



The Image Of The Intellectual In Rachid Boudjedra's Novel A Thousand And One Years Of Nostalgia

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Abstract:

This study aims to depict the complex relationship between the intellectual and power in Arabic literature in general, and Algerian literature in particular, across various historical stages influenced by political, social events, and intellectual currents that significantly shape this image. It reflects the contradictions and conflicts experienced by Algerian society.

Rachid Boudjedra, a prominent novelist, has utilized narrative discourse to penetrate the taboo subjects (power, religion, politics) through his protagonist, "Mohamed the Nameless," who attempts to impose his logic to alter the course of surrounding events. At times, he adopts a positive stance opposing authority, other times he remains neutral, and on some occasions, he is negative.

Keywords: Intellectual, Novel, A Thousand and One Years of Nostalgia, Rachid Boudjedra.

Introduction:

Creative works have long celebrated the intellectual as an ideal value in their portrayal of the struggle between good and evil. This celebration has been evident in many literary works, where the employment of the intellectual character has become a necessity imposed by the realities and developments of the time. Through this character, writers convey their perspectives and views on these outcomes, making it challenging to find a literary work devoid of an intellectual protagonist playing a leading role. The novelist often depicts the intellectual from various angles, reflecting his role in society and his impact on individuals and the cultural environment.

The presence and portrayal of the intellectual in novels have varied, often depicting them as individuals capable of critiquing social and political realities. This role highlights injustices and corruption through a deep analysis of events. In some novels, the intellectual is portrayed as an opponent of prevailing authority or traditional ideas, symbolizing rebellion and the quest for truth, which places them in constant conflict with dominant forces. At times, the intellectual is depicted as an isolated character or one who struggles to connect with society, possibly due to differing ideas or lifestyle from

prevailing values. Such intellectuals are seen as drivers of intellectual and cultural renewal.

Rachid Boudjedra's novel *A Thousand and One Years of Nostalgia* is one of the works that engage with the theme of the intellectual. In this novel, Boudjedra attempts to depict a town located deep in the desert, living mundane daily lives, involved in routine activities such as silk shroud trade and ram fighting, and experiencing a hidden conflict between the town's ruler—who was once a brothel's drifter—and the family of Mohamed the Nameless, especially Mohamed himself, who is portrayed as a cultured hero knowledgeable about the history of the Islamic and Arab nations. Through this conflict, Mohamed's view of the ruling authority, which employs devious methods to remain in power—even if it means colluding with external hostile forces seeking to exploit the town's resources—is revealed. Beyond this conflict, Mohamed the Nameless leads a near-mythical life until a group of foreign filmmakers arrives to shoot a film inspired by the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. This event turns the lives of the inhabitants upside down, exposing their reality under oppressive rule, as the filming transforms into a disguised occupation with the ruler's blessing. A confrontation occurs between the inhabitants, led by Mohamed the Nameless, and the allied forces, but ultimately, the townspeople prevail as they are in the right. Through this novel, Rachid Boudjedra attempts to present a progressive and forward-looking perspective on the Arab historical reality, forecasting events that have occurred and are occurring.

Based on the above, this study seeks to answer several questions: How does Rachid Boudjedra present the image of the intellectual in his novel? Does this novel reflect the true image of the intellectual across the various ideologies that have succeeded one another during that period? Before addressing this issue, it is essential to examine the conceptual framework of this research.

1. The Concept of the Intellectual: Linguistic and Conventional Definitions

1.1 The Intellectual linguistically:

The growing scholarly interest in the image of the intellectual in literature has made the term “intellectual” one of those concepts that are difficult to pin down due to differing perspectives on its definition and the lack of a comprehensive definition. According to some critics, the difficulty in defining the term is attributed to its overlap with other terms, particularly in certain foreign languages, leading to multiple connotations in translation.

