



The dialectic of the relationship between the ego and the other and the question of identity in the postcolonial novel

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Abstract:

Postcolonial studies put forward a set of cognitive and cultural theses that revolve in their entirety around the issues of ego, the other, marginalization, identity and cultural difference...Perhaps the geography of travel experienced by many Arab novelists made them adopt post-colonial sayings, to express the experience of migration and its cultural and civilizational repercussions, and the various obstacles faced by their identity and cultural specificity in the host Western society, which is witnessing multiculturalism and the conflict of identities, where their creative works seek to dismantle the colonial discourse and its grand narratives, which It was created on the one hand by colonialism, and on the other hand by the reconstruction of an identity to extract the voice of the self from the hegemony of the Western narrative. In this new cultural context imposed by the transformations taking place in the world, the Arabic novel tries in the post-colonial context to address the worlds of migration and their interconnected realities that reflect the nature of the new reality and its cultural implications on the identity of immigrant minorities. Based on this, our research paper attempts to provide a critical vision of the new post-colonial cultural context , and to stand up to the issues of identity raised by the post-colonial context as a cultural and intellectual project that seeks to understand the way novelists deal with the post-colonial stage, by posing the following problem: How did the experience of migration and the issue of identity.

Keywords; Postcolonialism, the Arabic novel, identity, the ego, the other.

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Introduction:

The Postcolonial studies are based on a set of epistemological and intellectual frameworks that seek to deconstruct Western hegemony and expose its underlying cultural discourses and biases. By generating counter-cultural discourses, these studies aim to reinterpret history from the perspective of marginalized self, thereby revealing the imperialist ideologies propagated by the West through its various cultural discourses. This is particularly evident in today's political and cultural context, marked by radical upheavals that have bifurcated the world into The southern hemisphere of slavery and the northern hemisphere of diaspora and migration, where these two worlds become strangely dual in the delusional scenario of the political unconscious(Bhabha, 2006).

The relationship between the two worlds is based on Western imperialism and its authoritarian tendencies, given the Western political and cultural agenda that imposes its superiority on marginalized groups, especially with the growing migration of marginalized peoples to Western societies, fleeing the dystopia of the Third World to the utopia of Europe, where different cultures meet and the cultural references of both sides multiply in response to the current historical moment, resulting in racial mixing and cultural diversity.

In this new cultural context, the novel takes shape as a cultural discourse that calls for a countercultural vision based on postcolonial studies and their epistemological propositions, which promote peaceful coexistence and cultural openness to different identities. In this research paper, we will attempt to examine the dialectic of the self and the other through their cultural encounter, as well as consider the question of identity from the perspective of the postcolonial novel in the new cultural context.

1.Identity: (A controversial concept):

'Identity' is a philosophical concept that has been the subject of much debate —much like other philosophical concepts that remain perennially contested. Indeed, identity is a fundamental philosophical issue, from Socrates' famous dictum 'Know thyself' to Freud and through the works of many other philosophers (Maalouf, in the name of identity, 2015) who have grappled with it extensively, given its pivotal role in the lives of individuals and communities. This enduring preoccupation has rendered theoretical consensus elusive, owing to the concept's expansive historical and semantic dimensions, The meaning of identity varies across philosophies, thinkers, and historical epochs, contingent upon philosophical systems, ideologies, and the historical contexts that have shaped human thought and existence (Djilali, 2016).

