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**Specificity of Cultural Belonging in Translated Algerian Fiction
–I Shall Give You a Gazelle by Malek Haddad – as a Case Study**
خصوصية الانتماء الثقافي في الرواية الجزائرية المترجمة – «سأهديك غزالة» لمالك حداد
–دراسة حالة–

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Abstract:

This study explores the specificity of cultural belonging in Algerian fiction composed in French and translated into Arabic through an examination of Malek Haddad's novel *I Shall Give You a Gazelle*. It proceeds from the problematic relationship between language and identity raising the question of whether the language of composition alone is sufficient to determine the affiliation of a literary text or whether content historical memory and national consciousness constitute the decisive factors in this regard. The study further surveys the principal critical positions that either endorse or contest the affiliation of Algerian literature written in French to the sphere of national culture. The study also traces the manifestations of identity and belonging in Malek Haddad's intellectual and creative experience highlighting their profound connection with collective memory and national history. It examines the novel through its artistic constituents and central symbols foremost among them the desert as a realm of freedom and openness and the gazelle as a symbol of liberation and hope. The study concludes that Malek Haddad despite writing in the language of the colonizer succeeded in embodying Algerian identity and articulating his cultural and national belonging through the characters settings symbols and historical references that constitute the deep structure of his novel.

Keywords: Cultural Belonging, Algerian Fiction, Malek Haddad, Identity, Historical Memory.

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة خصوصية الانتماء الثقافي في الأدب الجزائري المكتوب باللغة الفرنسية والمترجم إلى اللغة العربية، من خلال تحليل رواية «سأعطيك غزالة» للكاتب مالك حداد. وتنطلق الدراسة من العلاقة والإشكالية القائمة بين اللغة والهوية، السؤال المطروح حول ما إذا كانت لغة التأليف وحدها كافية لتحديد انتماء النص الأدبي، أم أن المحتوى والذاكرة التاريخية والوعي القومي تشكل العوامل الحاسمة في هذا الصدد. كما تستعرض الدراسة المواقف النقدية الرئيسية التي تؤيد أو تعارض انتماء الأدب الجزائري المكتوب باللغة الفرنسية إلى مجال الثقافة الوطنية. وتتبع الدراسة أيضًا مظاهر الهوية والانتماء في التجربة الفكرية والإبداعية لمالك حداد، مسطرة الضوء على ارتباطها العميق بالذاكرة الجماعية والتاريخ الوطني. وتفحص الرواية من خلال مكوناتها الفنية ورموزها المركزية، وفي مقدمتها الصحراء كمجال للحرية والانفتاح، والغزالة كرمز للتحرر والأمل. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن مالك حداد، على الرغم من كتابته بلغة المستعمر، نجح في تجسيد الهوية الجزائرية والتعبير عن انتمائه الثقافي والوطني من خلال الشخصيات والأماكن والرموز والإشارات التاريخية التي تشكل البنية العميقة لروايته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانتماء الثقافي، الرواية الجزائرية، مالك حداد، الهوية، الذاكرة التاريخية.

1. INTRODUCTION :

Addressing the question of the representation of national identity in fictional writing and determining social and religious affiliation, particularly in translated novels, is by no means a straightforward undertaking. Rather, it is a matter fraught with complexity and ambiguity, whether at the level of content itself, at the level of form, or at the level of authorial identity.

These various considerations compel us to examine the issue of identity and national belonging through the prism of linguistic expression, which may, on

numerous occasions, differ from the official language associated with the writer. This also raises questions concerning the extent to which the alternative language adopted by the novelist is capable of conveying the subject matter and the author's perspective, determining the national affiliation of the literary work, and communicating the essential meaning that the author seeks to transmit to the reader.

2. Between Writing and Belonging

At the outset, it is necessary to address the question of identity and belonging, a subject that has generated considerable

debate among critics and scholars. Their positions may broadly be divided into two camps. The first maintains that literature written in French represents only itself and cannot be regarded as an expression of Algerian identity owing to the constraints inherent in French linguistic expression, as well as the writers' admiration for Western civilization and their inclination toward its cultural values.

The second camp, however, acknowledges the Arab character and national affiliation of this body of writing regardless of the foreign language in which it is composed. According to this perspective, the determining factor in establishing the identity of such literature lies in its embodiment of the national spirit and character, in the writer's capacity to defend the homeland, its principles, and its fundamental values, and in its representation of customs, traditions, the past, and historical memory.