In the Quran, the term “intellectual” (مُنَقَّفٌ) is not used directly; rather, the root “نَقَفَ” appears, as in the verse: “And kill them wherever you have overtaken them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you” (Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:191). Here, “نَقَفْتُمُوهُمْ” refers to where you find them on earth and encounter them there. The term “مُنَقَّفٌ” is derived from the triconsonantal root “نَقَفَ”. According to the *Lisan al-Arab* dictionary, the term “نَقَفَ” conveys meanings related to sharpness, understanding, and adeptness: “To be skilled or adept at something. ‘Thaqafa’ means to be perceptive, intelligent, and quick

to learn... The term also denotes someone who has become skillful and agile” (Ibn Manzur, 1997, p. 121).

From this definition, two connotations emerge: one cognitive, related to the individual's skill in understanding and combat, and the other sensory, relating to the spear or tool used by archers to correct its alignment. In modern usage, the meaning of "intellectual" differs significantly from these traditional connotations.

1.2 The Intellectual in Conventional Terms:

Among the prevalent definitions in this field is the one proposed by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, who defines the intellectual as: “Real intellectuals form a class of scholars or learned individuals who are truly rare, as they advocate for the eternal standards of truth and justice, which do not belong to this world” (Said, 2006, p. 35).

According to Gramsci, an intellectual is anyone engaged in cultural, educational, and moral activities. The term "intellectual" was first used by Saint-Simon (1760–1825) to refer to a new class of cultural elites whose status is based on intellectual and theoretical production (Al-Salam, 2009).

Arab thinkers have also defined the "intellectual" by focusing on different aspects of their formation. For instance, Ayman Harb defines an intellectual as: “One who is preoccupied with issues of rights and freedoms, or who is concerned with the politics of truth, or who commits to defending cultural, social, or universal values, through thought and debates, or through writings and positions... They may be poets, writers, philosophers, scientists, jurists, engineers, or practitioners of any profession, trade, or craft” (Sartre, 1973, pp. 12–13). This definition emphasizes the intellectual's preoccupations and categorizes different types of intellectuals.

Edward Said, regarding the true or organic intellectual, states: “I believe that the choice facing the intellectual is either to align with the stability of the victors and rulers, or to consider stability as a temporary condition threatening the less fortunate with total extinction... The true intellectual necessarily stands on the opposite side of power, standing alone with his bare chest, shouting truths that are unwelcome to it and to its audience, which follows its misleading propaganda about security, unity, religion, and resistance to terrorism” (Said, *The Image of the Intellectual*, 1996, pp. 37–38).

According to Said, a true intellectual is one who does not yield to unjust moments, even if they are destined to last a century, but rather confronts them as if they could be the reason for their downfall.

2. The Image of the Intellectual in Arabic Novels

According to critic Jaber Asfour, the image of the intellectual has been associated with novelistic production since the era of translated novels: “The emergence of the intellectual hero in the Arabic novel, as a subject of the narrative... and the transformation of this hero into a constitutive element of the novel or the central character among its figures, was a

necessary development that quickly became an inherent characteristic, becoming a hallmark of its creator who sought representations or counterparts before seeking contradictions or adversaries” (Asfour, 2003, p. 56).

Thus, the intellectual has continuously appeared in Arabic novels since their inception, with varying representations from one novel to another, depending on the novelist’s beliefs, choices, experiences, perceptions, and objectives. A prevailing image that can be observed is the clash of self with the other, society, and authority, evident since the foundational novels in the Arab world, such as *Zaynab* by Hussein Heikal, *Adib* by Taha Hussein, *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih, *The Doomed Student* by Abdelmajid Chafai, and *The Wind of the South* by Abdelhamid Ben Haddouga, among others. “The birth of the intellectual character in these tattered forms of the novelistic art, as known in the history of our modern literature, was accompanied by the emergence of the intellectual” (Mohamed Shadhli & Abdel Salam, 1952, p. 15).

Since its inception, Arabic literature has tackled the issue of the intellectual from multiple perspectives, including psychological, social, and political angles. These treatments have varied according to the novelist’s orientation, position relative to authority, and general view of the intellectual. This is evident in the works of authors such as Abderrahman Munif, Sonallah Ibrahim, Gamal al-Ghitani, and Naguib Mahfouz.