Despite its ambiguity, identity's significance in affirming human existence cannot be denied. It constitutes a cornerstone of human thought, and while a precise definition remains methodologically challenging, it is necessary to outline its conceptual framework, however provisionally. Amin Maalouf, in *In the

Name of Identity*, acknowledges this difficulty, A lifetime of writing has taught me to mistrust words. The most transparent are often the most treacherous. Among these deceptive words is 'identity'—we all believe we grasp its meaning, yet we continue to trust it even as it slyly comes to signify its opposite. (Maalouf, in the name of identity). This semantic instability stems from identity's reliance on diverse ideological and disciplinary perspectives. The French thinker Alex Mucchielli defines it as a composite of norms that allows for the definition of an object or an internal sentiment. The sense of identity encompasses a range of emotions: unity, integrity, belonging, value, autonomy, and confidence rooted in a will to exist. (Mucchielli, 1993)

This definition underscores identity's role in delineating the self, actualizing its existence and autonomy, and anchoring it within a collective. At its core, identity affirms the self's presence in the world and asserts its distinct cultural and historical particularity vis-à-vis others. Yet, many global conflicts and atrocities feed on the illusion of a singular, unchosen identity. The art of manufacturing hatred invokes the magical forces of a supposedly sovereign, hegemonic identity that eclipses all other affiliations. (Sen, 2008) Such supremacist narratives have fueled sectarian and ideological wars, destabilizing peace and coexistence among cultures and peoples.

This hierarchical view obscures the plural nature of identities, denying their diverse referents and betraying their insularity—as if identity were a fixed, immutable given. The globally centered identity, framed as the "original," aligns with the cultural hegemony imposed by the West. The imposition of a supposedly singular identity is often a decisive tactic in inciting sectarian confrontation, (Sen, 2008, p. 9) exacerbating identity conflicts that erode possibilities for peaceful coexistence and intercultural dialogue. Recognizing that identities are robustly plural—and that the importance of one need not erase others (Sen, 2008, p. 34) offers a transcendent perspective that challenges philosophies privileging monolithic identities, which have historically legitimized exclusion and violence.

2.From Paradigm to Cultural Hybridity: Rethinking Identity:

In rejecting Western centrality and its dominant narratives, the postcolonial context offers an alternative vision to the colonial model of identity, which interprets identity as a fundamentally static principle that formed the core of cultural thought during the imperial era (Said, Culture and Imperialism, 2014) This colonial framework treats identity as something fixed and unchanging, erasing other identities through systems of representation while elevating the dominant Western identity. In doing so, it denies the existence of non-Western identities and strips them of their specificity In order to support the principle of Western racial purity and the essentialism of the Western self.

Edward Said's scholarship and his critique of Western cultural systems expose the West's will to represent the East's identity, justified by Karl Marx's assertion that the Orient cannot represent itself; it must be represented (Said, Orientalism Western Conception of the orient, 2006). This imperialist logic

framed Eastern identity in rigid, unchanging terms, denying the East and its peoples even the possibility of evolution, transformation, or human agency in the deepest sense of the word. The Oriental and the Orient were reduced to a fixed 'attribute,' stripped of the capacity for movement and productivity (Said, *Orientalism Western Conception of the orient*, 2006, p. 326)

This Orientalist perspective confined the East to a state of incapacity and stagnation, revealing its political and imperialist underpinnings. By asserting Western superiority while diminishing Eastern identity, these fabricated justifications legitimized the West's domination and cultural subjugation of the East. The West represented itself as the embodiment of humanistic and civilizational progress—if the Oriental was irrational, depraved, childlike, and aberrant, the European was rational, virtuous, mature, and normal (Said, *Orientalism Western Conception of the orient*, 2006, p. 96) However, the postmodern period has contributed to the formulation of a new vision of the arrogant Western self, in which 'the Enlightenment "self" with a fixed and stable identity has been de-centralised and transformed into open, contradictory, incomplete, fragmented identities that return to the postmodern self' (Hall, 2008) ; this means that the postmodern period has overthrown the centrality of the self and refuted its fixed and unique identity. It calls for difference and multiplicity away from the reductionist view that modernity has established with its various discourses, a phase that has resulted in many transformations that have had a profound impact in disrupting Western centrism and its grand narratives that glorified itself and gave it a great concept that provided it with power and arrogance over other selves and identities.

