where Mahfoud can visit brothels and enjoy alcohol, the activities that cannot be done in less developed cities. Seeing that Oran was one of the most developed cities in the era of French colonialism, the Narrator and Mahfoud felt that Oran was their

ideal city. At the same time, because they consider Oran as a protected space, their perception of the city shows their ambivalent attitude. In contrast, the areas outside Oran were considered unprotected space whose inhabitants were the dominated and irrational people. So was the relationship between space and humans in the days of French colonialism.

At the meso level, the city of Oran is considered "*une chose plus importante liait avantage*" (a thing that brings us the closest) by the narrator. As a space that was favourable for his friendship with Mahfoud, the narrator thought that Oran was the medium (instrument) of his close relationship with Mahfoud. It is a kind of medium that functions as a space for their social interaction, unlike other spaces. This depiction shows the postcolonial behavior of the narrator and Mahfoud, which is similar in nature with French colonialists' behavior in terms of the act of creating a boundary between one self and the native group. In particular, they went to Oran to live in the *quartier blanc* to separate themselves from the Arab natives. The narrator also mentioned Oran as he and Mahfoud's monthly *fugues mensuelles*, which means that they perceived the cities outside Oran as a space that offered no sense of security for them. In fact, Oran was a space with various forms of security and rationality, and therefore it was the place where their bodies feel "protected."

Although Mahfoud and the narrator showed their disapproval of Western traits, particularly in their relation to prejudice against the native Arabs, they were not entirely free from "western elements". They also displayed a postcolonial attitude in their decision to choose Oran city and position themselves as a subject whose body wanted to be "protected." Their judgment on the Arabs and the desire to be colonial-style "protected" subjects signify a form of post-colonial ambivalence.

CONCLUSION

There was an ambivalence in attitude between the East and the West that was unconsciously internalized by the Algerians. This phenomenon is represented by the contestation created by the narrator and Mahfoud in El-Hassani's *Le Mouchoir*. The contestation involved the Arabs and the Arabic women in the way they imitate the colonialists' attitude. It was also demonstrated by France as the producer of colonial

ideas. Moreover, the narrator contested France due to the colonial period that his country had to cope with. However, he still appreciated and admired French products. Mahfoud and the narrator also contested the problematic relation between the westernized Algerians and the West as the cause of chaos in the Arab nation.

Moreover, the East/West ambivalence is also apparent in the paradoxical contestation that is related to the city of Oran as a representation of the colonial space of French domination. According to the narrator, Oran was an ideal city to escape from daily activities that imitates Western mindset and culture, such as the habit of drinking. It represented a space that offered a shelter for the colonized subjects who needed a protection from the colonized space and from the people who were considered undeserving from the colonialist's perspective. Mahfoud and the narrator perceived that the cities outside Oran, which still followed a strict Arabic culture, represented an unfavourable space where the narrator and Mahfoud felt unsafe. Thus, this ambivalence contributed to the perpetuation of colonialism.

The forms of ambivalence identified above are none other than the narrator and Mahfoud's hypocritical attitude in addressing colonial issues. Their mindset and behavior that developed from the postcolonial experiences collide with their indirect affirmation of the colonial culture as individuals who had been constructed by Orientalist stereotypes. In other words, the narrator and Mahfoud had put themselves in a liminal space that was represented by the two contestations they made: the one between them and their people and the one between them and French people. In fact, although the story in *Le Mouchoir* wants to highlight the dire effect of French colonialism in Algeria, the characters are shown to unconsciously take the imperialist side. This tendency is shown in their perception of Oran and other cities as the civilised space and uncivilised space respectively.

All the findings of the analysis in this study have implied that *Le Mouchoir* as an Algerian *francophone* novel depicts the pertinent post-colonial issues. Historical information about French colonialism in Algeria have supported the discussion of the postcolonial behavior of the characters in the story. The analysis of ambivalent behavior represented by the narrator's efforts of criticizing the social conditions of Algeria suggests that the influence of Western way

of thinking and French colonialism can be found in such efforts. Even though the colonial era had passed for years, the narrator had not been completely free from the colonial mindset and attitude when criticizing his country. Therefore, the narrator can be considered perpetuating the colonial perspective throughout the story, and the story of this kind exemplifies the representation of the reproduction of colonial practice in francophone literature.

STATEMENTS OF COMPETING INTEREST

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