Within this context, the critic Abdallah Rekibi expresses his view regarding literature written in French, stating: "*In sum, Algerian literature written in French emerged under particular circumstances and for specific reasons during a given period. Although it was written in a foreign language, it expressed an Algerian content and a national reality, which renders it a local and national literature.*"¹

This implies that, according to Rekibi, the decisive criterion for determining the nationality of a literary work does not reside solely in language. Rather, it extends to the content and national reality reflected within the work. The distinction between Algerian and French reality is profound. French, in this regard, functions merely as a medium of expression. Moreover, cultural and civilizational openness may require writers to express themselves in languages other than their own in order to engage with broader literary developments, not as a means of renouncing their identity or transcending the boundaries of national belonging.

Conversely, another group of writers, theorists, and scholars, particularly those deeply committed to the preservation of Arab identity, regard language as the primary criterion for defining the identity of this literary genre. Foremost among them is Abdelmalek Mortad, who asserts: "*This literature is alien unto itself and exiled from the homeland in which it was written. It has failed to play a substantial role in the development of contemporary literature in Algeria, let alone a decisive role in fueling the revolutionary spirit through which the Algerian people succeeded in breaking the heavy chains of colonialism.*"²

Between proponents and opponents of the Algerian identity of literature written in French, we contend that Algerian identity cannot be reduced to language alone, nor even to reality with its individual and collective experiences. Rather, it extends to the exploration and preservation of the historical memory of nations and homelands. Historical memory alone determines the writer's affiliation and the relationship of his writings to his homeland, religion, and civilization. There can be no present without a past, and no past without an enduring memory. The writer's ability to articulate this memory and safeguard it from erasure, obliteration, or foreign distortion, whether through Arabic or any other language, is what ultimately secures the authenticity of his national identity.

Within this context, Malek Haddad acknowledges the role of Algerian literature written in a foreign language in portraying and embodying Algerian society through a non-native linguistic medium, thereby producing a hybrid discourse. Such a discourse emerged from the interaction between a foreign linguistic framework and the Algerian Arab spirit. Yet the predominance and effusion of the national spirit within this foreign linguistic mould prompted French critics to reject Algerian literature.³

The rejection of this literary corpus by French critics constitutes compelling evidence of its national and Arab character,

not least because of the themes it articulates and the conflict it depicts between the self and the other. This other is embodied in the French presence during a particular phase of Algerian history, namely French colonialism, and in the attempts it made to destroy, erase, and distort the living memory of the Algerian people. Consequently, this literature emerged in order to restore history to its authentic form from the perspective of the writer's cultural and national affiliation and in accordance with his convictions. It also reflects his aspiration to realize himself through the language of the other. This choice was not an act of self-denial or a renunciation of identity; rather, it represented a challenge through which the writer sought to demonstrate his intellectual and linguistic capabilities before the other.

Between these two positions, one encounters numerous Algerian writers who chose to write in French for both personal and broader historical reasons. Among these distinguished authors stands Malek Haddad, whose literary creativity was not confined to a single language, namely Arabic, but extended beyond it to encompass other languages within the framework of linguistic plurality.

3. The Writings of Malek Haddad between Identity and Belonging

The concept of identity is closely intertwined with a number of related notions belonging to the same semantic field. Here, an attempt will be made to approach the meaning most closely associated with the concept of identity within the network of concepts connected to it. Among the scholars who addressed this notion is Duvant D.A., who concluded that "*there exists a correspondence between identity, the self, and the ego.*"⁴

Identity constitutes a representation of the self, while simultaneously intersecting with the concepts of collective identity, culture, and cultural belonging. These notions converge in their expression of nationality and of the ideological and intellectual sphere embodied by the writer and projected onto his literary production.

If one speaks of cultural belonging, one is in fact referring to one of the fundamental constituents of identity itself. As has been observed, "*the relationship to culture appears more firmly grounded, for there exists something approaching a correspondence between the concept through which culture is defined and the concept through which identity is defined.*"⁵

Historical memory likewise falls within the sphere of cultural belonging that shapes both individual and collective identity. Memory constitutes one of the principal foundations of the sense of identity, and such a sense can emerge only through the national consciousness possessed by every writer who remains devoted to and deeply attached to his homeland.

In discussing the relationship between identity and memory, John Locke observes that "*The identity of the human person is grounded in consciousness and consciousness could not guarantee personal identity were it not to contain within itself the principle of identity. This does not mean that this principle is innately implanted within it; rather it is an intrinsic feature of consciousness manifested in its self-sameness as a consequence of its capacity for self-reflection.*"⁶

The two elements of self-consciousness and historical memory, which preserves past experiences across the continuum of time into the present, constitute essential components of the very essence of identity. From this perspective, the conceptual framework through which identity may be understood begins to take shape.

