

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Algerian Youth Fiction: Identity Anxiety and Questions of Belonging The Novel A Stranger in Marseille by the Writer Amira Hassani as a Case Study

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“Life is not what we have lived, but what we remember and how we remember it.”

— **Gabriel García Márquez**

Received: 24/05/2025 Accepted: 22/08/2025 Published: 11/01/2026

Abstract:

The novel *Gharib fi Marseille* is a novel with a luxurious cover and paratextual design, with its blue outer color and its nocturnal space that is camped over the parts of the city, the city of Algiers which appears on the front cover with its Great Mosque that gives to the novel realistic and poetic dimensions which it creates through the spaces of reception, and even gives you a space for reading that you can feel while you are flipping through the external page. I came across the novel by the guidance of a colleague who advised me to read it; I will not lie, I had been searching for a youth novel for nearly three months and my luck stopped at some novels, but I wanted an adventure of a different adventure.

Keywords: Narrative of Culture, Narration of War, Narration of Love, Discourse of Crisis, Traditions of Exile and Estrangement.

A- The Question of Writing:

Carlos Fuentes has always been asking in his researches about what the novel can say in a different way, and we can start from this question to arrive at a deeper question, which is: what can the current novel add to the novel in general, and to culture, and to the intellectual reality, especially that we know that it is a genre that managed to preserve the literary values at the same time that it managed to accompany the human being with fidelity, to use Kundera's expression, where thanks to it the human being moved from the desire of knowledge which put him under Enlightenment, to keeping the world of life always under the light and protecting it against the forgetting of Being (Hamid, 2019, p.51).

Therefore, when we want to question writing at Hassani, we come across her saying: “It is a shame for a human being to live without a cause; surely we must carry some cause to live for it, or at least to be the cause of somebody else” (Hassani, 2023, p.10). And this puts us directly in front of a second challenge, which is the difficulty of taking this writing out from the postmodern stage in which it was born, and the difficulty of isolating it from postcolonial writing based on the themes that were circulated; and if Lyotard confirms that “in the contemporary society and culture, and the postmodern society and the postindustrial society, the legitimacy of knowledge will be formulated in different terms, since the grand narratives have lost their credibility, regardless of whether they are a speculative narrative or a

narrative of emancipation” (Lyotard, p.56), then it seems logical to pose: what are the grand causes for Amira Hassani? and which may reveal the concerns of the Algerian novelist at the present time?

And as soon as we approach the text we will face a third type of problem, which is the nature of the tools that we should use in order to read this first fruit of the postmodern texts, if the expression is correct, that is: how can we deal with the new and apprehend it, and what are the tools that we should use? Is the essential reading related to the nature of the text or to the nature of the method or to the tools of discourse analysis? To say honestly, in my readings I try to search for the ongoing developments in the field of literary studies and to respond to them, those developments that appear as decisive and important aspects of the sweeping waves of transformation that continue their evolution since structuralism, feminism, postmodern criticism, and the new concern with the nature and patterns of language and politics and the style of life that results from them.

And when we try to approach these texts, we find before us a momentum of critical studies that declare their competence in analysis and in sensing the cognitive and cultural representations and the linguistic structures, and this is the essence of the saying of Wahid Ben Bouaziz: “The critical studies remained, in the contemporary production, hostage to dense revisions and cognitive shakes; whenever a new paradigm arrives, the maps and the statements and the latent regularities change. And these tremors do not indicate a negative state, but they are positive, because they refer to a large secretion of all the epistemic possibilities that must be invested” (Ben Bouaziz, 2023, p.7).

And it seems very logical when the researcher decides that when we claim that we are going to undermine the achievements of modernity and centrality and philosophical theses, then at that time the postmodern discourse, despite its claim of total domination, will shrink into the strategies of discourse only; and any awareness of the formations of discourse realizes that the reality existing in the bosom of linguistic representations is a different reality that does not indicate a real existence, and for this it is necessary that this deconstructive discourse passes through the deconstructive tool itself (Ben Bouaziz, 2023, p.9). Therefore, if we go in this research to deconstruct with the strategies of modernity and with the achievements of Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian and Deleuzian archaeologies, then we will be in front of a discourse that does not possess postmodern theoretical strategies, but rather discourses that found for themselves far from the explanatory statements that fall into readings instead of founding a postmodern epistemic awareness.

Of course, we cannot affirm that the narrative discourse analysis of the novel can be an alternative method or a complete reading of the text, despite the seriousness of the knowledges that surround it. And here we can return to what Jan Dijk said, who does not consider it as a method in itself, but rather “a field of scientific practice that is distributed among all the fields of the human and social sciences, and for the same reason also it is better to give the name discourse studies to this field of knowledge” (van Dijk, 2014, p.31). Therefore, we can rely on the analysis of the narrative fictional discourse because, as Amina Belala says, “it is considered a support for criticism and not a competitor to it” (Belala, 2023, p.96), and it can invest cognitive researches on the role of the cultural representations of discourse and their role in the processes of interpretation. Consequently, our saying here about the issue of the collapse of the grand narratives and the end of the intellectual and the state and the class seems contradictory with the institutional reality of the Western state that practices modernist thought, even if we are here in front of

a project that calls for surpassing, but it is a reality that can be represented in the societies that underwent colonization and that are trying to get out of the circle of modernist thought to embrace rupture and the demolition of the colonial values that modernity brought. From here we will try to stand at these grand narratives that collapsed in the novel that is in our hands and which we consider as a model of writing that promotes the train of deconstruction and rupture.

1- The Narrative of Culture and History:

As we saw the resort of the humanities in the twentieth century to science to save them from closure and restriction and rigidity, we see today the narratives as they try to get out from the tunnel of experiments and experimentation to the tunnel of reality instead of fiction, which may form for some a threshold to distance literature from the multiplied concerns of society in the recent ages, where literature started to ask for help from cultural, anthropological, psychological studies and the various knowledges that feed its imagination and nourish its texts with what can respond to the requirements of the age and the preoccupations of humanity. And perhaps the most important achievement of the postmodern condition is “the interaction movement that it created between the various totalizing cultures and oppressive centralities and the conflict between peoples and civilizations, and that is in order to undermine the hierarchical traditionalism and to search for a new globalist discourse in which all parties participate, and not a discourse directed from the center to the peripheries” (Oumatarian & Harding, 2012, p.10). Therefore, culture was and still is an interstitial problematic field for researchers and thinkers and creators who seek the help of knowledges and culture in order to define through them the components of identity and memory and the conflicts that these societies face in the current century.

