

The Algerian Novel, the Colonial Legacy and the Post-Colonial Discourse. The ‘Force’ and the ‘False’; Remembring and Theraping.

BOUDERSA Hemza¹

¹ Higher College for Teacher Training, Constantine 3 University, Algeria
, mr_boudersa@yahoo.fr

Corresponding author: BOUDERSA Hemza, mr_boudersa@yahoo.fr

Received: 2017-05-01

Accepted: 31 -05- 2020

Abstract:

The Algerian novel tackles many subjects related to social, cultural, intellectual and political issue before, during and after the 1954 Revolution. Before 1954 Revolution, it got an explicit discourse pertinent to discussing social issues such as homelessness, misery, unemployment, injustice and oppression against Algerians. It focused on the themes of resistance and reflected Algerian lives. This paper raises the following research questions: in what ways the Algeria history affects its novel? What discourse had been portrayed by the Algerian novel in this period? The hypothesis of the paper is that the Algerian novel plays a reconstructing role to the Algerian memory via diagnosing atrocities of the colonizer and its ‘false’ vision to history and its writing. During the 1954 revolution, novelists had a significant role to play in the Algerian scene. They reordered and provided an intimate portrait of the living conditions of Algerians. Further, they made it explicit to the whole world that the only way to liberate Algeria is through fighting for independence of the country. Initial findings show the Algerian novel had even a key role after the independence of the country. Some novels served as a means to ‘decolonize’ the Algerian mind from the colonial legacy through deconstructing the ex-colonial Eurocentric paradigm. As a pertinent recommendation, I can say that the post-colonial discourse brought a new ‘memory war’ in which the Algerian novel should take a position to ‘reconstruct’ the Algerian ‘injured’ memory.

Keywords: Algerian; Novel; colonial; legacy; Eurocentricism.

JelClassificationCodes: XN1, XN2.

Résumé

Le roman algérien aborde plusieurs questions sociales, culturelles, politiques avant et après la révolution algérienne de 1954. Avant la révolution, le roman algérien a lancé un discours clair à propos des problèmes sociaux comme l'itinérance, la misère, la pauvreté des algériens à cette époque. Le roman algérien a concentré aussi sur la résistance qui a inspiré la vie des algériens. La question qui se pose dans ce contexte est : comment l'histoire algérienne peut influencer le roman de ce pays ? Quel est le discours préconisé par le roman algérien après l'indépendance ? Dans ce contexte , on peut proposer l'hypothèse suivante : le roman algérien joue un rôle reconstituteur de la mémoire algérienne .Durant la révolution, des écrivains ont eu un rôle important à jouer à travers ses romans. Ils ont réorganisé et offert un portrait intime des conditions de vie des algériens. De plus, quelques romans ont éclairci que la résistance contre le colonisateur doit être armée. Le roman algérien a décrit aussi les horreurs de la guerre entre colonisateur/colonisé et abordé ses conséquences psychologiques et sociales sur le peuple colonisé. Les résultats initiaux qui vont être discutés dans ce contexte c'est que le roman algérien a eu un rôle très important après l'indépendance de ce pays. Quelques romans ont eu le rôle d'un moyen de 'libération' du cerveau et esprit algériens de l'héritage colonial. Comme recommandation, on peut dire que le discours post-colonial préconise une nouvelle 'guerre de mémoire' dont le roman algérien doit avoir une position pour reconstruire la mémoire blessée de l'Algérie. Cette reconstruction a deux aspects respectifs ; glorifiant l'histoire et clarifiant la 'force' et la 'faiblesse' du colonisateur.