The sense of identity can only be formed through memory, and the interconnectedness of memories can occur only within consciousness. Consequently, a writer's expression of identity in literary discourse is inseparable from the extent of his awareness and understanding of both his past and his present, and it is precisely this function that memory performs.

Malek Haddad is regarded as one of the Algerian writers who chose to write in French within the intellectual framework from which they emerged, the French school, particularly during the post-independence period. Through his writings, he, along with others who adopted a similar approach, sought to guide Algerian readers and the broader public toward a deeper understanding of the Algerian reality that unfolded after independence, with its reform-oriented movements such as the socialist revolution. He also advocated the expression of public concerns and the improvement of the conditions experienced by Algerians during that period, while drawing attention to the adverse legacies of French colonialism and calling for their transformation.

This objective was pursued through shedding light on the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions of the time and through identifying the underlying causes of the crisis in order to overcome them by means of social transformation. The designation "social" is particularly appropriate, as literary production during this period was largely preoccupied with such issues, driven by a desire for reform and for rectifying the general condition of the nation amid the profound damage left by colonial rule.

In these novels, Malek Haddad sought to foreground his cultural belonging by highlighting a body of knowledge, references, customs, traditions, and social conventions that he had acquired from his society as one of its members. Culture, according to the definition proposed by R. H. Lewis, is *"the totality of what an individual acquires from his society, including beliefs, customs, and aesthetic standards, as a heritage inherited from the past and transmitted through both formal and informal education."*⁷

Malek Haddad points out that literature written in French forms part of the broader literary landscape on the international stage. Consequently, Algerian writers who chose to write in French

concentrated on particular issues bequeathed by colonialism in Algeria. They sought to articulate these silenced realities through the language of the other in order to render them more visible and intelligible. In describing this body of literature, Saadallah states: *"During the colonial period and throughout the revolution, writers portrayed the suffering of the people, their aspirations for freedom and independence, and their struggle against injustice and oppression. During the revolution, their energies became increasingly devoted to independence, which emerged as the supreme objective."*⁸

Malek Haddad exemplified this literary tendency through his celebrated novel *I Shall Give You a Gazelle* (1927–1978). This novel, translated from French, is far more than the story of a lover seeking to prove his devotion by wandering through the desert in search of a gazelle to offer his beloved. Rather, it constitutes a representation of a lived reality through which the novelist projects the fragmentation experienced by the Algerian intellectual under the influence of colonial culture.

It is a fragmentation accompanied by the pain of suffering and the anguish of estrangement between his Algerian origins and roots and the language of a colonizer who held him captive through its culture and linguistic dominance. Nor is this condition confined to this novel alone. Haddad explored the same predicament in several of his other works, including *No One Answers on the Flower Wharf*, *The Student and the Lesson*, and *The Last Impression*, as well as in his poetic collections *Misery in Danger* and *Listen and I Shall Call You*.

Throughout his novels and literary works, Malek Haddad endeavoured to affirm his Algerian identity through his deployment of artistic elements such as character, time, and place, in addition to events drawn directly from Algerian reality.

In his critical reflections, he maintained that language does not necessarily constitute the criterion by which

the origin of a literature should be judged. On the contrary, he praised the role of Algerian literature written in a foreign language in expressing the sufferings of Algerians, their political positions regarding the revolution, and the social circumstances they experienced during particular historical moments.

According to Haddad, these texts are ultimately hybrid creations born of the interaction between a foreign linguistic body and an Algerian Arab spirit through the dynamics of cultural influence and reciprocal exchange. Had the national spirit not manifested itself so powerfully within this literature, it would likely have been accepted by French critics. Yet it was precisely because of its pronounced Arab national character that it was rejected. In this regard, he observes: "*The foremost critics in France maintain that your literature differs considerably from French literature... or, more precisely, they employ the following formulation: French literature of Algerian expression.*"⁹

In his novel *I Shall Give You a Gazelle*, written in 1959, Malek Haddad sought to affirm his Algerian belonging through his deployment of the desert as the principal setting of the narrative. In essence, this open space constitutes a powerful symbol of the liberation sought by Algerians from the constraints of colonial domination and from the social and political pressures imposed upon them. The desert thus emerges as a boundless expanse within which the Algerian can attain self-realization, far removed from the colonizer who is incapable of enduring the harsh realities of desert life. Haddad therefore selected this setting as an objective correlative of liberation on the one hand and of the exile endured by the Arab intellectual on the other.