The writer did not overlook the role of memory and history in the novel, because she started to recall the events of the Black Decade that struck Algeria and that led to the draining of the lives of innocents, among them the character of Youssef, the brother of the hero, who was living in exile and the circumstances forced him to return to the homeland that was waiting for him, in order to take charge of ending his life at the hands of the terrorist groups. The hero tells about him saying: “It was eight o’clock and the café was crowded with people. As for my brother, he was arranging the shop to receive the customers. A crowd of men went out of the café at the sound of the brakes of a fast car; it stopped in front of Youssef’s shop, four individuals went out of it calling his name at the top of their voice... He did not surrender despite their number; he struggled a lot with one of them, and the first thing he knocked him to the ground, he went quickly to his car, opened the trunk to take out the weapon and finish them... The treacherous bullet that penetrated his back took him” (the novel, p.140).

The scene was painful for the hero, because Youssef was the dearest of his brothers, between them there is a relation of friendship and love, but unfortunately he left, leaving a deep trace in his psyche, especially after Youssef saved him from the claws of addiction into which he fell after the killing of Leila. He says in that: “He stood in front of me looking at me with contempt, but he was not surprised by my appearance; it seems that he knows about my addiction. So the spies’ favorite stood in front of me with pride and firmness that weakened my position more, then he raised his hand and slapped me in anger. I was stunned for moments by his behavior, then I exploded crying and threw myself in his arms, crying like the small child who suffered the woes of orphanhood and loneliness” (the novel, p.126). And she did not overlook the Lebanese civil war; the talk about this stage came in the context of drawing the

character of Leila the Lebanese, whom the war brought to Paris to live there far from her homeland after she lost her husband in a bombing operation in one of the squares, to witness afterwards the departure of her daughter who was also assassinated. She no longer had any place except Paris, which gathered her with the hero so that they live together the damage of memory.

And to recall, the interest in memory was the result of what the world reached after the two World Wars, which led to the abundance of studies and debates about the reason for the swelling of evil and the failure of the liberal capitalist system and the distortion of the Enlightenment foundations on which Western modernity was established, and even also the failure of the idolatrous claim in the usefulness of science and reason in achieving happiness without knowing its dimensions and limits. Thus, it can be said that the interest in the past and memory and history, as Wahid Ben Bouaziz said, “was not only connected to recovering the past for educational or pedagogical or admonitory purposes, but was connected with the aim of opening and liberating this memory from the totalizing writings that controlled it for a long time and dominated its narrative” (Ben Bouaziz, 2023, p.65).

The novel can be considered as a kind of escape from the narration of identity to the writing of the self, through the hero’s moving to the space of exile and his focusing on his daily life, regardless of what was happening in Algeria of grave events; he preferred to be preoccupied with his anxieties that he encountered in exile from contact with the Lebanese Other and the Christian Other, and the preoccupation with the work that ensures for him living and earning his sustenance. In this he states: “Despite the pain that was sweeping through me and the feeling of humiliation and insult, in addition to that I am a stranger to them and from a foreign country, I bandaged my wounds with a handful of salt and started to learn the principles of the profession. I wander on board the ship and notice everything, from fishing with the rod to fishing with the net, and even how to anchor. I also benefited from my work with them in that period to collect a considerable amount that I add to my previous balance so that my dream comes true: I buy a boat of my own and work for my own account” (the novel, p.38).

Here we notice the extent of the presence of the Other in the novel, and its effect on the Algerian self; there was an effective collision in the intellectual and cultural direction between them, exactly like those discourses that recall the Other in their texts, which appear through representations that resemble what was expected from a self that suffered from his oppression and centrality, so you see him present with his usual negativity and as a place of temptation if this Other is a female who carries the features of seduction and lust and the desire for bodily communication. And this view does not differ between the Eastern Arab novel and its Maghrebi counterpart. We can particularize the Algerian novel, which in its turn drew the Western Other in a stereotypical drawing that does not contradict the widespread representations since the time when I read Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s novel and came across the female Françoise, who appears as a symbol of France with her overwhelming femininity and her sexual liberation and her eroticism.

The female/temptation is present in many Algerian novels that I have read recently, such as the novel *Al-Ta'na* (The Stab) by Walid Sahli, represented in the character of Magian, the Greek girl who was the reason for the hero’s moving away from his university studies; his obsession with her pushed him to stab her colleague who snitched about her betrayal of him. The heroine in the novel that is in our hands this time is the character of Leila, the Christian, who was of Lebanese origin, but she managed to

wear Western civilization in the novel and to represent it with her culture and her liberation and her religion, even if she held on to her Lebanese identity. And it is noticeable that the writer preferred not to create a quarrel between the Algerian self and the Lebanese self in the novel, unlike what we saw in her second novel which gathered a deep identity conflict between the members of the family of Moussa. We can cite the following example: "I got to know Leila and from the first day I was aware that she is also a devout Christian, and I never thought at all of intruding into this side of her life or convincing her to abandon her religion; she is, in a way, Muslim by instinct" (the novel, p.81). Thus, language did not appear in the novel as an obstacle because the woman first was of Arab origin; consequently, her culture does not clash in a deep way with the hero's culture despite her Christian religion. And even civilizationaly she was saturated with Western cultural loads which the hero had already collided with when he moved to Marseille, for the meeting took place after the passing of five years, which were enough to form in him an important reference for the nature of living and the culture of relations.

If we try to look at the themes circulated in the novel, we find that they are serious themes and of a high degree of study and importance for the Algerian, or for the human being who belongs to colonized countries in which the human being or the individual tried to travel to the Center in search of his self. Thus, is it permissible for us, on this basis, to start from the vision and the content and the position in order to consider it a novel of the present time, and a reading of history, and a critique of the institution, and a reshaping of some identities or a reconsideration of some issues, since the novel speaks about a period in which the novel witnessed a tight connection with reality? We can say that what has been transferred of events in a simple and ascending way reveals to us the exit of the writer from the moment of explosion in writing to the moment of calm writing that reshapes the moment.