Les Mots Clés : le roman ; algérien ; l'héritage ; colonial ; Eurocentrisme

1. INTRODUCTION

Colonial legacy is frequently considered as a thorny problem if not explosive for the African writers in general and the Algerian ones in particular. According to some encyclopedic definitions¹, 'legacy' refers to "something transmitted by or received from ancestors." Therefore, the term 'colonial legacy' is pertinent to the past colonial experiences². Furthermore, colonial legacy refers to the past colonial reasons that are behind the current state of affairs. Concerning the term post-colonialism, it implies an exploration of the influence and legacy of colonialism. The prefix 'post' semantically refers to 'after' and post-colonial literature refers to 'indigenous literature after colonization had begun' instead of 'literature [of the post-independence period] after the end of

colonization'(Nebbou, 2013, p. 1) .In fact, the literary framework of the post-colonial thought deeply embraced by literate figures in colonial Africa and expressed mainly be French, English or Portuguese (languages of colonizers).This post-colonial thought has also been used further to include other pertinent fields such as sociology and politics. Other critics said that post-colonial literature stand for post-independence literature. This paper considers both definitions with a particular emphasis and inclination to the second vision.

The paper at hand aims at clarifying the ‘deconstructing’ role played by the Algerian novel to end up the negative impact of the colonial nefarious legacy and its Eurocentric paradigms.

2. The Issue of Themes

Themes of the post-colonial novels are mainly: revealing the ‘force’ used by the colonizer to impose its ‘false’ vision to the relation colonizer/colonized. Many others are tackled as well by the Algerian novel, including: The search for restoring the Algerian identity, corruption, military totalitarianism, Algerian independence, and the rights as well the role of women in the Algerian society. Indeed, these subjects were ‘revealing’ to various issues on the one hand and ‘therapeutic’ to some other ills on the other hand.

The search for identity restoration in post-independence Algeria is one of the other themes explored by some of the Algerian writers. The years immediately following independence are marked by the endeavor to go back to a pre-colonial life. With the spread of nationalism and the growing desire to recover a distinctive history and identity, however, Algerian writers go beyond the imposed restrictions of French colonialism to use novels and fiction to react to the French colonizer.

Algerian writers support their plots within novels with historical facts and personal circumstances and characters in order to symbolize the Algerian genuine identity as independent Algerians and to overcome the clash between Algerian's past and present, and also between traditions and modernity. The Algerian novel thus began to serve a feasible mean to review the Algerian history from an Algerian lens and to regain dying traditional values.

History and identity are sometimes tackled as paradoxical but interwoven.Ouattar’s novel, *The al-Hawwatwa'l-qasr [Fisherman and the Palace]*, “is illustrative of some of the contradictory features arising from the search for an authentic identity and the investigation of history”(Debbie, 1998,

p. 14). In addition, this novel revealed the theme of military totalitarianism since the novel was “inspired by Boumediene's revolutionary re-adjustment which removed Ben Bella from the presidency in June 1965.” In these ways, the novels serve a means to recognize the evolution to the current Algerian identity.

Some other Algerian writers tackled pertinent themes to reality and showed facts explicitly revealing the Algerian society in the post-independence period. For instance, in his novel, *Al-Laz* [The Ace] Tahar Ouattar rewrites about the Algerian revolution and shows explicitly “the way in which history is made a battleground of conflicting interpretations as the nation's search for identity, and rejection of ‘Western’ models of modernization, lead to a search for ‘authentic’ models” (Debbie, 1998, p. 12). Ouattar believes that the development of Algeria is based on its ‘glorified’ history and ‘genuine’ heritage.

In fact, the issues already explored in the colonial novel did not change after the independence. Algerian authors focused particularly on matters pertinent to independent Algeria and to people still suffering from the horror of the French colonizer’s legacy.

Algerian writers attempted to record the history of their nation themselves from their own perception and experiences.

Through their novels, many writers criticized autocracy and the one-party system in Algeria after independence. Omar Azraj, an Algerian poet living in London, called this one-dominating party (FLN) to “be restored otherwise be perished” [*FLN Tajedad aw tebaded*]. Rachid Mimouni criticized as well the Algerian autocratic/ (FLN) one-party system and Algerian politicians and decision makers at that period of time. These novels, therefore, presented historical understanding of colonial history and post-colonial from a new perspective by providing an anti-colonial Algerian vision and critical analysis to the post-colonial politics.