Likewise, the gazelle as a tangible element within Haddad's novel signifies nothing other than the freedom long sought by his people. It also constitutes a vivid projection of the writer's own condition as he continuously searched for a stable point

of anchorage amidst the fragmentation of his identity between Amazigh origins, a Constantinian upbringing, a Tunisian milieu, and a Parisian cultural formation.

All these circumstances contributed to the shaping of his national consciousness and historical memory, particularly during the Second World War and the bloody events that followed, most notably the massacres of 8 May, which he regarded in this text as his true birth. It was then that Algerians took to the streets to demand their right to freedom, only to be met with French gunfire that claimed the lives of forty-five thousand martyrs.¹⁰

These events constituted a profound shock that awakened Malek Haddad from his slumber. He became acutely aware of the emptiness he experienced within his exile under the weight of colonial domination and sought to fill that void by defending his homeland through the language of the other and from the land of the other, thereby transforming writing into an act of challenge and self-affirmation.

4. *I Shall Give You a Gazelle* between Cultural Belonging and the Language of Exile :

The constraints imposed by French-language education, which accompanied Malek Haddad throughout his secondary studies in Constantine and his university education in France and Switzerland, did not sever him from his history. A reader of *I Shall Give You a Gazelle* readily perceives that the writer is a child of history, emerging from its very womb, and that national memory rather than geographical location and its surrounding circumstances is what truly shapes human beings. Through the voice of the teacher, the novel's central character, he introduces himself in the following terms: "*I do not see the author; he appears to me as though he were a painting. His appearance in infinite Paris is unlike that of others in his profession. He never conveys his intentions through empty words devoid of meaning, for he and words are one and the same thing, something endowed with substance and existence.*"¹¹

The novelist is, in many respects, but one of his own fictional creations. Just as the teacher who was sent to the desert endured the hardships of estrangement and exile, so too did the writer, whether within his homeland or beyond it. Haddad thus embodied both psychological alienation within his native country under colonial rule and physical alienation in his exile in Paris. Between reality and imagination, the following equation may be proposed to represent these two dimensions of estrangement:

Paris → Constantine → In Reality

Paris → The Desert → In Imagination

Malek Haddad embodied exile beginning with the French language itself, which he regarded as a form of exile, and extending to the reality symbolized by the desert. Paris remains the locus of exile in both reality and imagination. Consequently, the gazelle sought by the protagonist in order to offer it to his beloved (the homeland) symbolizes the lost freedom pursued in both the real and the imagined worlds.

The linguistic and cultural belonging represented by the Arabic language, which the writer expressed through his anguish, his lament, and his inability to write in Arabic, ultimately led him to abandon and boycott French immediately after the Revolution. He famously declared: *"The French language is my exile; therefore, I decided to remain silent."* Thus, the writer died from what has been described as the cancer of silence on 2 June 1978, becoming the first martyr to die out of love for the Arabic language.¹²

Malek Haddad regarded French as a means of expression rather than an end in itself, and he possessed no practical alternative to it. For this reason, he repeatedly affirmed his devotion and attachment to Arabic by portraying French as nothing more than a form of exile. He considered it an exile because it prevented him from learning his national language and deprived him of the opportunity to write in

it. Despite his remarkable mastery of French, this persistent feeling accompanied him throughout his life and left him dissatisfied with both his fictional and poetic production. As has been observed: *"He mastered French, possessed great command of it, knew its secrets, and was thoroughly acquainted with its literature; yet he remained convinced that he would never attain its highest summit nor reach that level capable of making a writer fully satisfied with his work."*¹³

From language, we move to character as the second principle through which the writer's identity and national belonging are represented. The narrative revolves around the young man Moulay, a hunter of gazelles in the desert. His beloved, Liminata, requests from him a gazelle possessing specific qualities, and he finds himself compelled to fulfil her wish in order to prove his love and devotion. At the same time, he regards the gazelle as a dowry worthy of the freedom embodied by his beloved.

In contrast stands the character of Lieutenant Masson, who frequently visits Liminata's father accompanied by the commandant's clerk, Capache. In every circumstance and declaration, Liminata remains an object of desire for the traitors associated with one of the French officers.¹⁴

If one adopts a symbolic reading of these characters, the gazelle emerges as the embodiment of the long-awaited freedom, while Liminata represents the enduring hope inseparably bound to the liberation of the homeland.

5. Place and Its Relationship to Identity and National Belonging :

In *I Shall Give You a Gazelle*, the desert functions as a symbol of Arab history and civilization in general and of Algerian history and civilization in particular. Haddad adopts the desert as the spatial framework of his narrative because it serves as an objective correlative of Arabism and national belonging, given that it constitutes one of the defining features of the Arab

world, of which Algeria forms an integral geographical component.