And the victory here for the national causes can confirm the correctness of what some critics say about the novelist who works as separated islands that do not realize through them the theoretical awareness that makes the reader feel that the novelist is a project that becomes a fictional model that writes from the perspective of his cultural reality and employs the cultural question without claiming that he brought what others did not bring, and that is a psychological and ethical problem in the novel. Creativity has fallen in front of the obsession with difference that made the question of creativity a mercurial state for all commodities in the chaos of ideas and opinions that undermine the cognitive models responsible for laying down the conditions of rationality in reality and of morality in the individual (Belala, 2023, p.16).

And the Nineties remain a fertile space for novelists in their representations of the events and the tragic reality that Algeria went through. The end of the period and the acceleration of the pace of disturbances at the beginning of the third millennium did not take the novelists away from this period, as they re-read it as a historical event that left a deep effect in the conscience of society intellectually and culturally and psychologically, and it will remain a fertile subject as long as it is a discourse that gave narration the opportunity to go out from the phase of colonialism to the phase of postcolonialism and its residues. Thus, you see it in the novel that is in our hands appearing not as an actor in the discourse as much as it is a director in the narration and in transferring events from one state to another and from one phase to another.

The rewriting of history here was on the basis of recognition of what this period created of a crisis in discourse and in criticism as well, and here Amina Belala says: “Despite the passing of three decades from the beginning of the decade of violence, the subject is still establishing the ways of representation for novelists and controlling their strategies and interpretations” (Belala, 2023, p.n.). She confirms that violence is still furnishing the experience of novelists and almost determining the landmarks of the fictional universe, despite the difference in the context of its representation from one writer to another, but almost there appears a similarity in terms of the details and the production and the reading that the discourse of repetition offers here. The novelist says, describing these events: “The smell of flowers and the breeze of the sea disappeared and in their place came the smell of sedition which burned the green and the dry and destroyed society. Families were disintegrated; the brother began to kill his brother, and neither old man nor infant was spared from death. The pictures in the newspapers hurt me, and the clips of mourning and crying and screaming that were broadcast on television, hundreds of dead and funerals that do not end” (the novel, p.137).

And it can be confirmed that what the Arab countries lived and live of challenges and situations hardly differs between them. Violence caused a deep shake in the conscience of these peoples and in their narratives, and they are no longer able to deny it, but rather sought to represent it in a way that records the suffering of the Algerian and Lebanese peoples alike in their civil war that they went through, and you find for it an echo in the Egyptian novel that speaks about the Egyptian revolution, like the novel of Nora Nagy Sanawat al-Jari fi al-Makan (Years of Running in Place). And this is not a rule for all novels, as you find it absent in some Arab countries according to my reading of Saudi and Emirati novels at least, as far as I know, which you see preoccupied with discovering social worlds and representing them and speaking about the Other and migration and the journey of civilizational clash that revealed a rift in the narrative structure in the Gulf countries. We can give examples, such as the novel *Raf al-Yawm* (Today’s Shelf) by Najwa al-Otaibi, etc.

And it can be said that violence was an effective means for questioning history and smashing the grand narratives and trying to direct questions towards the relation with the Other and identity, and responding by writing to the subjects that were previously certainties. For this, the question here was an existential question before being a narrative question. If it were not for the characters’ feeling of loss and isolation and oppression, we would not have seen them suffering in silence in exile, far from the safe bosom of the homeland and of the family. Likewise, the wars that drained the country and the people pushed Algerians and Lebanese – as an image of many postcolonial societies – to the necessity of not separating the past from the present, and history from narration, and belonging from identity. Therefore, memory always remains a **pictorial** frame for the landmarks of the fictional universe.

The writer seems aware of the difficulty of what this civil war left in the souls of Algerians and Lebanese, which pushed some of them to migrate as an escape from death, and here she declares on the tongue of her hero: “Her words made me realize more what it means to be a war refugee; he is not just someone fleeing from danger or searching for safety, he is a refugee of sadness, a refugee of loneliness, a refugee of mourning. We were in the year 1982 and the civil war in Lebanon was at its height; the pain was sweeping through her heart when she read in the newspaper about the number of victims” (the novel, p.59). The writer who writes war and death was recalling the general history of colonized peoples who passed through bloody wars and conflicts in a way that truly reveals the novelists’ conceptions of it, and

experimentation now moved to digging in these conflicts and wars and revolution, which does not create narration only, but also creates an anxious structure in the human being and makes him anxious towards details and what is silenced and marginalized and the taboos. You even find there a clear tendency towards exposing blackout, revising memory and rewriting history by interpreting it with new values that started to be promoted after political pluralism and especially after the phase of terrorism (Belala, 2023, p.39).

Thus, the colonial question remains a raised question in most writings that belong to colonized peoples who tried to get out of their cultural dependency on the Other, and perhaps the writer preferred to raise it from the starting point of revealing his expansionist policy in burning lands and houses and displacing peasants and villagers and practicing all kinds of oppression on them. We can listen to the hero while he describes one of the scenes saying: "That was on one of the freezing winter nights and the village was covered in that white garment. We were living in a rented house after the French colonizer destroyed our house, and when my father died we could not pay the rent, the owner of the house raided us and threw us out into the open..." (the novel, p.52). Therefore, you find these texts building their narrative spaces through marginalizing this Other in the novel and centering their events in areas that belong to the original countries, even if they were exposed to transformation and attempts at annihilation in the time of colonialism and their destruction as the space of the village that represents the Self, yet it remained at least preserving its existence.