The same themes tackled by Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Kenyan writer, in his novels *the Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*. In Ghana, moreover, Ayi Kwame Armah revealed also the ills of his society and the corruption of his country' government in his novel *the Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

Furthermore, among the themes of post-colonial Africa; gender and the issue of women's position in the post-colonial Africa. For instance, the

independence of Algeria did not give the Algerian women their full rights and glorify their roles in the Algerian society as it did to men. This issue was explicitly demonstrated through the narratives of Assia Djebar where the Algerian woman:

....was subject to marginality; oppression and silencing carefully and systematically conducted by male-dominated culture. Legally, She was denied the right to a full citizenship; therefore, disappearing under the rule of the male members. Socially, she was not allowed the opportunity to function and express herself freely.
(73)

Djebar tried to defend the Algerian woman and to “put an end to the inner turmoil caused by a bilingualism which seems to limp with both legs. To one day stop speaking your native language like a child learning to walk and the language of one’s education like a masked foreigner³”.

3. The Issue of Colonial Languages

France's colonization of Algeria in was not only based on a land conquest, but moved beyond to impose a psychological and mental power upon Algerians. It was an ‘enterprise of multidimensional dominance’. The French colonization, by the end, aimed at dominating the Algerian territory, memory and culture through language.

Through education in French, the French hoped to guarantee their cultural hegemony by shaping an Algerian identity that would not only unquestionably accept French presence, but also accept the French culture; that is why, the language issue is always considered thorny. It is a debatable subject of reflection and controversial discussion. The choice of language in literature is often regarded to be frequently and tightly linked to the issue of identity .In Algeria, the writer is often criticized while using either Arabic or French as taking a cultural position with discrete linkage to a given political creed. In the post-colonial period and still, language is considered a crystallizing point of an ex-colonial conflict. The question of which language to write is sometimes explosive.

Indeed, imposing of a foreign language resulted in an imposition of a cultural relam. The latter may cause an ideological domination according to Ngugi Wa Thiong’O.Ngugi thinks that the “imposition of language resulted in the disassociation and detachment of one’s being from his native culture to

another. He says: “To be detached them from ourselves to the other selves”. Colonial Education was already used to ‘falsify’ the Algerian identity via mystifying its vision to its culture, its history and its memory. Therefore, promoting the ‘false’ education through the ‘force’ (violence) was a strategy itself.

One of the most nefarious effects of French colonialism relied on the way French language and culture spread and internalized over the Algerians. Being exposed to a pure French educational system made the Algerians raised in an environment in which French was their first language. Thus, the French language shaped the Algerian's identity and dislocated the dominant language especially for the old generation (M.Mammeri, 2009, p. 33). Great efforts of ‘Arabization’ were exercised, yet the French language still has its defenders.

The Algerian poet Tahar Djaout made clear in a 1996 interview that, regardless of the decision to the ‘Arabization’ policy in the post-colonial Algeria, French remained as the primary language of literary expression in Algeria. He said:

We tried to eclipse the French language. But even after those long years of Arabization, the production of ideas in our country is done mainly in French, and whether we like it or not, it must be taken into account... When all is said and done, what we must be interested in nowadays is not a language in which one expresses oneself but what it is saying (Katz, 2011, p. 4).

Because language is carrier of culture (as Ngugi WaThinog’O said), France designed a purely French educational system centered on the French language. During the post-colonial era, and in spite of the programme of ‘Arabization’ aimed at making the use of Arabic widespread, the French language continues to be adopted and used by Algerian. As a consequence, most of the post-independence Algerian literature was written in French. The latter was another canon and cartridge of the colonizer.

In turn, after independence, the use of the French language was the subject of a major political debate, as it had been viewed as impeding the search for the dependability, and identity of Algeria. A few writers, like KatebYacine and Rachid Boudjedra, attempted to overcome this problem of language and to communicate with Algerians, a majority of whom were not able to write in Arabic. Rachid Boudjedra turned later to write in both French and Arabic.

After writing *Nedjma* and *Le Polygone étoilé* in French, he ceased to use French as a means of expression and turned entirely to the vernacular Algerian dialect. KatebYacine has always been described ‘as a product and the reflection of Algerian culture and thought’. Even though he wrote in French, he did not recognize it as his own language. In an interview with him (1998), he advocated the use of the Algerian language that Algerian masses could understand.