Postmodernism changed the concepts of the self and identity by overthrowing the monolithic view of the self and the world, and questioning Western thought, which was based on modernist discourses with a colonialist tendency that sought to marginalise other parties and their specificity. Moreover, the beginning of this coup was in the late 18th and 19th centuries, when nationalism emerged against the backdrop of the struggle against the great empires. In 1815, specifically, following the defeat of Napoleon's project and the convening of the Congress of Vienna, history opened its doors to periods of national division. After World War II, the map of global influence changed, and the Non-Aligned Movement emerged during the Cold War and the polarization between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. This coincided with the emergence of international institutions concerned with human rights. (Hamad, 2020)

All these factors marked a transitional phase in global thought, contributing to the emergence of minorities, margins, and the oppressed... In a related context, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities that came in the context of resistance movements against European colonialism, and the general atmosphere foreshadowed wars of a new kind, namely 'identity wars', and the search for an effective voice for the

“margins”, whether in politics or culture’ (Benali, 2014), after colonialism and its exclusionary colonial practices.

The post-colonial stage came in the context of the new stage - post-modernism - to reformulate a new vision of these minorities from their own perspective, and to research the question of identity that has been imposed on humans in recent times, especially since the ‘mid-twentieth century to the beginning of the third millennium’, namely the decline of colonial movements and the events of 11 September 2001. Its importance lies in the fact that : The end of colonialism was in fact the stage of thinking about the national and cultural identities of the countries that emerged from the colonial experience, and the resulting migration to the Western world, and the rise of the voices of cultural minorities in metropolitan or American centres. (Benali, 2014, p. 149) This colonial act resulted in various repercussions that we clearly see in the Arab reality and its parameters.

The previous argument refers us to the arguments of the cultural critic Edward Said, who seeks to question the colonial discourse and its stance on ‘identity’, in order to present a counter vision that would reinterpret ‘identity’ according to new data that makes it a flexible cross-cultural statement, rejecting at the same time the static dimension of it, due to the special cultural nature enjoyed by Edward Said and his various travels between Palestine, Cairo, and the United States of America, these travels contributed to the formation of his different awareness of identity, especially that he belongs to the third world countries governed by political and cultural backgrounds with the West, as we have already mentioned. These journeys contributed to the formation of his different consciousness of identity, especially since he belongs to the third world countries that are governed by political and cultural backgrounds with the West, as we mentioned earlier, and this is what he declares in writing ‘Out of Exile’, The geography of migration, of departure, arrival, farewell, exile, longing, homesickness, and belonging, not to mention travelling itself. Each of the places I have lived in - Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, and the United States - has a dense and complex network of attractive elements that have been a spontaneous part of my growth and acquisition of my identity and the formation of my awareness of myself and others. (Said, Out of Place, 2000)

Homi Bhabah coined the term ‘third space’ to express the meeting of the two spaces with their different specificities, where contact and friction occur between their cultural identities. Therefore, Bhabah emphasises the need to seek ways of negotiation and for the Western metropole to abandon its condescending thought that has prevented marginalised subjects from living properly in these Western societies, and its extreme view of marginalised subjects.

In addition to his portrayal of the situation of immigrants in Western societies that reject them, and the stakes facing their original identity in these societies, which is an explicit desire by Baba to overthrow the idea of identity centrality, and call for attention to different identities, and to listen to the

suppressed voices, immigrant minorities, and the experiences of exile and diaspora... To read Homi Bhabha is to live those moments of unsettling strangeness, at the border between cultures, nations, identities, and worlds; on the bridge; in the zone of hybridity, attraction, and fission (Bhabha, 2006, p. 9) imposed on them by the new context and its new cultural contents, where they lived in a state of anxiety. This made the question of identity one of the questions posed by the postcolonial discourse, especially with the growing phenomenon of migration to the Western world where different cultures meet and clash with each other, often in very different relationships of domination and subordination (Lumba, 2007) in the face of the hostile and imperialist Western gaze that claims racial purity and cultural superiority.