Beyond its symbolic association with history, authenticity, and openness, the writer portrays the desert as a space of love and emotional communion between Moulay and Liminata Yamina. As the text states: "*The Koko was part of that place which united them; it stood as a guardian over her and over their love, and I shall turn towards the Koko, the place of kisses.*"¹⁵

Within the fictional imagination of the novel, the desert becomes a locus of affection and emotional exchange, while simultaneously embodying a set of profound dualities rooted in lived reality:

death ≠ life
present ≠ past
authenticity ≠ renewal
freedom ≠ constraint
the living ≠ the dead

The writer's evocation of place is not confined to the desert alone. Rather, it extends to other locations that transcend the realm of imagination and belong to historical and geographical reality, including the city of Ouargla as Moulay's birthplace, Tamanrasset, Zendar, Gao, Ghadames, Tripoli, and the ancient city of Timgad. As one passage declares: "*I shall enter the city of Timgad through the Gate of Janus.*"¹⁶

Most of these locations are real places intimately connected with Algerian and Arab history. Their vast and open spatiality transforms them into living symbols of Arab identity and Algerian national belonging. Despite colonial attempts to alter their names and erase their significance, they remain inextricably linked to the memory of place and to the inhabitants, landmarks, corners, and characteristics that define them.

Indeed, Malek Haddad demonstrates remarkable artistic mastery throughout this text. He presents it as a veritable treasury of secrets whose pages, whenever revisited, and whose words, whenever reread, continually reveal new layers of meaning to the reader meanings that evoke history, reality, civilizational conflict, identity, Arabism, suffering, and liberation.

Although the writer was compelled by circumstance to write in French, he nevertheless succeeded through various artistic strategies in transcending this constraint and expressing his identity through alternative means. These means are embodied in the artistic components of the text itself, in the historical references upon which he relies to articulate the ideas and events of his narrative, and in the unmistakable presence of his identity manifested through the pain of his linguistic exile.

List of Foot notes

¹ See: Abdallah Al-Rukaybi, *The Algerian Short Story*, Algeria, 1st ed., 1983, pp. 249–273.

² Abd al-Malik Murtagh, *The Revival of Arabic Literature in Algeria 1925–1954*, Algeria, 2nd ed., 1983, p. 6.

³ Mabruk Qadah, "The Problem of National Belonging in Algerian Literature Written in French," *Insaniyyat: The Algerian Journal of Anthropology and Social Sciences*.

⁴ Muhammad Muslim, *Identity in the Face of Integration: The Second Maghrebi Generation in France*, Algerian Ministry of Culture, Algeria, 2009, p. 86.

⁵ Muhammad al-Arabi Wuld Khalifa, *The Cultural Question and Issues of Language and Identity*, Office of University Publications, Algeria, 2003, p. 108.

⁶ Mohamed Menadi Idrissi, *The Question of Identity in John Locke: From Theological Controversy to Practical Debate*, *Tabayyun Journal*, Issue 34, 2020, p. 149.

⁷ Saidi Muhammad, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Popular Culture*, Dar al-Khalduniyya, Algeria, 2013, pp. 10–11.

⁸ Saadallah, A., *Experiences in Literature and Travel*, National Book Foundation, Algeria, 1983.

⁹ Dejeux, J., *Situation de la littérature maghrébine de langue française*, Alger, Ed. OPU, 1982, p. 184.

¹⁰ See: Hakim Marzuqi, "*I Will Give You a Gazelle*" — *A Cry of Pain for Those He Writes for Who Are Unaware of Our Existence*, <https://alarab.co.uk>, 5 January 2022, 9:54.

¹¹ Malek Haddad, *I Will Give You a Gazelle*, trans. Salih al-Qarmadi, Tunisian Publishing House, 1986, p. 3.

¹² See: Yahuni Zahiya et al., *Encyclopedia of Algerian Scholars and Men of Letters*, Dar al-Hadara, Algeria, 2003, p. 15.

¹³ Hanafi bin Issa, "The Contemporary Algerian Novel," *Al-Thaqafa*, nos. 8–9, Algeria, 1972, p. 63.

¹⁴ See: Malek Haddad, *I Will Give You a Gazelle*, trans. Salih al-Qarmadi, p. 3.

¹⁵ Malek Haddad, *I Will Give You a Gazelle*, trans. Salih al-Qarmadi, p. 32

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 50.