One of the prominent phenomena addressed by contemporary Arabic literature, closely related to the intellectual character, is religious terrorism or extremism and political violence of the ruling authority. Arabic novels may have “leaned towards the modern intellectual model in relation to the contrasting novelistic models that did not reach the level of the counter-hero or the opposing hero but remained confined to the margins of supporting roles that complement the features of the intellectual hero to whom the novel has aligned itself” (Asfour, 2003, p. 58).

In some feminist novels, the image of the intellectual has fluctuated between glorification and disparagement, with the latter often prevailing. Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifeh, from her first novel *We Have No More Maidens* (1974), and subsequent works such as *The Sandstorm* (1976), *Sunflower* (1980), and *Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman* (1986), depicts the Arab intellectual as a wretched figure unable to reconcile his positions and writings with his real-life practices. In her writings, he produces liberatory ideas that entice women, especially female writers, yet in reality, he reveals his psychological repressions. In *Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman*, the protagonist Iffat recognizes this complete bias in favor of the male child at the expense of the female, where everything the boy does is forgiven and accepted, while the girl is rejected, restricted, and lacks rights (Khalifeh, 1986, pp. 142–143).

Similarly, Algerian novelist Fadhila Farouk, in her novel *Discovery of Desire*, writes through the narrator: “Mary says that most Arab intellectuals view women merely as an object of pleasure, and therefore, they struggle for sexual freedom more than they fight to uplift women from their miserable conditions” (Farouk, 2006, p. 61).

Among the prominent issues addressed by Arabic literature regarding the image of the intellectual is his stance towards authority. Undoubtedly, the binary opposition between the intellectual and authority has dominated the narrative, creating a scene rife with intense conflict between the creative self, representing the intellectual, and the ruler or legislator, representing the authority. The image of the intellectual in relation to authority thus forms through three positions: the proactive, engaged intellectual; the neutral, detached intellectual; and the negative, defeated intellectual.

3. The Image of the Intellectual in the Novel A Thousand and One Years of Longing

3.1. The Positive Intellectual

The positive intellectual is one who actively engages with the issues of their time, viewing these issues as integral to their surroundings and responding to the prevailing disturbances with observation, follow-up, and positioning. This intellectual embodies these engagements in their writings within the bounds of genuine commitment. They possess the ability to transcend any situation that fails to reflect the true nature of humanity and are fully aware of the consequences of their actions (Al-Rahman, 1995, p. 108).

The positive intellectual is characterized by their broad and diverse cultural knowledge, striving to disseminate it among society to elevate its members beyond their state of backwardness. This intellectual continually interacts with various societal layers, contributing to liberating society from oppression and corruption and challenging false ideologies (Bachir, 2006, p. 136). According to Gramsci, this type of intellectual works towards the success of political and social projects that address the needs of the working class and meet their essential needs (Maghnia, 2010).

In the novel *A Thousand and One Years of Longing*, the image of the positive intellectual is prominently represented through the character of "Mohamed the Nameless" (Mohamed Adim al-Laqaab). As the only educated man in the village, he is obsessed with history and its influential figures, particularly admiring the renowned Ibn Khaldun (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 37). His repeated and diligent studies of historical achievements endow him with an enlightened mind, enabling him to challenge the rule of "Bander Shah" and oppose him, especially when the foreign film crew's arrival, which later turns into an occupation of the town, becomes apparent. He expresses his foreboding about this invasion even before its true nature is revealed: "They have taken it from us" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 9). This foresight eventually drives the intellectual to attempt a revolution and liberate the town from this occupation.

"Mohamed the Nameless" embodies the positive intellectual as envisioned by Boudjedra, serving as an effective instrument for change and reform through his ideas aimed at both personal and societal development. This type of intellectual is distinguished by their optimism and ability to propose constructive solutions to challenges and problems, encouraging others to think in effective ways.

