



The Dialectic Of Self And Other In The Algerian Novel Abroad: The Works Of Amara Lakhwas As A Model

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Received: 28/05/2024

Accepted: 30/10/2024

published: 09/03/2025

Abstract:

The relationship between the self and the other is a central theme in literature written in exile. This relationship is dialectical; it often reflects a dialogue between two different civilizations and sometimes reveals a cultural clash that results in the non-acceptance of the other. This is evident in the Algerian novel written abroad, particularly through the experience of the novelist Amara lakhwas, who lived in Italy within a hybrid Western society. His works address central issues and raise important questions, such as the scope of a possible cultural dialogue. We have chosen to focus on two of his novels: "How to Suckle the Wolf Without Being Bitten" and "Little Cairo". Our analysis is grounded in postcolonial theory as it relates to marginalized and hybrid spaces.

Keywords: Other, identity, hybridization, third space, postcolonial studies.

Introduction:

Literature has always embodied central issues in human relationships, depicting them through a critical lens by raising a series of problems related to the relationship between the self and others. Like other forms of literature, the novel has influenced thematic aspects related to the exploration of issues that address the dimensions of this relationship, with different interpretations depending on the references of each novelist. This is evident in the Algerian novel, written by Algerian authors who lived abroad and grasped the meaning of fragmented identity in a hybrid Western society. The novelist sought to raise several questions about the extent to which a civilizational dialogue is taking place or not.

Among the Algerian novelists who have addressed the question of the self and the other is Amara lakhwas, whose works explore identity differences in the Western world and the resulting cultural clashes. He is a young novelist who left Algeria for Italy, where he spent a considerable amount of time producing several novels, such as "The Bed Bug and the Pirate" and "Divorce in the Islamic Way," as well as the two novels that represent the sample chosen for our study: "How to Suckle the She-Wolf Without Being Bitten" and "Little Cairo".

Based on these premises, our study aims to address several questions, which can be summarized as follows:

- How is the image of the Other embodied in literature written in exile?
- To what extent can a literary text embody the idea of cultural conflict and the fragmentation of identities?
- How does the space of cultural plurality convey an image of the Other through the works of Amara lakhwas?

Theoretical Introduction:

The dialectical relationship between the self and the other represents one of the most significant themes found in literary works written abroad. The expatriate environment, characterized by cultural plurality, diversity of nationalities, and mixed ethnicities, provides an ideal setting for the self to encounter the other.

Identity emerges as a prominent theme in the creative works of Amara lakhwas, alongside the presence of the issue of the author's stance towards the other, which is woven throughout his writings.

Based on this idea, we believe that the most suitable approach to analyze these texts is through the lens of postcolonial critique (Critique postcoloniale) or what is known as postcolonial studies (Etudes postcoloniales) or postcolonial theory (Théorie postcoloniale), as these studies focus on marginalized and hybrid spaces.

Postcolonial studies is considered one of the most significant intellectual developments in the Western academic landscape in the last decades of the twentieth century. Interest in this type of discourse emerged, drawing on a significant number of cognitive fields and intellectual trends as references to achieve its goals, which include raising awareness of the impact of imperialism on the colonies by condemning colonial phenomena and the intellectual, spiritual and cultural alienation it caused, affecting not only individuals but also societies. This led to the emergence of new contexts, the differences between which gave rise to interpretive approaches such as feminist and postcolonial and ethnic critiques¹.

Those engaged in postcolonial studies have worked to transform thought into a tool of resistance, making writing a means of constructing a specific imagination for the marginalized and oppressed. These oppressed groups include migrants who have left their countries, either forcibly or voluntarily, and who encounter multiple identities in their host countries.

The beginnings of postcolonial studies can be traced to the efforts of the Palestinian-American thinker Edward Said, who laid the groundwork for the theory in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. This placed him at the forefront of analysts of colonial discourse, with some even considering him the pioneer of the field².

