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ACCULTURATION AND ITS ROLE IN DISRUPTING THE MECHANISMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY ALGERIAN NOVEL

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Abstract

This study addresses the issue of acculturation and its role in changing the mechanisms of the novelistic text, moving from a self-centred perspective towards a relationship of narrative integration with the Other. It seeks to move away from ideological partisanship and conflict closed in upon the self, and instead advocates openness, awareness of and confidence in one's own cultural identity, recognition of the independent identity of the Other, and the placing of one culture in dialogue with another culture—or with a set of different conceptions, beliefs and visions.

The Algerian novel has offered a serious perspective on this effective dimension of acculturation. It is not unusual for the Algerian novel to resonate with large numbers of writers and literary figures who have generously contributed their efforts and creative work in this regard. Accordingly, these new mechanisms can be identified in the work of Algerian novelists whose creative achievements have reached a high artistic level. To enrich the study through analysis, we have selected a number of novels that draw extensively on the Other and whose texts are replete with the influence of Western fiction.

Keywords: Acculturation; Identity; Novel; Self; Other.

1. Introduction

Acculturation is the transformation and alteration of ideologies. Ideology consists of the body of ideas—that is, judgements and beliefs—held by a society at a given moment. It is a system with its own logic and internal rigour. When acculturation takes effect, these ideas change and are replaced by another, acquired ideology.

Acculturation encompasses the domain of ideas and conceptions and the exchange of sciences and knowledge that takes place within it; linguistic communication; creativity in the arts, skills and expertise; and the domain of traditions, customs, morals and behaviours. Four dimensions govern acculturation: awareness of and confidence in one's own cultural identity; recognition of the independent identity of the Other; placing one culture in relation to another culture, or bringing a set of conceptions, beliefs and visions into dialogue with different conceptions and visions; and allowing one's identity to engage with the Other independently and with self-confidence. Its importance therefore lies in presenting our vision to the Other and allowing the vision of the Other to be presented to us. Acculturation is an interaction between the Self and the Other aimed at producing a new formulation that reflects an evolving and civilisational vision of the world, encapsulating the coexistence and succession of different cultures.

The cultural integration between the Algerian novel and the Western intellectual system is evident in the body of the text, which is laden with quotations, adaptations and assimilated statements from different Western texts, whether similar or different in genre, type and style. This takes the form of textual intersections or intertextuality between the novel and Western thought in wording, signification and construction. In other words, the Algerian novelistic text, through its relational structure, engages with numerous Western textual mechanisms. This dialogue may imitate the structural framework of certain Western texts, or establish complex relationships with many other texts by invoking or extracting textual elements from them as textual wings that enrich the novelistic experience.

2. Acculturation and Ideology

The concept of acculturation has a long history in the social and psychological sciences. The term "acculturation" was used to understand the processes of modernisation experienced by different cultures and societies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently, acculturation has become an important concept for explaining the diverse experiences of ethnic and cultural minorities, as international migration, economic globalisation and political conflicts contribute to the formation of multicultural societies.[1]

The relationship with the Other should not be built on ideological partisanship or conflict that remains closed within the self. Rather, it is preferable to be open to the Other and to attempt to understand and assimilate it culturally and psychologically. Orientalism is one example of how one may identify with the Other and unsettle it from within. The construction of states dominated by a single ideology has become a thing of the past, since history has demonstrated the fragility of such states and exposed them to revolutions by ideologies that have been excluded and marginalised. The most developed and dynamic societies are those that allow different cultures to coexist under their umbrella.

The term "hegemony" is associated with the Marxist thinker who explained the economic and political rise of a particular group through cultural and intellectual hegemony. Intellectuals

sympathetic to that group perform an organisational function: they express the class's worldview and thereby give it cohesion and awareness of its objectives by increasing support for the ideas of the dominant class.[3] Socialist revolutionaries therefore sought to develop an alternative hegemony. Yet ideologies that begin as revolutionary in order to displace dominant ideologies often become emptied of their revolutionary spirit and are transformed into instruments of domination. The source distinguishes Lenin's socialism before the Bolshevik Revolution, described as revolutionary, from his socialism after the establishment of the Soviet Union, described as authoritarian and totalitarian.