3.2. The Neutral Intellectual

Neutrality is a political term that gave rise to the Non-Aligned Movement during the intense conflict between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union (prior to its dissolution). The connection between this term and the concept of culture and the intellectual involves the notion of cultural neutrality, which fundamentally differs from its political counterpart aimed at preventing nations from entangling themselves in global conflicts serving only the interests of two superpowers. In contrast, culture should not be neutral as it is always expected to take a clear stand against injustice, oppression, and ignorance. Neutrality represents a conceptual stance with infinite dimensions influenced by surrounding conditions and circumstances. Its proponents reject being labeled as defeated or passive, arguing that their stance is an extension of a timeless and universal philosophy (Ubaid, 2017).

In Boudjedra's portrayal, the neutral intellectual is depicted through the character of "Mohamed the Nameless," who is portrayed as submissive and compliant under the authority of "Bander Shah." This ruler issued arbitrary laws against the town's inhabitants. Instead of rebelling against these decisions, "Mohamed the Nameless" prefers neutrality, non-commitment, and indifference by retreating into a "self-imposed exile" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 87). Consequently, the character embodies the image of the neutral intellectual who is passively resigned to the authority, failing to rise in rebellion and disappointing those who place hope in him.

3.3 The Negative Intellectual

The negative intellectual is often associated with crises affecting the country or is someone who observes from a high vantage point or from a low-profile position, preferring not to be seen. Despite being aware of the ongoing discussions and issues, they refrain from participating in debates or solutions, expecting others to act on their behalf. The crisis experienced by the negative intellectual or the prominent label that can be assigned to them (the negative intellectual) is often linked to a cultural crisis (Lafteh, 2020).

The negative intellectual perceives themselves at the center of their surrounding environment, viewing the world from a self-enclosed perspective. They are only concerned with their personal matters, live solely for themselves, and only participate in public activities if they yield personal benefits (Al-Rahman, 1995, p. 108).

In Boudjedra's narrative, this type of intellectual is exemplified by the character of the merchant who founded the town of Manama. This character insists on establishing a town as a crossroads for salt trade, despite the town's unsuitability for this purpose. He stubbornly opposes abandoning his negative idea and establishes his town. However, this ill-conceived dream fails because the central hub for the salt trade has shifted a thousand kilometers away from that location (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 26). The merchant's ambition to make Manama a "capital connecting multiple civilizations and continents" (Boudjedra,

2002, p. 26) ends in disappointment. This negative character, driven by unreasonable folly, meets a tragic end: "He considered this massive failure a personal defeat and only found peace when he hanged himself from one of the trees he had planted himself" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 26). The character's tragic end results from their stubborn adherence to flawed beliefs and positions, attributing the error to the daily reality itself rather than the principles and goals they seek to achieve.

A negative intellectual remains so by adhering to the mandates of authoritative power through its decrees and laws, regardless of the nature of this authority. This leads to the establishment of a conformist discourse and creates an introverted reality with severe negative consequences, transforming a once positive and active intellectual into a passive and reclusive one.

4. The Duality of Victory and Defeat in the Revolution of the Intellectual Hero against Authority

The use of the intellectual character by writers from the Third World has emerged as a necessity driven by the conditions experienced by those nations. This urgency has accelerated the development of thinkers' and writers' perspectives on their countries' occupations, resulting in various literary works that address these positions by depicting the rebellious intellectual confronting the oppressive authority, whether representing colonial occupation or internal repressive regimes. The revolution of the hero is thus a metaphor for the revolution of the people symbolized by this hero.

This intellectual can be defined as a social being, and therefore, a human hero. He belongs to the rising forces within his community and people, moving positively in alignment with these forces. Hence, the symbolism of this hero, as a reflection of society, is justified. The hero embodies the writer's vision of his people's revolution and their struggle against despotism. This hero, while being a creation of the writer, also represents a projection of reality; he cannot merely be a product of the writer's imagination or a figment of his mind. Like the writer himself, this hero belongs to history and reality. In examining the literary works of Third World writers, it is rare to find a writer who refrains from depicting the revolutionary hero in his struggle with oppressive authority and the outcomes of this struggle, which oscillate between victory and defeat.