And although what distinguishes the first crop of postcolonial texts is that the possibilities of deconstruction in their themes cannot be fully realized, even though they tackle material characterized by strength, they were forbidden from exploring all their anti-imperial possibilities (Ashcroft et al., 2006, pp.22–23). Here the counter-narration tries to build its tools in order to penetrate all those certainties or central structures that were the reason for placing the culture of countries and their identity and their civilizational and political history in the margin, which made the tools of discourse analysis dig in these modernist theses and overturn the equation of the fictional universe and its apparent poetics in order to explain the cultural implicit in it and its metaphorical tropes. You can simply know that when you read Hassani's text to find the stranger located on the shore in Marseille. The hero who traveled to the West/Paris refused to enter the city, as if by his presence on the margin of the sea he suggests the presence of the Algerian on the margin of civilization and globalization and global transformations that made the postcolonial Algerian human being suffer difficulty in adaptation, and this is something clear in the novel were it not for his communication with the Other, Leila. We can also explain that by the writer's desire to marginalize the civilizational Other and to be content with escaping from the homeland/pain/reality and being between two worlds on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, where neither did the hero manage to integrate and accept the culture of the Other nor did he completely shed his identity and his Islamic religious landmarks.

One can simply recall Fanon's saying in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, which states that the human being subjected to colonialism always lives on the margin of the city, and this can be applied to the characters of the novel who live in the village during the colonial period and after it, and this is clear in the hero's statement about himself: "My youth which I spent in that traditional house in one of the rural areas of central Algeria, a house with the smell of jasmine and the melodies coming from the rustle of almond trees in the front yard, that beautiful prison that glows with white and blue... and my mother's

voice...” (the novel, p.11). The hero even refused to travel to the capital to get a job. What is also astonishing is that the hero who migrated to Marseille chose to live in a simple hut on the seashore where he worked, and that has different long-term dimensions: it is the difficulty of adaptation that the expatriate who had already spent his childhood and youth in a remote area may be shocked by, and secondly, that these cities symbolically are difficult to penetrate because of the cultural difference and the social conditions that migrants do not know. It is the symbol of the European city built by the invaders; it is a closed space in which the native son does not integrate unless he merges into the colonial system, to use the expression of Abdelkader Hamid. And although the writer practiced the symbolism of killing by displacing the hero to the Center, the hero remained living on the margin of the city and was not able to penetrate its worlds except after he got to know Leila and fell in love with her, and then we see him trying to adapt and traveling to Paris to discover the city after five years had passed since his migration.

The writer in this novel seems insistent on expressing the marginality of these peoples by displacing them from the Center, even though she tried in her second novel, *Mout Abyad* (White Death), to make the main characters live in Paris and obtain a residence and study visa with ease. This novel and others like it in these corpora give us an absence of clarity of vision resulting from the intrusion of the Other and the practice of a discourse of displacement, and this falls within the theses on which postcolonial writers are working, which take into consideration essential issues in their national or regional dimension or rewrite the common heritage and history.

The writer explicitly states that the events of the novel started in the Seventies, when refined fictional models such as *Rih al-Janoub* (The Wind of the South) by Ibn Hadouga and *Al-Laz* by Tahar Wattar spread, and it is a period that historians have not returned to for some time, according to the novels that I have recently read. Memory and the revolutionary archive are often recalled, or the discourse of crisis is rearticulated, or Algerian and Arab heritage in general is invoked. Therefore, the adventure of engaging in this writing appears to me different in terms of the temporal and spatial frame, and in terms of the structure of the characters, since youth fiction now seems to shy away from reading literature from a purely generic perspective and treats what is beyond being gender literature, and we can find a mixture between two intertwined realities: the civil war in Lebanon and the Algerian reality which imposed itself strongly after independence. It seems here that the novelist Amira Hassani reminds us of the novel *Muftaraq al-Osour* (The Crossroad of Ages) written by Abeer Shahrazad, which left a deep imprint in my self in terms of its deep ability to raise this intimate relation between Arab reality and Algeria through its heroine Samia the journalist, and through Mokhtar who was the son of a Harki and who had visited Lebanon during its civil war, which deepened the tragedy in the novel. Amira Hassani’s novel moved to the civil war in Algeria, that is, what is known as crisis literature, to narrate to us also a bitter phase that befell the Algerian.

From what preceded, the idea of the difficulty of ignoring the relation of the novel with politics returns, and with revolution and the intellectual and religious conflicts that clash inside Algerian society. It is enough to browse the path of the novel to know the depth of this connection and the insistence of the novelist on transferring some historical events such as French colonialism and some events that he lived during this phase when he was small with his family. Due to historical particularity, the Algerian novel, since its birth, has remained connected to a referential climate rich in political discourses and diverse concerns: it connected with revolution and struggle and history, and connected with national

changes and ideological conceptions after independence, and with crisis and war and violence and others. Here Abdelkader Hamid confirms: “The novel draws from history, and the novelist started to roam freely in the space of memory just like the historian, with one difference, which is that the historian searches for truth and seeks to reach relative objectivity in order to transform memory into history” (Hamid, 2019, p.25).

And history here became mixed with the description that he used to describe his journey of moving to France, because he presented some places that bring the Ottoman and colonial phase, in a semi-comparison between them and the simplicity of the Algerian countryside. He says: “At that moment, I thought that the beauty of the land is in its nature and its mountains and its worn-out roads, and that only calm touches the heart with its magic, because that is what my eyes were accustomed to. Then I discovered at that time that beauty has no definition, just like the features of a weak old woman who may carry a beauty that the face of a young girl in the prime of life does not carry... It is vast Algeria that brings together the modernity of French design and the authenticity of Ottoman design and the Andalusian beauty. Even the names of its streets tell the stories of its heroes who gave their souls for it” (the novel, p.31).

2- The Narration of War and the Rearticulation of the Discourse of Crisis:

Everything is revived and forced in by writing and narration, and in saying, nothing is said enough and longs for being said again. The rearticulation of the discourse of the Nineties crisis does not mean a desire to recall sadness or violence, but rather an attempt to question this discourse that had a profound impact on the Algerian novel and on Algerian history in general: “White is not the color of rest, you know that – and you say it. How much living blood there is in the white page; desire mixes with the wound and the embrace with struggle and they fall” (Jabès, 2015, p.76). Thus, silence and blackout were among the most important features that the postmodern discourse tried to go beyond, so language, by destroying silence, realizes what silence wants and does not attain.