Marx argues that ideology corresponds to the ideas dominant in any society, manifesting themselves in its culture and social organisation, laws, policies, religion and art. These ideas are produced by the ruling class and serve to legitimise its wealth and power. Marx also defines ideology as the attempt to present the ideas of the ruling class as serving the general interests of society and the nation. Accordingly, literary works produced in capitalist societies may justify and support economic and social relations that benefit the ruling class. Marxist critics therefore argue that literature written by bourgeois writers primarily expresses bourgeois assumptions and values.[2]

Our search for an ideal form of acculturation, free from the negative effects of ideology and domination, is an aspiration shared by anyone seeking to establish the humanistic principle of culture. Can culture liberate itself, or will it remain subject to the power of domination?

3. The Impact of Acculturation on the Contemporary Novel

During the 1990s, the Algerian novel witnessed remarkable quantitative growth, contributing to the emergence of a new generation of novelists, namely the younger generation. This generation entered novel writing and sought to compete with the works of the 1970s generation, whose prominent figures had disappeared and some of whose members had reduced their output. Many representatives of the new generation, however, lost their way when they attempted to capitalise on the Algerian crisis after observing the success of novels that had made the crisis their central subject. New novelists consequently took to the streets, recording events through regional lenses. Others excelled in preserving the foundations of the Algerian novel and sought to develop it, writing and creating in French without forgetting their mother tongue.[4] This amounted to an imitation of Western novelistic writing and a rejection of confinement within the space of crisis, calling instead for engagement with artistic concerns and texts dominated by the language of acculturation.

In his novelistic experience, Waciny Laredj draws on the Algerian ideological reality since the 1980s, tracing its suffering and political and social upheavals through an artistic preoccupation. His works have consequently been renewed in style, form and language. Among the novels that extensively imitate the Other and whose texts are full of Western novelistic influence is *The Guardian of Shadows* (Harisat al-Dilal). The novel was well received in the West and

represented a new turning point in Waciny Laredj's experience, particularly in terms of the dimensions of acculturation and its role in unsettling the constitution of the novelistic text.

The novel is intertextually open to both the Algerian local folk heritage and the Western novelistic heritage, including *Carmen* and *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. Its title reveals a distinctive writing strategy based on intertextuality. The chapter titles also display disruption and destabilisation, some of which hint at the influence of Waciny Laredj's reading of Latin American literature. Acculturation thus plays an active role in shaping terminology by introducing Western terms into the novelistic text. For example, the title of Chapter Three refers to the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias and his novel *Men of Maize*, transformed by Waciny Laredj into *Men of Hay*.

The acculturation adopted by the novelist through a phrase attributed to the poet "Abu Linier" appears to express the Algerian reality of the 1990s and the state of defeat experienced by the people. Waciny connected this poet's biography to that impasse and to the novelistic composition of *The Guardian of Shadows*.[5] This left the reader psychologically affected by the Other invoked in the novel and gave the writing a quality that is both suspenseful and strange. Inserted texts that disrupt narrative techniques include texts shaped like journalistic reports and commemorative plaques. These are technical devices and artistic tricks through which the novelist seeks to persuade the recipient of their factual authenticity while also distorting the creative text from within. They provide a pretext for incorporating subsidiary events that enrich the main subject and deepen its dramatic dimension, while generating engaging linguistic and dialogic acculturation.

The novel's openness to standard and colloquial Arabic, as well as Spanish and French, creates cultural diversity within *The Guardian of Shadows*. Its style and language engage and clash with the Other in order to establish the unity of the artistic effect. There is also harmony between the novel's textual space and the real space in which its events unfold. Both are shaped by mechanisms that unsettle imported intellectual concepts: the former through the violence of discourse and fictional imagination, and the latter through the reality of terrorism and the violent events experienced by Algeria during the 1990s. These techniques shaped the novelist's worldview and informed his depiction of setting and creation of characters inspired by Western fiction.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi frequently employs Western statements by thinkers, artists and painters in her three novels: *Memory in the Flesh*, *The Chaos of the Senses* and *Passage to a Bed*. These quotations add elegance and beauty to the trilogy. The first quotation at the beginning of *Memory in the Flesh* is attributed to the French writer Marcel Pagnol: "Get used to considering ordinary things ... as things that can happen too."[6] Acculturation lies in connecting the quotation to the condition of Constantine, which has remained unchanged, neither better nor worse. When the protagonist leaves the city and later returns, he finds no difference: the

Constantine of yesterday is the Constantine of today. The city's unchanged state deeply affects him because he had not expected it.