On this basis, the postcolonial perspective seeks to refute Western cultural and epistemological systems that suppressed the identities of oppressed peoples and marginalised their histories, as writers of newly independent peoples can now write their own novels that reclaim their stolen identities and present their own histories and cultures in their own voices and from a perspective that serves their interests and goals. (Bouazza, 2018), far from the reductionist perceptions that Western centralism has perpetuated in its various cultural discourses, which claim racial purity and cultural superiority that excludes the idea of difference between cultures and the multiplicity of cultural references that guarantee their cultural and civilisational specificity, and which exclude the idea of difference between cultures and the multiplicity of their cultural references that guarantee their cultural and civilisational specificity.

3. The crisis of identity in the postcolonial novel:

First of all, it is worth noting that an individual's identity expresses his sense of belonging to a particular group with which he shares his socialisation, customs, traditions, daily interactions, etc., in addition to his awareness of his shared history with this group, which achieves his own identity and independence, as the formation of identity among peoples and nations does not take place in a short time, it is the product of a long historical period, in which many elements blend, from ancestral experiences to a common geographical environment, in addition to religious, linguistic and social commonalities such as customs and traditions (Bualaskik, 2016). This means that the relationship between the individual and the group to which he belongs is built on a cultural basis that allows them to interact with each other and adapt within a common cultural fence that draws clear boundaries to achieve their cultural and ontological specificity. However, the situation will be different when this self migrates to the European space with its different identity formed from a set of cultural patterns different from the culture of the other, where this individual is placed within turbulent cultural contexts that result in difficult issues related to the issue of identity and its issues, which negatively reflect on the relationship of this self with the Western Other.

The researcher in the post-colonial novel notes the great space that the issue of the civilizational conflict and the identity crisis has taken in contemporary novel writings, so that she sought to embody that conflict and represent the friction and convergence between East and West in the Arab creative arena, as well as depicting the state of Arabs as she goes through the new birth of civilization with the other, which made her experience the throes of death as she seeks to loosen the restrictions imposed on her, as well as facing the challenges and temptations presented to her in order to abandon her cultural and civilized identity, Identity is forms: like the cultural and civilizational identity of a nation of nations, it is the fixed, essential and common set of general features and divisions that distinguish the civilization of this nation from other civilizations, and that make the national or national personality a character that distinguishes it from other national and national personalities. (Radwan, 2012)

The other seeks to obliterate this cultural particularity and therefore invites it to unite with him intellectually, civilizational and ideologically, in view of the latter's cultural poverty that makes it isolated and isolated from the desired discourse of globalization, hence contemporary novels assumed the role and began to raise this issue in its details, thus trying to present this conflict and the fate of identity, which oscillated between

In the post-colonial context, the novel formed a fertile space to address the identity crisis experienced by the Arab in the face of the major transformations and conflicts that followed the colonial period. Narrative texts have been preoccupied with depicting the predicament of the Arab self in the face of the dominant Western other, especially in light of globalization, which has deepened its sense of marginalization and dependence. The seriousness of this crisis is manifested in the fact that it has placed the Arab identity at a delicate crossroads of civilization, where it faces a strange unbridled desire to dominate and reach greatness at the expense of local particularities

This civilizational crisis is an expression of the nature of the problematic relationship between the ego and the Western other, which took shape through direct friction between East and West. This spatial confrontation contributed to highlighting the fundamental differences between the two parties, which prompted the Arabic novel to present questions of identity and belonging in an attempt to understand this crisis and its causes. Hence, the Arabic novel can be read as a counter-discourse that seeks to dismantle Western centralism and restore consideration of the marginalized self in a context characterized by a struggle over representation and identity

The post-colonial Arabic novel has raised the identity crisis raised by the new cultural context in the space of the Other. Novelists tried to formulate a conscious literary vision that condemns the Western intellectual and cultural frameworks that perpetuated the culture of displacement and exclusion, These migrations have contributed to demographic, cultural and ethnic shifts within

Western societies, creating a social and cultural reality, from which a group of intellectual and literary elites emerged that contributed to the development of theories and approaches to (cultural diversity), (cultural hybridity) and (cultural difference) (ali, 2016).