Edward Said's works continue to contribute to the field of post-colonial studies, such as "Culture and Imperialism", which is considered a sequel to his earlier book *Orientalism*. Said regards it as the second part of *Orientalism* because it contextualizes the issues addressed in the latter within a broader framework, aiming to expand the analytical scope to include areas beyond the Arab East and Islamic Near East³.

Said's theoretical extensions are evident in his other works, such as *Representations of the Intellectual*, which consists of dialogues conducted with him, and *Reflections on Exile*. It is noteworthy that Said introduced several concepts central to post-colonial criticism, such as "counter-narrative" and dialectical reading. He also expressed views on hybridity and multiculturalism, asserting that "the idea of multiculturalism or hybridity, which forms the true basis of identity today, does not necessarily lead to control and antagonism but rather to participation and the transcendence of borders to shared and intersecting histories."⁴

This statement can be applied to our research context, which exemplifies the hybrid Western society, and we will see this idea present in the two novels later.

Edward Said played a significant role in shaping the field of post-colonial theory⁵, and his name is closely associated with it; he can be considered the main driving force behind the theory. However, he was not the only one who contributed to the establishment of these studies. Another intellectual figure who gained the attention of scholars and critics due to the importance of the subjects he analyzed is the Indian thinker Homi Bhabha. He authored several foundational works in post-colonial criticism, such as *Location of Culture, Nation and Narration*, and *The Third Space*, which is one of the most significant dialogues conducted with him.

It can be said that Homi Bhabha is directly related to our research topic, as he employed a range of theoretical concepts concerning fragmented identity in the diaspora and exile, and how the difficulties of civilizational dialogue affect identity. His work is grounded in a solid intellectual background primarily drawn from the works of French thinker Jacques Derrida and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

One of the most important concepts in Homi Bhabha's framework is the concept of hybridity, which he derived from Edward Said and later developed. This concept has become closely associated with Bhabha and is one of the most widely used and controversial terms in post-colonial theory. Alongside this concept is another one connected to Bhabha: the concept of the third space, where all cultural systems and signifiers are expressed, according to Bhabha⁶.

Cultural identity often manifests in this dual and contradictory space, which, for Bhabha, renders the claim of a hierarchical purity of cultures a hollow issue. Recognizing this dual space of cultural identity helps identify possible hybridities where cultural differences can operate⁷.

From the above, we can conclude that the theme of identity and its embodiment of the dialectical relationship between the self and the other is one of the most significant topics that post-colonial criticism has studied. Post-colonial critics have not only analyzed identity in literary works but have also examined the fragmentation and disintegration often associated with post-colonial identity. They have studied the outcomes of identity mixing, especially in diaspora or exile, where identities from various races, religions, and beliefs converge. This indeed leads to the realization of hybridity, which conceals attempts to affirm the reciprocity of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial world⁸.

Introduction to the text:

1. How to suckle the wolf without being bitten?

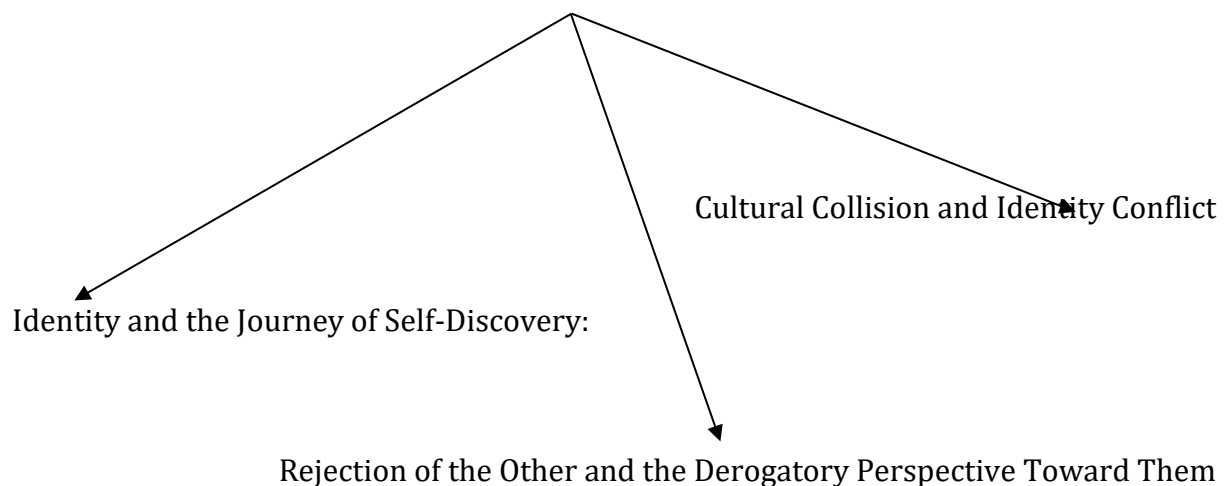
The events of the novel take place in an apartment building in Rome that houses residents of different ages, social classes, and cultural backgrounds. The novel features characters such as Parwiz Samadi from Iran, Iqbal Amirullah from Bangladesh, Manuela Marias Gonzalo from Peru, Johan Van Maraten, a young Dutch man, and Antonio Marini, a professor from Rome, among others. Most of the characters in this novel are migrants who have left their countries, often involuntarily. The novel depicts the daily problems and struggles of migrants, as well as the reality of conflict between the different nationalities living in the Vittorio apartment building.

2. Little Cairo:

This is a detective novel set in the "Marconi" neighborhood of Rome, where the author raises intellectual and social issues that migrants face in their daily lives in Western society. It also attempts to convey and embody the stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims through the conflict between the characters in the work.

A. How to Suckle the Wolf Without Being Bitten?

Manifestations of the Other in the Text of the Novel:



1. Identity and the Journey of Self-Discovery

The reader of this novel perceives the dominance of the theme of identity within it, along with its presence laden with numerous issues. One of the manifestations of the identity issue is seen in the context of the play concerning the problem of defining Italian identity. There is a question regarding whether “Amadeo,” the protagonist of the novel, is Italian or not. Here, one of the characters intervenes to assert that this question is pointless and yields no benefit:

“...then how do you know who is Italian? Is it someone born in Italy, or someone who possesses an Italian passport and ID card, or someone who masters the Italian language, or someone with an Italian name, or someone who resides in Italy? The issue, as you see, is very complicated”⁹.

This statement, placed in the mouth of one of the novel’s key characters, raises a critically important issue about the essence of identity. Does acquiring a certain identity require belonging to that country, or obtaining an ID card from that country, or do we become truly belonging to that country through mastering its language? This is a fundamental issue addressed by philosophers and thinkers, and it has been tackled by Imara Lakhous in this work filled with intellectual dilemmas.

One of the most important aspects of the text that embodies the theme of identity and demonstrates its presence is the reference to one of the most important works of the Lebanese Francophone novelist Amin Maalouf, who is known for addressing the theme of identity and otherness in his works, such as his work entitled “In the Name of Identity”. The novel also refers to the character of Leo Africanus, which is one of his most famous works, where the character Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan, known as Leo Africanus, represents fragmented identity in the best possible way.

The question of identity is present in the text, posed by the protagonist who wonders: “Am I an orphan like the twins Romulus and Remus, or an adopted child?”¹⁰.

The novelist reaches a stage of losing confidence in himself, doubting whether he is an orphan like the twins “Romulus” and “Remus”. The reference to these twins further confirms the identity issue addressed in this text. Historically, the twins mentioned were the sons of Silvia, wife of Mars, the god of war, who, according to legend, was forced to sacrifice her sons by throwing them into the waters of a river flowing through Rome. The fate of these twins was not to be thrown

into the river, but to be taken and raised by another woman, who named one “Romulus” and the other “Remus”.