Ngugi, for instance, argues that the imposition of European languages over the rest World cultures leads to the destruction of the colonized identity: But the biggest weapon wielded and daily unleashed by:

Imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. ((Thiong'O, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 1989, p. 26)

Therefore, the colonial language replacing the native one is seen by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O as a ‘destructive’ force and attempt to control, through culture, the way people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world.

Ngugi considers that imposing the colonizer’s language as a weapon to suppress the languages of the colonized.

The culture and the history carried by these languages were thereby thrown onto the rubbish heap and left there to perish. These languages were experienced as incomprehensible noise from the dark. In the secondary school that I went to in Kenya, one of the hymns we were taught to sing was a desperate cry for deliverance from that darkness. Every morning, after we paraded our physical cleanliness for inspection in front of the union jack, the whole school would troop down to the chapel to sing lead kindly light amidst the encircling gloom, lead thou me on’ (Thiong'O, *Moving the Center: the Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, 1993, p. 49).

Ngugi added: “Our languages were suppressed so that we, the captives, would not have our own mirrors in which to observe ourselves and our enemies” (Ibid).

In the same context, Taleb El Ibrahimy, Algerian writer and politician, said: “By borrowing the language of the colonizer, we also borrow, unconsciously, his intellectual approach, even his scale of values⁴”

On the other hand, Algerian writers insist that using the French language in their writing does not mean that they betray their Algerian values. However, they claim that it helped them to retrieve their national culture and heritage. Many Algerian writers share Mouloud Maamri's viewpoint. He said that writers communicate with the rest of the world through using the French language in writings (Déjeux, 1975, p. 207). Many writers agree on the positive side of writing in the colonizer's language.

Before he starts writing in Arabic, KatebYacine was among those writers who used French as a language of their writings. He justified his choice as following: “I write in French because France has invaded my country and holds such a powerful position there that I am compelled to write in French to survive. But though writing in French, my Arab or Berber roots are still alive(M.Mammeri, 2009, p. 39)”.

Rachid Boudjedra agrees with KatebYacine's view. He said: “For me, an Algerian person, I did not choose the French language. It rather chose me. It has imposed itself to me throughout centuries of tears and blood flowing during the painful colonial period (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 372)”.Therefore, for both Kateb, Boudjedra and Chinua Achebe in Nigeria who said ‘I got the language and I’m intended to use it’ .These writers believed “the language does not matter. However, what matters is the purpose behind writing in that language.”

Concerning Assia Djébar's vision to the French language use in literature; she declares the following.

After more than a century of French occupation -which ended not long ago in such butchery-a similar no-man's land still exists between the French and indigenous languages, between two national memories: the French tongue, with its body and voice, has established a proud presidio with me, during the mother tongue, all oral traditions, all rags and tatters, resists and attacks between two-breathing spaces...(Neuwirth, 2010, pp. 429-444)⁵

In fact, the gulf separating her from the women of her family and society -that enables her to overcome the divide and the "two-ness" (African/female/ex-colonized) through writing.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assia Djebar , Mouloud Feraoun , Kateb Yacine , Mohammed Dib and Rachid Boudjedra writings in French did not, by definition, meant that they are assimilated. It is rather just “provided vast scope for writings on issues such as religion, women, revolt, language and gender, and personal discourses which was not possible in Arabic”(Gikandi, 2005, pp. 170-189). Mouloud Feraoun and Kateb Yacine were among the Francophone intellectuals who got French and simply intended to use it producing a French-written literary art with an Algerian soul. That education also, in addition to the choice of language, shaped some of their works towards a more personal genre of literature.