In *The Chaos of the Senses*, Mosteghanemi uses a statement attributed to Oscar Wilde: "Man invented language in order to conceal his feelings."[7] Language is thus presented as a tool for communicating with others and concealing feelings, whether genuine or otherwise. If language does not conceal them, a person's facial expressions and behaviour may expose them.

The novelist also refers to chess player Garry Kasparov, the thirteenth World Chess Champion: "The moves we make in our minds while playing and then decide not to pursue form part of the game just as much as the moves we actually make on the board."[8] The heroine compares the dialogue and internal conflict between herself and the protagonist to a chess game. Each player chooses a colour and a position; during the game, the player thinks through possible moves, just as the heroine considers how the protagonist might deal with her, what may be going through his mind and what he might attempt.

Another quotation in *The Chaos of the Senses* is attributed to André Gide: "The most beautiful things are those suggested by madness and written by reason."[9] The intended meaning concerns inner moral qualities that guide a person towards the right path and help keep away what is improper. Madness is described as the impetus for abnormal actions, whereas reason is the means of overcoming the barriers that lead towards them.

Mosteghanemi also uses another statement by Oscar Wilde: "There are two misfortunes in life: the first is not to obtain what you want, and the second is to obtain it."[10] The writer suggests that when a person pursues something they desire, it may elude them. When they give up and convince themselves that it is not worth pursuing, it may come to them easily. Yet, at that point, they do not know whether to welcome it or turn their back on it.

The novelist refers to Roland Barthes: "A person should conceal from others the pharmacy of their home ... and their library."[11] This quotation is linked to the heroine's fascination with the protagonist. Although she tries to draw him into conversation and ask about personal matters, he keeps his secrets and does not reveal them. The house and library thus resemble the owner's private domain, into which no stranger may enter.

In *Passage to a Bed*, the French singer Serge Gainsbourg is quoted: "Ugliness is stronger than beauty because it endures."[12] The writer connects this statement to a conversation between the protagonist and his friend Murad about the handsomeness and ugliness that distinguish each of them. The protagonist believes that nothing beautiful lasts and that ugliness is more enduring. Although Gainsbourg himself was not handsome, women were attracted to him.

The same novel draws on a statement by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges: "The sea is as solitary as a blind man ... or perhaps I realised that I was the sea."[13] The conversation concerns the beautiful city in which the protagonist and Murad lived, a city that turns its back on the sea.

The protagonist describes it as showing no concern for the sea, while the sea seems to reciprocate. The writer appears to suggest that Murad resembles the sea: he is indifferent, pays little attention to healthy relationships and lives his own life without allowing anyone to disturb him.

Mosteghanemi also employs a statement by playwright and film director Sacha Guitry: “There are no women who are honourable and others who are dishonourable; there are only women who are dishonourable and others who are ugly.”[14] The writer uses this statement in a scene in which the heroine visits a bathhouse where naked women violate the sanctity of Constantine without modesty or shame. This leads her mother to call them “depraved”. The quotation, however, suggests that there are no dishonourable women, only ugly women.

The novelist also quotes Nietzsche: “The greatest thoughts are those that come to us while walking.”[15] The heroine moves through a landscape of sadness and tragedy, a sea of grief. Each idea brought to her by the sea is carried away by the next wave. Every way she might find to escape her sorrow is blocked. Walking devotes much of our energy to an activity that does not require deliberate thought, thereby allowing creative ideas and inspiration to emerge.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi has given considerable attention to this form of acculturation, which consists of incorporating foreign quotations. Such quotations are a distinctive feature of her writing, particularly in the trilogy, where they appear frequently.