In response to the new contexts that force the West to change its perception of the other, especially in the face of the recent waves of migration and to overcome the compulsions of bitter history, it calls for activating cultural dialogue within recognition of other cultures and affirming the legitimacy of difference and cultural pluralism.

In the face of the new cultural context that witnessed a significant increase in the number of migrants to Europe, due to political and social circumstances, the idea of migration was entrenched in the ego's consciousness, making it search for a new horizon for its life that frees it from the rules of coercion imposed on it in its current situation, so it was necessary for it to search for alternative homelands that provide it with a decent life, and this existential choice that it imagined living well in will place it in a turbulent cultural context charged with contradictions that will weaken its connection with the place, where the ego will face a hostile space in its search for being in a self-hostile space. It pushes her to search for and assert her identity in the midst of this new European society with its different cultural values that conflict with her original values and tend to overthrow the voice and identities of minorities. This exclusionary European outlook towards immigrants stems from a belief in a fixed origin and self-centred identity, which creates ethnic and cultural intolerance, and thus this vision tends to create this cultural gap between Europeans and marginalised minorities that always makes them feel foreign and impossible to belong to the European space and identify with it.

As a cultural discourse, the novel relies on post-colonialist arguments in order to establish a counter-cultural consciousness that would reveal the implications of Western cultural discourses and oppose their cultural representations associated with their colonial backgrounds that governed the production of the marginalised image of Eastern culture, a path that leads to the development of new cultural strategies that transcend cultural superiority and the idea of an intrinsic identity rooted in the Western consciousness. This path leads to the development of new cultural strategies that go beyond cultural arrogance and the idea of essentialist identity rooted in Western consciousness, based on the existence of this cultural interaction between the colonised and the colonisers imposed by the globalised era, which calls for the need to seek ways of negotiation and the possibility of overcoming the compulsions of colonial history, and openness to other cultures away from the logic of cultural centrism.

The postcolonial novel has worked on a number of cultural arguments that revolve around the issues of centre and margin, self and other, identity and other sensitive issues that the world is witnessing, given the current political and cultural situation in the world today, where difficult issues have emerged related

to issues of identity, self and its relationship with the other. From a creative perspective, it establishes a cultural vision that liberates it from the concepts imposed by Western centralism and its exclusionary and transcendent perceptions, which reveals its counter vision that goes beyond the biased interpretation of the concept of identity that remained captive to those Western fences, and confronts the imperial narrative that exercised its power in the colonial period over marginalised minorities who were subjected to domineering cultural contexts.

The texts of the postcolonial novel are a reaction to the exclusion of their marginalised identity in the colonial perception, and their excluded self in the midst of a Western centrality that establishes its superiority in contrast to the inferiority of the different other (the East), and thus this militant argument seeks to overthrow the belief in the essentialism of the self and the stability of its identity. which constitutes the real basis of identity today, does not necessarily always lead to domination and hostility, but rather to participation, transcending borders, and shared and intersecting histories. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 2014, p. 10). This achieves the desired coexistence by abandoning this exclusionary vision to adopt a pragmatic pragmatism of difference and multiplicity that rejects the idea of intolerance and moves away from hate speech. We can say that the contemporary Arabic novel has relied on post-colonialism in its interpretation of the new reality that imposes a set of new cultural parameters and values, as many models of the contemporary Arabic novel call for the need to accept the other and not to despise cultural and ethnic differences on the basis that cultures are hybrid and overlapping throughout their historical process, and this means that the location of culture today is not in a pure core of the tara, but on the edges of the contact between civilisations where "interstitiality", "hybridity" and "identities" are launched (Bhabha, 2006, p. 11). This vision enshrines the idea of cultural acceptance and coexistence between cultures, away from the principle of racial purity and cultural superiority that characterised the colonial historical context, where the representation of identity broke away from the fences set by the colonial context and its holistic interpretations.