For a while, I did not come across novels that recall the Nineties crisis in their fictional texts, to the point that contemporary narrative discourse was able to embrace the present and its paths in its structure, and to focus on the issues of the contemporary human being. But when I read the novel *Gharib fi Marseille*, I was surprised by the discourse of crisis again in the novel, and by a fortunate coincidence I read the book *Riwayat al-Azma (The Novel of Crisis)* by al-Yamin Ben Toumi and enjoyed it recently, as he approaches this theoretical problematic of the discourse of the Nineties, confirming that it is a discourse that still needs study. This made me bring together the book and the novel, trying to investigate the truth of what al-Yamin said in his book and the techniques that Amira Hassani employs in presenting this discourse in her novel, in order to know the youth vision of this crisis both intellectually and artistically.

The writer provides us with an opportunity to approach the feminine conception of history and conflict and wars. Here we can frankly declare that the writer herself managed to examine history and to reread it, after novelists and historians successively engaged in digging in history and standing at the archive of memory. The woman in her turn unveils this zone and enters it with all boldness to shake the idea of woman’s preoccupation with man and patriarchal society, and this is counted in favor of the writer Hassani, who here formulated another new awareness in which she implanted her narrative experience

in venturing into the questions that concern Algerian and Arab society and even concern her as an intellectual and a citizen, to go beyond the issues of clash with the Other, the man/patriarchal culture, to the formulation of an awareness in which she raises thorny issues from which Algerian culture in general suffers, where history and crisis and social problems and estrangement are present, far from prosecuting history and memory, but rather by reproducing them fictionally.

The novel cannot be called a crisis novel, because it passed by the Black Decade through memory and it was not its main subject, but the events that befell the hero's village managed to change the realities of narration and to transform some of its bricks after his brother Youssef and his wife Leila were targeted. He says: "At the entrance of the station, Leila and I were running with our bags so as not to be late for the fast train that links Marseille and Paris. We bought the tickets and sat waiting for the train... The atmosphere was calm and the rain was falling gently. I started to look at Leila's face while she was laughing and playing with one of the travelling children... I got up from my seat to look for the toilet, and while I was in the corridor, I heard a deafening explosion and felt an extraordinary force that pushed me to a far place as if I were waking from some dream... as if it were hell: the voices of women screaming and children crying, and its turning into a charred mass, and the smell of smoke and blood. When I looked for Leila, I found her struggling with death and her body was scattered pieces" (the novel, pp.110–111). The climate that preceded the Black Decade is also a climate frequently raised in the novel, in a way that confirms the difficulty of such writing.

If the Nineties novel had already resorted to reportorial narration that conveys events in a direct way and drew the boundaries of change between reality and the imaginary, choosing documentary writing that resembles journalistic writing because of the speed of events and their horror, which made reality more atrocious than fiction, now, after two decades, we ask: has narration remained conveying bloody events in the same way? If we rely on al-Yamin Ben Toumi's division of the phases of the novel, then the novel in our hands belongs to what comes after the events of October 1988, which is a phase that carries a lot of ambiguity and obscurity. If we restrict ourselves to some contemporary models written by youthful pens, then here we will speak about the globalization of chaos as topics raised in contemporary texts that revolve around the problematic of self and identity and homeland and estrangement.

It seems that we are here before the illusion of reference, as Saïd Boutagine called it, the illusion of the imaginary that tries to draw on events that submit to the writer's mood. Fictional literature is one kind of literature only and not all literature, meaning that the crisis novel can restore old meanings and those left to literature and work on actualizing them again, because the purpose of literature in general is not to define the genre of literature in itself as much as it is to purify the human being from all the harms and emotions related to the function of literature (Ben Toumi, 2024, p.81).

3- Traditions of Exile and Estrangement:

Edmond Jabès says in the *Book of Margins*: "Rare are those who live writing with a deeper intensity, just as a whole life cannot lessen the fires" (Jabès, 2015, p.79). This expression comes true when we see the hero trying to revive memory and write its deep wounds, and narrating his warmth within his family while he is in a state of estrangement. He even touches sensitive issues that examine the civilizational clash and the conflicts between Center and margin, and the transformations of

contemporary Arab societies that resulted in exile and estrangement. Migration is, most of the time, an existential problem before being a narrative one, and the novelist will not write far from these contemporary problems. Although the hero did not migrate to Marseille secretly, nor was he smuggled, nor did he deal with secret organizations that work on pushing youth towards estrangement, migration in the novel was a logical result of the transformations of society after independence and the effects of colonialism and the mismanagement of life and what the social and political reality in general is witnessing in most Arab countries.

We can pause at a direct statement from the hero that summarizes for us the youth obsession with estrangement and joining the Center. He says: "I started wandering in the streets of Marseille. This is the Other world then; the dream that started to haunt most of our youth is embodied in a pleasant mouthful and a decent life on foreign land, even if it costs you the status of a second-class citizen, but its advantages are considered a dream in his homeland" (the novel, p.36). We can add the period of civil wars and the fragility of political systems. Amina Belala says in this regard: "The Arab novel has become a representational project of great complexity and responsibility, especially when it comes to talking about some existential problems produced by wars and famines as a result of imperial hegemonic policy, foremost among them clandestine migration and displacement and refuge and other phenomena that do not express social and political situations imposed by certain circumstances as much as they express existential problems that make part of the world live something like an existential schizophrenia in which the concept of belonging and identity and difference and freedom recede" (Belala, 2023, p.272).

It seems that this title is appropriate when we find the same values that characterize migrants who broke into estrangement in order to build a decent life, while they remained in the margin and were not able to establish a real life. The truth is that this title was taken from a book by Matthews, who tried to study poetry in some countries that were subject to the same colonial bond. We can find for that a point that brought together Algeria and Lebanon in the civil war that both countries went through, and these are issues shared by postcolonial societies that were not able to get rid of the effects of colonialism or the effects of Western intervention in culture and society.