Understanding this myth helps us understand the context in which one of the characters in the novel questions her identity and whether she is an orphan like the aforementioned twins.

2. Cultural Collision and Identity Conflict:

The novel *How to Suckle from the She-Wolf Without Being Bitten?* can be considered a true embodiment of the conflicting and clashing identities that exist in a hybrid Western world. This conflict is reflected through the characters in the novel, showcasing the lack of convergence between the self and the other, as well as the refusal to accept the other. This idea is represented on multiple levels.

Firstly, there is the internal conflict among Italians themselves, as seen with the character of Antonio Marini, a university professor from Northern Italy, who is in a constant struggle with Southern Italians, whom he accuses of laziness and sluggishness. His distrust extends even to Italians like himself, exemplifying the “North/North” conflict, as he states:

“Isn’t the she-wolf the symbol of Rome? I never trust the children of the she-wolf.¹¹”

This reflects his lack of trust in other Italians.

The second level of conflict is the North/South divide, where there is animosity between various identities, whether Italian or immigrant, who have failed to accept and coexist with one another. One character interacts with Parwiz Samadi, the Iranian character, with disdain and outright rejection:

“You are in my house; you have no right to speak, do you understand, you despicable foreigner... Italy is for Italians.¹²”

This is clear evidence of the refusal to accept the other, as illustrated by the statement:

“Migrants must be expelled and replaced with our poor children.¹³”

Another indication of cultural collision and identity conflict portrayed in the novel is the tendency to associate crime with immigrants without any discrimination.

3. Rejection of the Other and the Derogatory Perspective The Western view of the Other, that is, of anyone who is not Western, has often been negative and shaped by ready-made stereotypes. This has led scholars in the field of cultural studies to question the patterns of representation of otherness.

In this context, we observe a perspective filled with contempt and ridicule towards the other, as illustrated by an Italian character who asks

“Do they eat dogs and cats in Albania?¹⁴”

Here, the other is always portrayed as inferior, embodying stereotypes that symbolize backwardness and subordination.

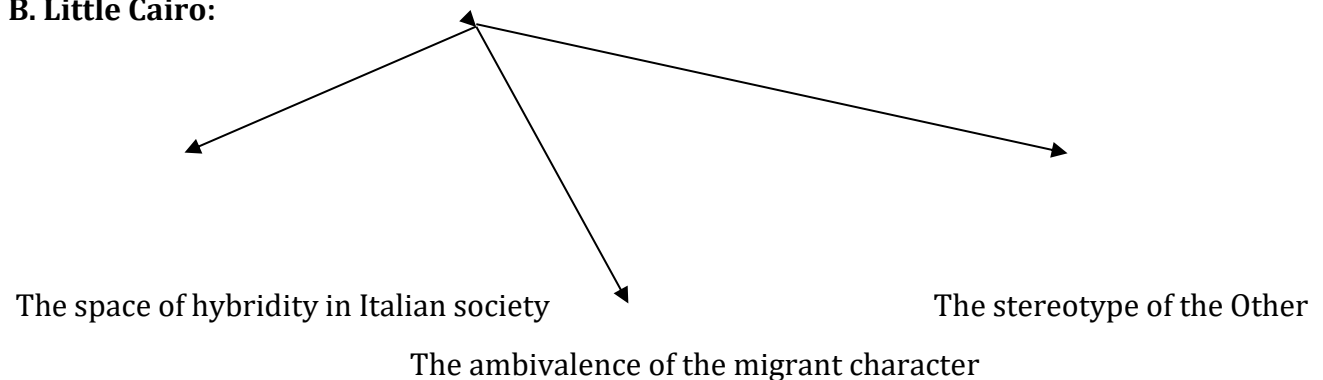
The rejection of the Other culminates in a statement made by a character who completely rejects migrants, seeing them as the cause of ruin and destruction in the West. In another context, one of the characters protests and calls for the expulsion of migrants:

“Migrants must be expelled and replaced by our poor children.¹⁵”

These excerpts from the novel reinforce the idea of a negative perception of migrants. As expressed in another context:

“Why aren’t Iqbal, the Albanian, and the other deviant migrants thrown in jail?¹⁶”

B. Little Cairo:



1. The Space of Hybridity in Italian Society:

We previously clarified the concept of hybridity related to the space of cultural plurality. Additionally, Italian society is one of the most European societies embodying the space of hybridity resulting from migration and alienation, which is significantly evident in Italy, known for welcoming migrants from various regions.