The civilizational relationship between the Arab self and the Western one is characterized by a state of turmoil, as a result of the deep contradictions and civilizational paradoxes inherent in the fabric of European Society. These contradictions have created a state of psychological instability in the migrant self, which has lost its balance and led to a constant feeling of anxiety and existential loss. An Arab immigrant who lives in a state of rupture between his Arabism and Western society with its cultural components finds himself unable to absorb the other Western or integrate with it in a balanced way. The successive fateful crises that this self faces in its new reality play a prominent role in deepening its existential suffering. The accumulation of her psychological and civilizational crises also made her live in a state of acute internal conflict between her desire to integrate into the new society and her fear of losing her identity.

This crisis situation negatively reflected on her ability to deal with the other with a clear objective vision, so she began to oscillate between excessive fascination and complete rejection

Which made her re-raise the problem of her existence in this social fabric, which is different from her in all its ideological, religious and intellectual dimensions...Despite its attempts to identify in its civilized being and unite with its different cultural worlds, the rejection practiced against it in post-colonial Western societies will create a nostalgic need for the native land and a sense of emotional belonging to it.

In the midst of these fateful crises, the Self has become oscillating between two different worlds, between its original homeland, which has marginalized it in the alleys of alienation, and identity in the other, which treats it as a nobody in its Western society, and so this self is psychologically and socially unstable amid a cultural reality that hindered it from integrating into the alternative homeland that originally rejected it, it is a reality based on loss and Therefore, the narrator has become a storyteller, putting a distance between himself and his stories to reveal what lies below the surface, and allows the fractured and divided self to question the coherence of reality and present it with its holes, gaps, noise and silence (Barada, 2011)

Thus, the narrative departs from its stereotype to express the self that suffers from a self-division that makes it in a constant psychological struggle, especially when it comes to the expatriate self who lives between two different worlds and cultures.

Finally, based on this theoretical proposition, we can say that the Arab ego is living in suffocating existential crises related to identity in European societies, as it finds itself torn between its original cultural values and the prevailing social norms in the host societies. This acute exposure to two different identities contributed to the deepening of her sense of alienation, which prevented the achievement of a truly peaceful coexistence with the different other. This crisis is exacerbated by the influence of the Orientalist representative system, which has established stereotypes about the East and its culture, aiming at marginalizing the Arab identity and undermining its foundations. In the face of this context, the Arab novel raises its counter-vision, seeking to dismantle the stereotypes that Orientalism has imprisoned the East within its frames. At the same time, it calls for overcoming cultural intolerance and critical openness to the other, emphasizing the need to respect mutual cultural peculiarities as the basis for any real coexistence.

Conclusion:

At the conclusion of this research paper, we can say that the Arabic novel, based on postcolonialism, has led to new cultural interpretations far from the Western holistic view that limited the boundaries of identity and fenced the truth within the walls of Western culture based on the principle of cultural superiority,

and this is why the postcolonial novel undertakes a set of concepts that counter the colonial vision and opens the space for minorities, immigrants, and the oppressed to express their identities and cultures in their own voices. This is why the postcolonial novel undertakes a number of concepts that counter the colonial vision, and opens the space for minorities, immigrants, and the oppressed to express their identities and cultures in their own voices, in an effort to confront the historical and cultural interpretations that the West has enshrined in its epistemological and cultural discourses.

The Arabic novel in the context of postcolonialism represents a cultural project that works on a number of cultural sayings, centered on the issues of the center and the margin, the self and the other, identity and other sensitive issues witnessed by the world, in an effort to dismantle the binaries of colonial discourse, where the Arabic novel in its narrative presented serious problems related to the issues of identity and its condescending exclusionary perceptions, which reveals its counter-vision that goes beyond biased interpretation. The concept of identity that remained captive to those Western fences, and confronts the imperial narrative that exercised its power in the colonial period over marginalized minorities subjected to authoritarian cultural contexts.

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