Generally, all postcolonial literatures are considered cross-cultural literatures because they cross the existing gap between worlds through which processes of exclusion and simultaneous assimilation continue in their struggle to define and determine their practice. The first thing writing attempts to do is to embrace that marginal as a component element of reality and of narration. Thus, you find the hero living on the edge of estrangement resulting from the lack of colonial integration geographically, then culturally and socially. Such postcolonial writings carry highly diverse cultural traditions that have clearly revealed, without ambiguity, that value, like meaning, is not an actual property but rather a relation existing between the object and certain criteria imposed upon it. That is why you find in its texts the raising of the issue of identity, which remains in the forefront as a subject that has come to occupy a site no one contends with, and is considered among the most important issues from which wars and disputes and conflicts are generated. Therefore, it was necessary to raise the question of identity and to rethink its formulation anew by rebuilding all values, foremost among them the value of the human being and the relation with the Other, such as coexistence and tolerance, which made the novel bring to the foreground the question of value (Belala, 2023, p.41).

You can find in the novel an attempt to deconstruct hegemony and Center: the masculine hegemony represented by customs and society and the character of the domineering brother Omar; the deconstruction of the hegemony of loyalty to the family; and the deconstruction of the Other whose hegemony and subjugation the hero refused to acknowledge, preferring to remain in the margin. Among what he mentioned in this regard: "My shares do not allow me to enjoy the advantages of the first class. It is reserved only for my two brothers, Omar and Youssef, then the wing of my sisters Fatima and Aisha. Since my father's death when I was five, Omar took over the torch of ruling, so that the era of the just sultan ended and the era of dictatorship began, where survival in it is for the strongest" (the novel, p.13). Thus, the novel tended to search for the reasons that led to the emergence of the crisis and its causes, and to try to interpret all that by posing the intellectual system that worked before the crisis, that is, the Seventies and Eighties. You see the hero sometimes preoccupied with thinking about power and religion and society and its conditions, but deconstructing all the values that he considered worthy of revision, especially the values of pretending kinship and connection and relations, and he presented only characters in psychological and social crisis.

And estrangement is counter-narratives to belonging and nationalism; it is a narrative in the new novel that makes us feel that the writer seeks to trade in everything, even in his self and his identity and his homeland, in search of different meanings for the grand narratives that were produced between the two wars: the narrative of belonging and centrality and power and knowledge, to what can be called the experience of writing about strangeness and reification and consumerist values. Here Mohamed al-Shehhat confirms that Arab society, since the revolutions of 2011 and its successive uprisings, which were like a danger bell politically and socially, signal the exposure of totalitarian regimes and the aggravation of political and social and economic problems, the collapse of the family structure, the rise in crime and suicide rates and psychological illnesses, alongside the spread of unemployment and the suppression of freedoms and the regression of the concept of citizenship and the increase of the fundamentalist tide produced by extremist religious groups in different forms and methods (al-Shehhat, 2022, pp.69–70). Therefore, it can be said that the contemporary novel was affected by all this, and writers started to build their fictional imaginary from reality and from the rapid events that foretell blackness and dystopia and much fear and ugliness and savagery that has started to afflict the contemporary human being and the political and social and civilizational situations as well.

4- The Narration of Love and Death:

This is clear in the contemporary novel that, as we said, leaned towards focusing on the individual and his obsessions instead of caring about social and cultural values, and this confirms the idea that "the novel is the achievement of the free individual who lives the consciousness of the modern world which incites the human being to discover and use his mind with all his freedom and to probe the inner depth" (Ben Toumi, 2024, p.37). We can speak here about emotional narration to cancel the idea of the model hero or the Promethean hero who disappeared in the novel, or simply the disappearance of the model heroic character that can be found fighting for values and principles for the sake of society's interest, and it was replaced by speaking about daily suffering and tragedies that the hero and the rest of the characters are shocked with. Mostly, you find the hero moving away from proving his self or trying to win others' admiration, not caring about the garment of courage, and even the novelist tends to make the hero match

what the contemporary human being lives of the breaking of his self and his search for calm and bearing responsibility for himself.

This is clear in the novel, where the hero searched for his livelihood in order to be freed from the slavery of the family and the domination of his brother who refused to marry him to his beloved, so he decided to leave the family and the homeland heading to Marseille. He says: "The promised day came, and it is the day on which I was liberated from the slavery of the family to the captivity of loneliness. I crushed my shackles with an iron fist and threw them among the crashing waves... The desolation of estrangement is like a malignant disease that ravages the patient, warns him of his collapse, squeezes his limbs with pain, and makes him hear the hiss of the flame that sweeps through his heart" (the novel, p.36). The hero was even often blaming the family and circumstances, preferring surrender instead of fighting or reconsidering matters a little more deeply. This hero did not hesitate, when his brother fell ill, to declare that he did not feel sympathy or support, in a quasi-hostile position that killed any feeling of brotherhood, and this is of course strange if one knows the difficulty of the responsibility placed on the older brother and the mother after her husband's death.

The novel goes on to reveal to us the hero's concern with emotion and love instead of the family relation, so we see him at the beginning of the narration in love with Zahra, the neighbor's daughter, to the extent that when his request to marry her was refused, he left the village definitively without return and remained faithful to his love and her features. He says, describing a girl he saw in the train: "She resembles Zahra in some details; I do not know what they are, but she reminded me of her. Or perhaps I projected her onto the face of every woman who passes by me, or maybe I sought in them both the love story that I wished to live with my beautiful one" (the novel, p.30). Afterwards he sympathized with Leila, who was lying in the hospital after a suicide attempt, and he quickly fell in love with her and asked to marry her: "She was about to leave, but I prevented her, for it is not of my nature to let a woman walk alone in dark streets in the middle of the night. We took a shortcut, and how much I wished we had taken the longest way so that we could remain silent like this and not utter a single word. Even silence with her is enjoyable, this girl. Nothing was lacking in this evening to describe it as perfect: a quiet road, empty of people on a summer night caressed by a refreshing breeze. We walked and heard nothing but the sound of our footsteps and did not feel embarrassed by that silence, and we did not try to break it" (the novel, p.88).