4. The Role of Acculturation in Disrupting the Mechanisms of the Novelistic Text

The process of acculturation moves through a limited and restricted space in a single direction, serving the interests of the West because it is centred on itself. It produces an unbalanced framework for the coexistence and cross-fertilisation of different cultures within a Euro-American culture that sees itself as a centre in dialogue with peripheral and supposedly primitive cultures. Acculturation therefore does not take place between equal nations, peoples or civilisations; rather, it is represented through a relationship of superiority and backwardness. This unbalanced relationship is reflected in “the cultural exchange between different peoples, particularly the changes that occur in a ‘primitive culture’ as a result of its contact with a more advanced society, or a process of cultural adaptation that leads to the improvement of an individual, group or people.”[16]

Acculturation becomes an effective element of cultural cross-fertilisation only when both parties, despite their differing intellectual orientations, participate positively. Its foundations are freedom of choice, spontaneous initiative and independent decision-making, away from passive reception, tension and pressures of domination, whether implicit or explicit. Acculturation can be sound and fruitful only when it arises from free will and aspirations rooted in the social entity, rather than being an artificial construction imposed upon that entity, potentially threatening its existence and ultimately being rejected.

Spontaneity, preservation of cultural immunity and adherence to particularity are not sufficient on their own unless equality in means is also achieved. Such equality guarantees balance among interacting parties. If one party monopolises the means and mechanisms, the balance is disrupted, acculturation is impaired, and the way is opened to domination and hegemony. Control over the means entails control over the ends, suppression of initiative, destruction of spontaneity and a threat to cultural immunity and particularity. Acculturation also requires rational awareness and an alert conscience, which enable creative interaction, prevent deception and deviation, and make it possible to select what is better and nobler according to the standards of goodness, truth and beauty and a sense of responsibility towards humanity. In the absence of such awareness, genuine acculturation is impossible.[17] This is what gives something new to the contemporary novelistic text.

The impact of acculturation on languages has always contributed to their growth, development and enrichment with new terms and concepts. This occurs through linguistic borrowing resulting from contact, through translation of written works from one language into another, or through commercial exchange, which transfers linguistic resources through product names and descriptions of their characteristics. “Through acculturation, languages have become more capable of survival, keeping pace with the times and accompanying civilisational development. Every language is a mirror of the conditions of its society, an expression of its civilisation and an indication of its share of progress and refinement.”[18]

Customs, traditions, morals and behaviours constitute a fertile field for mutual influence among societies through acculturation. This is evident in “what societies have borrowed from one another, whether in food, clothing and everyday behaviour, or in the rituals of celebration and mourning. Such borrowing has generally been based on utility and appreciation, taking into account taste, aesthetic value and the search for novelty and originality—impulses deeply rooted in the human psyche because they are essential to its vitality and happiness.”[19] This leads to recognition of the independent identity of the Other, since the independence of one’s own cultural identity cannot be fully realised without recognising other independent freedoms.

The Algerian novel has offered a serious perspective on this effective image of acculturation. Many writers and literary figures have contributed their efforts and creative work in this regard. Such new mechanisms can therefore be identified in the work of Algerian novelists whose achievements have reached a high level of creativity.

Among the novels rich in acculturation and interaction with the Other is *His Excellency the General* by Kamel Guerrou. This novel addresses dictatorship around the world in general and in the Arab world in particular, through an imaginative mode that directs the reader towards expectation and anticipation of the future. The novelist draws on characters from the Hilali epic, demonstrating the influence of heritage. At the same time, an imbalance can be observed in the decoding of contemporary acculturation and the introduction of the historical element.

Kamel Guerrou employs cultural cross-fertilisation in his novel, which also deals with an oppressive oligarchic dictator and the figure of García Márquez, through whom local dictatorships in Latin America—whose fame became global—are brought into the text.