When Rachid Boudjedra explored the image of the revolutionary hero, he based it on two fundamental pillars: the struggle against internal oppressive rule and the struggle against foreign occupation. The first is represented by the authority of "Bander Shah," a dictator who has ruled Manama for a long time, following a collusion with the foreign exploiters, represented by "Mr. Brown," the scout. This ruler seeks to remain in power by any means, even "dreaming of giving himself the title of Commander of the Faithful" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 32). He allowed himself to manage the town as he wished, even considering separating from the central authority and handing over the town to "Mr. Brown," who promised assistance for this separation. As a result, "the scouts were allowed to occupy the area as they pleased" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 47), without any attempt

to obscure their presence. In fact, he extended help to achieve their goals and made considerable efforts to assist the foreign film crew coming to shoot a film adapted from "One Thousand and One Nights" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 7). This portrayal reflects another form of occupation, cultural alienation (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 36), and at the same time, it symbolizes military foreign occupation. The filming quickly turned into a military occupation aimed at eliminating the town's residents. "The relationship between the behavior of the filmmakers and their attempt to control the town is evident" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 33). It was not long before the town of Manama fell under the yoke of occupation. Amid these circumstances, the character of the revolutionary hero emerges from among the oppressed common people. This educated hero takes the lead in confrontation, exemplified by Mohamed the Nameless. This revolutionary stance stems from a deep political and social awareness. The success of the revolution requires intellectuals "not just from the social class in the sense that industrial workers and peasants form social classes, but they arise from all corners of the social world" (Schumpeter, 1965, p. 233). Thus, the revolutionary hero must represent all segments of his society, not just himself, bearing the burden of opposing the repressive, occupying, and colluding authority and persevering until achieving the expected victory.

From the outset, Rachid Boudjedra provides us with a view of his hero, "Mohamed the Nameless," in terms of his cultural level. He is also a character obsessed with history and its active figures, similar to "the famous Ibn Khaldun, whom he admired" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 37). His historical knowledge endowed him with an enlightened mind that enabled him to transcend submission to Bander Shah's rule, rebel against him, and stand against him. This was particularly evident when the foreign film crew's arrival, which initially appeared to be a cultural invasion, later turned into a military occupation of the town. He tells his friend the cobbler about his view of the invasion, even before its reality is exposed: "They have taken it from us" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 9). This foresight later drives the hero to attempt a revolution and liberate the town from this occupation.

The critical moment revealing the true face of occupation occurred when the film crew visited a restaurant for dinner. The resulting altercations led to a confrontation where "the foreigners drew their guns and killed several Manamans" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 26), followed by the exploitation of their corpses in filming scenes. From this incident, "Mohamed the Nameless and his supporters believed that the time had come for the town's people to awaken from their slumber and realize the damages" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 31) inflicted by this foreign occupation, which was supported by the colluding ruler. Consequently, the Manamans recognized that they were "victims of a deception hiding a trick of the ruler" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 32), thus necessitating change through revolution. This revolution required a decisive leader, as "revolutions that do not embrace decisiveness quickly swell and fade away" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 32). Mohamed the Nameless thus entered the preparatory phase of revolutionary action—raising public awareness. He succeeded largely, as "the people of Manama emerged from their stupor and realized that they had been oblivious to themselves" (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 39). This

awareness led to a response where the Manamans “reacted violently, destroying the set, shedding their illusions, and refusing to work for nothing or die” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 39).