If, according to studies, the Algerian novel moved from the phase of concern with theme to concern with the simple character during the Seventies and the wearing of ideologies, then in the Nineties it focused on the intellectual and thinker in the first place, perhaps trying here to show the suffering of this category in the phase of the Black Decade, which specifically targeted it, or the role of the Algerian intellectual in creating the destiny that Algerian society reached. Yet despite that, the intellectual continued to write about society from behind the glass, displaying others' lives, sinking in the loneliness and isolation that overwhelmed him after the fear that surrounded him from all sides and in all places. This state can be found echoing in the novel, but the writer preferred to show the condition of the ordinary human being who fights death in the Nineties and remained a prisoner of fear and killing in rural areas especially.

Among the issues raised in the novel is a subject of great importance that leads us to topics related to the sociology of the body, namely the issue of illness and death that affects the human body, which appeared in the novel through the situation that Omar, the hero's brother, ended up in, and it was a situation that did not spare even him when the novel was nearing its end, after it turned out that he had cancer, liver and lung cancer, which would kill him, as he was in a convalescent phase after an operation to remove a tumor in the brain.

Here the book *The Body Matters* by Debra Gimlin or Devin Morgan says that "health and illness are not merely a matter of ideological changes that affect individual bodies, but they are decisively social issues; bodies carry class and gender and a large number of social meanings that contribute to producing different health outcomes" (Suscott & Morgan, 2019, p.37). Looking at the novel, we find that the hero was from the middle working class, which is pursued by these illnesses because, according to the writer, the rate of morbidity affects the working class. Thus, the writer worked on the marginal group that found nothing but some hard jobs to live through, such as the profession of fishing in estrangement or some difficult professions that Algerian expatriates resorted to after their escape from the homeland or their migration in search of work and a decent life.

Here the narrative of pain is born, from which the novel's characters began to suffer, starting with the hero who left the homeland and his family towards the unknown/estrangement, to struggle with loneliness and isolation and memories and the killing of his wife and his family's denial of him, to undergo another painful experience, which is the experience of illness that will end his life. Hence, there is no pain without evidence of it; those who express their pain do not merely display it, but they also share it through agreed-upon rhetorical forms (Moscoso, 2024, p.123). Such pains appeared with the character of his brother, who traveled to Petersburg with his wife, which means that he too drank the cup of exile and estrangement. The hero tells us about him, saying: "Circumstances separated us. He obtained a work contract in Belgium since I was fifteen. He is younger than Omar and older than me. His relationship with Omar was not good either; he was almost the reason for his departure to Belgium, but he maintained relations with the family members" (the novel, p.46).

The experience of bodily pain was lived by Omar after he was stricken with cancer, which made him move to Paris where he would receive treatment and be able to see his brother after a long period of estrangement. He says: "The next morning I asked about the hospital where surgical operations are performed for cancer patients, and I got the address and went directly towards it. When I arrived I walked cautiously for fear of meeting one of the family members or Omar himself. I asked at the information desk about his name, so they directed me to the intensive care room. I understood from the nurse that he had undergone the operation and that they moved him to intensive care because his condition was serious" (the novel, p.42). The problems then escalated after the terrorist groups targeted his brother's life.

We can simply pause at the manifestations of pain in the contemporary novel at least, as it has been recognized that the novel and narratives tend to write violence and war and crises because of the nature of contemporary life, which is dominated by instability and the multitude of conflicts that have colored cultural life and narration. Hence, the representation of human suffering is something that occurs frequently, after it moved from religious images throughout history and human bodies hanging as

offerings or tortured, to other bodies that were subjected to curse or abuse as a result of wars, which pushed writers to try to immortalize their exploits and heroism and epics and even their cognitive and intellectual struggle against the ignorance of humanity. Thus, these signs that work on showing cultural and human pain were relied upon in various arts and cultures to display the painful fate of victims and the punishments and harm that befall human beings.

The hero's story with Leila the Lebanese began through what Javier Moscoso called sympathy: "It is a kind of feelings of compassion and helplessness and anger and shame and lust that accompany the pain of others and always come from felt emotions" (Moscoso, 2024, p.30). When he arrived at the hospital, he was terrified by her loud screaming, which forced him to monitor her condition. He describes her saying: "She was screaming like a sinner heading to his grave, the scream of a terrified frightened person who refuses his inevitable destiny, except that she was objecting to being saved from death. Her body was convulsing on the bed, writhing in the throes of death. She was refusing resurrection and cursing the blood that runs in the veins. Her rebellion almost exceeded the nurses' ability to restrain her. She asked with all oppression: Why did you save my life? Let me join my little girl" (the novel, p.47). Naturally, he was drawn to her by her beautiful childish features and her delicate face that made the hero fall in love with her. He says: "That beautiful woman made me confess everything that was in my mind, and those things I had not discovered at all except in that session. She made me discover the ailment in myself and see matters clearly, and I think this step is the first step towards recovery, for the exhausted body does not heal except by identifying the source of the ailment and treating it or removing it" (the novel, p.67).

B- The Anxiety of Formal Architecture and the Chaos of Space:

The rise of minor or new narratives among contemporary novelists – especially the youth category – was linked to the search for difference and visibility and the attempt to rely on different references to prove their innate talent and narrative capacity. Writers of the postcolonial period went so far as to play with the concept of representation, which reflects the nature of the relation between the Self and the Other and the interaction between cultures and civilizations. The novelist no longer presents the same view on the issues of exile and migration and estrangement, and the spaces of representation of the marginalized, the expatriates and the refugees have diversified, even if the general feeling almost does not depart from what Edward Said mentioned about them: "The exile lives a middle state; he does not fully integrate with the new environment, nor does he get rid totally of the burden of the past environment. Half-solutions bother him" (al-Shehhat, 2022, p.169). Thus, they create what Fakhri Saleh called imaginary geography, which is constructed in the novel and consists of a mixture of different places, some of which appear directly through the metaphysical presence of the place frequented by the hero and characters, and some of which are colored in its angles and given its imaginary dimensions by what the writer has lived.

Therefore, from the beginning, it is acknowledged that there is an attempt to create a space for difference in such texts, because there is always belief in the text and in the influence of the cosmic worlds from which the writer/novelist draws her references. It always stands questioning reality and history and the time that rushes to change. Thus, speaking about similar or different techniques is a relative matter according to each study and each critic or reader. Then the novel as an art seeks

completeness; it is an unceasing journey in composition and construction, and any fixity leads to its death, as Milan Kundera says (Ben Toumi, 2024, p.18).