Arguing for his choice in using of French in his writings, Mouloud Feraoun ,for instance, joined Malek Haddad who pointed out in an essay (1961): “we write French, but we do not write in French(Gikandi, 2005, pp. 170-189)”; He joined Kateb Yacine who stated outspokenly his position in many declarations. French is : “..a loot..war booty to be used wisely,” said Kateb Yacine. In this respect, Kateb Yacine also declared: "Je parle le français, j'ai écrit en français pour dire en français que je ne suis pas un français. " (I speak French, I write in French to tell the French that I' am not French)(Mebirouk, 2018, pp. 14-26); His ‘French’ language, as he said also, "shaped his Algerian soul!"⁶

Though the school had ultimately offered him a worldwide language which he mastered to a considerable extent, its use by Feraoun did not necessarily serve the colonizer; meaning that the use of this language was not to praise its owner but to show who you were. That is, Mouloud Feraoun’s use of French is also seen from a strictly utilitarian view: portraying the life of his people and their miseries in French meant a wide scope of readership and a large audience which would sympathize with his cause. Feraoun got a positive echo by some critics.

One may conclude that Feraoun’s, Dib’s, Mammeri’s and Kateb’s novels both projected the course of Algerian anti-colonial militantism and shed some light on wide-horizons of nationalism. These novels did not only reveal the destitution of Algerians, but they also urged quick, radical social change.

Because these writers were greatly inspired by the claim for ‘a land, a name and a difference’, this literature would be so influential in the post-colonial period, as suggested by Malek Haddad. He said in 1961 :

Ainsi que certains artistes du cinéma ont dû disparaître, bon donner leur place devant le cinéma parlant, en Algérie les écrivains de ma génération et de ma formation devront un jour ou l’autre, à brève ou longue échéance...céder la place à des écrivains algériens d’expression arabe⁷...(Saad, 2014).

Kateb Yacine claimed the independence of the Algerian writer from the post-colonial political régime. He said (in an interview with French radio in 1963): “the writer should be independent because he must not be inclined to power. He must not be undergoing the pressing of the country’s political regime. He has a mission to say what he feels; pleasing or not does not matter for him”⁸(Saad, 2014).Hence, writers should have intellectual sovereignty.

Mohammed Dib argued that his writings about the revolution ended with achieving independence .Accordingly, the end of his political commitment returned to his favorite themes about Algeria and Algerians pertinent to social problems and men-related issues.He said: “j’ai repris mon attitude d’écrivain qui s’intéresse à des problèmes d’ordre psychologique, Romanesque ou de style...Le temps de l’engagement est terminé...Les literatures aussi font leur temps⁹(Ndiaye, 2004)”.Social issues and pertinent challenges were greatly tackled in these writings.

5. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, most of the Algerian writers of the post-colonial period in French did not try to resist the ‘French language’ as a means of communication and writing, but they clashed the colonialist ideology and wanted to destruct its germs; the Algerian blood preserved and kept circulating in those writers veins and the Arab-Islamic and Tamazight heart kept throbbing in most of the Algerian writings even in French. Accordingly, the French colonizer could not replace the Algerian blood with another and the French language was not able to prevent Assia Djebar , Kateb Yaçine,Mohammed Dib , Mouloud Feraoun and others from being Algerian writers with Algerian concerns and interests interpreted into intellectual pronouncements and thematic writings.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY LIST