Mohamed the Nameless worked to mobilize the townspeople against the ruler and the occupation, as both represented a unified force against the inhabitants. This position made him a target for the ruler, and such suffering befell anyone who represented his community or bore a banner for his group (Mohamed Shadhli & Abdel Salam, 1952, p. 51). The townspeople feared that their hero might be “killed secretly in revenge; anything is possible with the mad Bander Shah” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 43). However, the awareness among the Manamans grew, leading to street conflicts that lasted several months between the foreigners and the people of Manama (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 44). The revolutionary hero aimed beyond guerrilla warfare and exploited the conditions in Manama to keep everyone preoccupied temporarily until he could organize a real armed resistance against the invaders. This organization bore fruit as the Manamans “joined their efforts with those of Mohamed the Nameless, who had multiple extraordinary qualities, so they would not remain on the margins of history” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 79). This consolidation did not favor the ruler, who began to employ deceptive maneuvers aimed at winning over the Manamans. He announced “to the people of Manama that he was about to introduce democracy into the town and establish an open party for all and for all criticisms, thereby filling the void” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 106). However, this did not deceive the inhabitants but rather increased their awareness. They would not accept the idea of establishing a democratic party under a tyrannical regime, and historical evidence showed that such deceptive attempts were bound to fail.

This led the ruler to seek assistance from a third party, “Mr. Brown,” who agreed to support the ruler against the townspeople “but with one condition: that he agrees to sell his property in the crocodile lake at the upper and lower Nile, a lake that had enabled the irrigation and reclamation of the desert. Bander Shah agreed” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 108). This agreement led “Mr. Brown” to prompt General “Yahudi” to launch an attack on Manama with a heavily armed army. They managed to capture the resistance committee, except for Mohamed the Nameless (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 129). However, this did not prevent the revolution from continuing its victories, indicating the effectiveness of the revolutionary hero’s awareness efforts, which led the people to persist despite the absence of leadership. The hero reappeared, resorting to cunning after exhausting military means, by exploiting religious aspects to achieve his goals. He stole the Black Stone, representing a religious symbol considered sacred and untouchable. This action led to several favorable outcomes for the revolution. The authorities agreed to negotiate with the hero and listen to his demands. Mohamed The Nameless explained that he wanted only the departure of the foreigners, the end of the secret alliance between the Gulf king and the Jewish general, and the cessation of the film production” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 148). The hero’s demands were met, achieving a significant victory, largely due to the use of religion, a potent pressure tool against Third World peoples. The result was guaranteed because everything that happened was orchestrated by the Gulf king, who had

a hidden hand in orchestrating the occupation. Shortly after the Black Stone incident, they managed to “end the ruler’s functions, seize his properties, and convert his luxurious house into a shelter for children whose parents had been killed during various clashes and demonstrations under bombings. They also agreed to dismantle the so-called army he had created, convert the barracks into an international hotel, expel the film crew with financial compensation, and sever diplomatic relations with the Gulf king... That evening, these outcast people packed their belongings” (Boudjedra, 2002, p. 155).

Rachid Boudjedra effectively portrays the image of the victorious revolutionary hero despite the challenges he faces, ultimately triumphing on all fronts—against external occupation and internal collusion. Through this portrayal, he aims to convey a deeply entrenched belief in occupied countries: the right of peoples to self-determination. Mohamed the Nameless exemplifies the defiant Algerian revolutionary hero who embraces his people’s just cause.

-Conclusion

The portrayal of the intellectual in literature is a broad and multifaceted subject that cannot be confined to a single framework. Nonetheless, this discussion has aimed to provide an overview of the topic and highlight its most significant aspects. The following conclusions have been drawn:

- Mohamed the Nameless as a Committed Intellectual: He embodies the role of the intellectual by combining his duties as a scholar with those of a resistance fighter, manifesting this commitment through his actions and decisions.

- The Relationship between Intellectuals and Authority: This relationship is always marked by tension. The novel depicts the interaction between the intellectual and the occupying authority, illustrating the inherent conflicts and challenges.

- The Intellectual’s Role in Mobilizing the Masses: The intellectual plays an effective role in motivating the public. "Without a Title" uses his cultural tools and extraordinary abilities to inspire people to fight for justice and equality.

- The Novel as a Reflective Mirror: The novel serves as a mirror that reflects societal conditions and debates. Through the character of the intellectual, it mirrors societal issues and discussions, as he speaks on behalf of the oppressed and defends rights and freedoms.

- The Intellectual as a Critic of Reality: The intellectual often appears in literature as a critic of social and political realities, striving to unveil deception, hypocrisy, and expose truths.

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