If the novel is a continuous journey towards searching for the most suitable form, it will never settle for the prevailing one and will resort to experimentation and transformation and substitution. Instead of falling into the repeated model, it will try to send the spirit of difference, but this does not mean that the available models have managed to do so. Although monotony threatens the novel, that does not kill it yet, and this does not mean that the new generation must make a radical change in the fictional mold, but it is required to make a break with the inherited fictional structure if it wants to get out of the crucible of repetition and formal regurgitation, because writing no longer depends on contents as much as it tries to escape from the paralysis of the prevailing discourse and the climate of the literary experience besieged by repetitiveness. Therefore, one can find a kind of anxiety surrounding the fictional construction: anxiety of description, anxiety of narration, and anxiety of construction in general, so that we stand before a fragmented model that almost presents a general space without physical or architectural details, and what is around it has surpassed everything towards nothingness and stillness and darkness.

Chaos can be seen in the text: the chaos of expectation or narration, the chaos of features that hang over the space, and the chaos of the awaited fate of the characters, the chaos of events. Even his meeting with Zahra took place in the incident of his visit to his brother's grave. He describes her without focusing on her features, but rather wanted to convey her psychological state, saying: "She was holding her brother's arm and walking with the usual calm, declaring her mourning with her black veil. She had not changed much, but her features became sharper and more mature, her eyes teary and her gaze broken. It seems that that heart belonged to the martyr and I had become nothing but a distant memory folded in oblivion" (the novel, p.144). In the narrative imaginary, the writer gathered a set of themes without siding with one of them, and they all intertwined to tell of the instability of goals and results for the hero who left his homeland waiting for salvation, only to fall prey to his wishes and destiny. When the novel was first encountered, there was the belief that it would deal with women's issues first and foremost, a suffering rebellious heroine or an intellectual woman trying to assert herself, or social issues surrounding the woman. Some books were even marked that were expected to be used, such as Mohamed Bekkai's *Jadl al-Niswiyya* (The Debate of Feminism) and *al-Niswiyya wa al-Jandar* (Feminism and Gender) by Rabiha Hadour. But the shock came with a text far from expectation: a masculine narration without a mask, and themes with a national human dimension and issues that go beyond the borders of the homeland to embrace the civil war in Lebanon and some of the life that migrants live in the West, specifically in France, to the extent that it was difficult to find in her text any feminine specificity that can be acknowledged in style and language and themes.

Since chaos has been linked to concepts and conditions that everyone seeks to avoid, such as disorder, confusion, and mixture, it means matters like departing from prevailing laws, the disturbance of order, and the loss of control, and the vast negative concept of chaos was formed (Ben Nasser, 2023, p.20). This will be useful here to speak about some of the chaos that has affected the structures of fictional narration. It is not random, but it creates a kind of experimental chaos that wants to shake the position of current structures in front of the construction techniques it seeks, which appear in creating a different subjective imagination and in the nature of the style that shapes the image of place and character. For that, the writer used an aesthetic technique that can be called the narrative of dream, which is a structural

element that enters into narration, and it is a technique worthy of attention. Here Mohamed al-Shehhat says: “Dreams have slipped into the texture of texts and records and oral and written narratives to the point that the dream has become one of their central thematic components and a sign of their rhetoric and a strategy of their cultural interpretations, which began with the descent of the religious text and then was formed in the space of the Arab Sufi text, passing through the representations of dreams in creative and imaginative Arab texts ancient and modern” (al-Shehhat, 2022, p.209).

The beginnings of writers’ inclination to create this new aesthetic experience in fictional texts were almost a product of the contemporary period, even if its old manifestations are clear in the Qur’anic and poetic text. Criticism sees that the domination of the pessimistic tendency and crises on the Arab scene made this narration an opportunity to address the Arab crisis and problems that afflicted it since the setback of June 1967. Postcolonial and modernist discourse deconstructed grand narratives and totalities and ideals and sacred things, to search for new systems in representation and deconstruction and reading, and started to develop them in response to the general situation and to adapt them to the defeats of the human self in each phase, and the search began for narratives that suit the nature of each region and phase and author as well.

The dream narrative seems to play the same role as prolepsis in temporal arrangement, because it gives narration the opportunity to foresee something that will soon come and change the course of events. The writer did not create a distance between dream and reality; rather, the technique came directly to announce the climax or the element of surprise or to suggest the truth of the character’s intuition about what will happen because she anticipated matters. You feel you are before a narrator-hero and not a hero far from knowledge. Even memory in the novel was connected to the dream narrative, and it can be considered metaphorically as the death of narration, which was announced by Peter Osborne, who said: “The narrative of the death of narratives is larger than most narratives that try to consign them to the world of oblivion. Postmodern culture is taken with change and movement and open endings and instability; some of it flattens everything, starting with Socrates and ending with Sartre, reducing everything to one boring hour” (Ben Bouaziz, 2023, p.15).

Dreams visited the hero in that period in which his brother Omar was ill, as if they came to inform him that there is a tragedy his family is going through while he sits far away, but his heart still feels what is behind the seas. He narrates once the nightmare that warns of the coming of death: “I opened the door gently, and there I saw her sitting cross-legged on the carpet in the middle of the room, muttering Ayat al-Kursi and placing cold compresses on the forehead of my brother, stretched in front of her like a dead man... I approached more, and found him as a coffin with my brother Omar inside it, and I was wandering fixing wooden planks that covered his corpse” (the novel, p.42).

When the narration of the dream is completed, we are surprised in the early morning by the arrival of his brother Youssef, who came from Belgium to inform him of Omar’s cancer and his dying in the hospital. He says about that: “I approached slowly and saw him stretched exactly as I saw him in the dream, connected to intensive care machines and a heart-rate monitor. It seems that his condition is really serious, and it seems that he is struggling with death” (the novel, p.46). We can notice that this technique functions in the novel in the place of prophecy, which we previously saw in the play Oedipus Rex when King Laius was told about the awaiting future.

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