The influence is evident in the narrator's statement: "I am García Márquez, a novelist from Latin America. You may have read some of my novels, or heard of me and my novels."[20] The novelist then presents a different vision of the Other: "I love the Arabs and stand in solidarity with their causes. I support the Arab Spring revolutions against the Arab oligarchic dictatorships, which we used to read and hear very little about in the media and which we could not find represented in literature ... I would be pleased to write your biography, since you are the local Arab dictator whom all writers have ignored."[21] The influence of the Other is apparent in the narration, as is a disruption in the dialogue with an identity that gives the Other little importance, as reflected in the passage: "Write, Márquez ... Yes, Márquez ... We have grown old ..."[22]

The novel is saturated with acculturation. The novelist explains the Arab tyrant's character by drawing on the traditional figure of Dhiab ibn Ghanim, a symbol of tyranny that transcends time, and on the writings of the Colombian novelist García Márquez, who excelled in depicting the tyrant in Latin America, particularly in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. It is thus clear that Kamel Guerrou was influenced by Western culture, allowing acculturation to play an important role in changing the novel's narrative elements.

5. Conclusion

The principal findings of the study can be summarised as follows:

Acculturation plays an effective role in changing and transforming ideologies, which represent the ideas and beliefs held by a society at a given moment and constitute a system with its own logic and rigour. When acculturation acts upon novelistic texts, these ideas change and are replaced by another, acquired ideology.

Cultural integration between the Algerian novel and the Western intellectual system is clearly evident in the body of the novelistic text.

The relationship with the Other should not be based on ideological partisanship or conflict closed in upon the self, but on openness and an attempt to understand and assimilate the Other culturally and psychologically.

Waciny Laredj draws on the Algerian ideological reality since the 1980s, tracing its suffering and political and social upheavals through artistic concerns. His works have consequently been renewed in style, form and language. *The Guardian of Shadows*, well received in the West, represents a new turning point in his experience and demonstrates the role of acculturation in unsettling the constitution of the novelistic text.

The openness of *The Guardian of Shadows* to standard and colloquial Arabic, Spanish and French creates cultural diversity through a style and language that engage and clash with the Other. The novel's textual space and the real space of its events are also connected through mechanisms that unsettle imported intellectual concepts.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi gave considerable attention to acculturation in *The Chaos of the Senses*, *Memory in the Flesh* and *Passage to a Bed*, employing unusual quotations and making extensive use of them in her novels.

Acculturation continues to contribute to the growth, development and enrichment of the language of the novel through new terms and concepts, linguistic borrowing and translation.

Kamel Guerrou's *His Excellency the General* is saturated with acculturation, combining Arab cultural heritage with the very different culture represented by the writings of the Colombian novelist García Márquez.

6. Footnotes

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2. J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 353. (Personal translation.)

3. Ibid., p. 326. (Personal translation.)

4. See Al-Sa'id Boutajine, *The Novel Tomorrow*, book of the Fourth Abdelhamid Benhadouga Conference (Ministry of Communication and Culture, Algeria, 2001), p. 38.

5. Kamel Riahi, "Some Characteristics of Novelistic Writing in Waciny Laredj's *The Guardian of Shadows*," press article, issue 1, Monday, 10 May 2010, p. 4.

6. Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, 12th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1999), p. 13.

7. Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Chaos of the Senses*, 12th ed. (Beirut: Ahlam Mosteghanemi Publications, 2003), p. 11.

8. Ibid., p. 22.

9. Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Chaos of the Senses*, p. 44.

10. Ibid., p. 153.

11. Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Passage to a Bed*, 3rd ed. (Dar Naufal, 1997), p. 178.

12. Ibid., p. 62.

13. Ibid., p. 63.

14. Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *The Chaos of the Senses*, p. 255.

15. Ibid., p. 328.

16. ‘Izz al-Din al-Manasirah, *Acculturation and Comparative Criticism: A Problematic Perspective* (Beirut: Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, 1996), p. 75.

17. See Jaber Asfour, *Dialogue of Civilisations and Cultures*, Book in a Newspaper, no. 101 (Beirut: Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, 2007), pp. 23–25.

18. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, translated by Saeed al-Ghanimi, 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon / Casablanca, Morocco: Arab Cultural Centre, 2003), pp. 36–37.

19. Majdi Ahmed Mohammed Abdullah, *Introduction to the Psychology of Communication and Media* (Alexandria: Dar al-Ma‘rifa al-Jami‘iyya, 1st ed., 2008), p. 77.

20. Kamel Guerrou, *His Excellency the General* (Setif, Algeria: Al-Watan Al-Youm Publications, 1st ed., 2015), p. 39.

21. Ibid., p. 40.

22. Ibid., p. 182.