- Debbie, C. (1998). Symbolism and Allegory in Algerian Arabic Novel. *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literture* , 193-204.
- Déjeux, J. (1975). *La Littérature Algérienne Contemporaine*. Paris: Presse Universitaire de France.
- Feraoun, M. (2015). *Le Fils du Pauvre*. Bejaia: Editions Talantikit.
- Gikandi, S. (Éd.). (2005). "Impact on Maghrebi literature and Journalism". *North African literature in Arabic* . . London : Routledge.
- Hargreaves, A. (1993). *French and the Algerian Identities from Colonial Times to the Present.A Century of Interaction*. The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Jensen, K. (2002). A Literature born from Wounds.Ahlem's Mostaghanemi's Memory in the Flesh. *Al Jadid.A Review and Record of Arab Culture and Arts* .
- Kane, C. H. (2012). *L'aventure Ambigue*. Brooklyn: Melville Hous.
- Katz, L. (2011). *Writing the Cry: French and Francophone Literature*.
- M.Mammeri, R. (2009). The Syndrome of the French Language in Algeria. *International Journal of Art and Sciences* .
- Mebirouk, S. (2018). *Ecrivains Algériens D'expression Française*. Constantine : Numidia books.
- Ndiaye, C. (2004). *Introduction aux Littérature Francophone*. Montréal : Presse de l'Université de Montréal.
- Nebbou, A. (2013). The Colonial Discourse versus the Anti-Colonial Discourse in West African Post-colonial Literature. *Scholars World* 1.3 .
- Neuwirth, A. (2010). *Arabic Literature.Post Modern Perspectives*. Munich Saki.
- Premat, F. S. (2009). Literature Remembers History: the Algerian War in un regard blessé and la malédiction of Rachid Mimouni. *Institut Nordique des Etudes Africaines* .
- Saad, M. (2014, January 2). In Search of Identity: Algerian Literature during and after Occupation. *Westminister* .
- Thiong'O, N. W. (1989). *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: James Currey.
- Thiong'O, N. W. (1993). *Moving the Center: the Struggle for Cultural Freedom*. London: James Currey.

8. CITATION

¹ *Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary and World Book Encyclopedia*

² *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defined the same word as “a situation that exists because of events, actions... etc. that took place in the past” (734).

³ From : Barbara Winkler. On Writing in the “Language of the Enemy” Assia Djébar and the Buried Voices of Algerian History”. *Arabic Literature. Post Modern Perspectives* (2010) edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler. Londo: Saki, p.432

⁴ « En empruntant la langue du colonisateur, nous empruntons aussi, et de façon inconsciente, sa démarche intellectuelle, voire son échelle de valeurs »

Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi

Mohamed, B. *Langue et pouvoir en Algérie. Histoire d'un traumatisme linguistique*. Paris: Les Colonnes d'Hercule -Seguier, 1999, p.104.

⁵ More quotations of Assia Djébar about the issue of language :

⁵ More quotations of Assia Djébar on the question of language

“Writing in a foreign language ... has brought me to the cries of the women silently rebelling in my youth, to my own true origins.”

“Musicality, orality, and the written word blend in this highly original work to portray the author's fragmented sense of self, and the final product is rendered in a beautiful prose.”

“I had just turned 40. It's at that point that I finally felt myself fully a writer of French language, while remaining deeply Algerian

“...to put an end to the inner turmoil caused by a bilingualism that seems to limp with both languages. To one day stop speaking your native language like a child learning to walk, and the language of one's education like a masked foreigner”

“When I wrote and read in a foreign language, my body travels far in subversive space, in spite of the neighbours and suspicious matrons. It would not need much for it to take wing and fly away!”

“...so, as soon as I learned the foreign script, my body began to move as if instinct. As if the French language suddenly had eyes, and lent them me to see into liberty; as if the French language blinded the peeping-toms of my clan and, at this price, I could move freely...”

“Actual areas the French language provides the narrator with a rich set of tools, but on an emotional level it remains sealed to her...” the French language could offer me all

its inexhaustible treasures, but not a single one of its terms of endearment would be destined for my use..."

"...she feels the French language to be a "tunic of Nessus"...a "gift of love" from her father...the French in her is a "Stepmother tongue" and so she embarks on the search for her mother tongue" that left me standing and disappeared"...her inner world has become a battlefield, with both languages engaged in a struggle that resembles the conquering of Algeria..."

⁶Abdelkader Aoudjit .Personal interview. April,1st 2017- April, 15th 2018 (about Algerian Literature)

⁷"As some film artists had to disappear, bunting their place before the talkies, Algerian writers of my generation and my training will one day or another, in the short or long term give the floor to Algerian writers writing in Arabic ... "

⁸"Il faut que l'écrivain reste indépendant, parce qu'il ne doit pas être mêlé au pouvoir. Il ne faut pas qu'il subisse les pressions du pouvoir. Il a une mission qui consiste à dire qu'il sent ; que ça plaise ou non"

⁹"I took my attitude as a writer who is interested in psychological problems, Romanesque, or style ... The time of commitment is over ... The literatures are also doing their time"