2. The stereotype of migrants in general and Arab Muslims

in particular Through this work, the novelist attempted to convey the manifestations of the stereotype of migrants in Western societies, particularly Italian society, focusing on Moroccans and Muslims in general.

One aspect of racism in Italian society is the rejection of the appearance of veiled women. The normal hijab is equated with extremism. This was expressed by “Sophia”, the protagonist of the novel:

“My first months in Italy were very hard. People did not look at me, but at my hijab when I walked in Marconi.¹⁷”

3. The tension of migrant identity:

This novel addresses a crucial aspect, one of the main themes of postcolonial criticism, which relates to the tension and oscillation experienced by migrants. This idea has been taken up in particular by the Indian thinker Homi Bhabha, who argues that migrants exist in a third, liminal space, feeling alienated neither in their homeland nor in the country to which they have migrated or to which they have been exiled.

This idea is illustrated in the text by the words of one of the Egyptian characters:

“Here in Rome they call me Egyptian, and in Cairo they call me Italian.”

What a paradox; he is neither Italian nor Egyptian¹⁸.

Conclusion:

From the above, we can assert that the novels “How to Suckle from the She-Wolf Without Being Bitten?” and “Little Cairo” by Ammar Al-Akhos embody a profound exploration of the issues surrounding the clash of cultures and the discord of identities. This idea manifests on several

levels, as the novelist uses the theme of identity as a means to search for the obscured self, which has been usurped by the realities of migration and marginalization.

On another level, the notion of conflict and the difficulty of civil dialogue between the characters in both works is evident, leading to a disdainful and negative perception of the “other”—representing migrants in general—who is framed by the ready-made stereotypes associated with anyone foreign to the West.

We can also state that these works carry a civilizational dimension, as they do not merely spotlight an individual character but rather draw attention to issues that transcend individuals to affect societies. In this way, the assertion of Australian critic Bill Ashcroft, a prominent figure in postcolonial studies in the Western world, is realized: “Literature offers one of the most important means of expressing those new perceptions through its realistic writing of everyday reality.¹⁹” The significance of expressing these perceptions lies in giving everyday reality a civilizational depth.

Footnotes:

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- 1- Tony Morrison, *The Image of the Other in Literary Imagination*, translated by Mohammed Mashbal, p. 11.
 - 2- Saad Al-Bazai and Meghan Al-Ruwaili, *Guide to Literary Criticism* p. 158.
 - 3- Edward Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*, pp. 207-208.
 - 4- Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, translated by Kamal Abou Deeb, p. 10.
 - 5- Mohsen Jassim Al-Mousawi, *Theory and Cultural Criticism*, pp. 180-181.
 - 6- Bill Ashcroft, Garrett Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*
 - 7- *Ibid*, p. 199.
 - 8- *Ibid*, p. 200.
 - 9- *How to Suckle from the She-Wolf Without Being Bitten*, p. 11.
 - 10- *Ibid*, p. 115.
 - 11- *Ibid*, p. 85.
 - 12- *Ibid*, p. 21.
 - 13- *Ibid*, p. 38.
 - 14- *Ibid*, p. 38.
 - 15- *Ibid*, the same page.
 - 16- *Ibid*, p. 37.
 - 17- *Cairo Small*.p. 74.
 - 18- *Ibid*, p. 170.
 - 19- Bill Ashcroft, Garrett Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Response by Writing*.p. 15.

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