

**The Hidden Cultural Patterns in the Novel Al- Tibber
by Ibrahim Al-Kouni
-Analytical Reading-.**

Ahmed Bouafia *

University of Tamanghasset

Laboratory of Scientific and Cultural Heritage of The Tamanghasset Region.

Email: bouafiaahmed@univ-tam.dz

Received: 11/01/2026

Accepted: 14/04/2026

Published: 09/06/ 2026

Abstract :

Cultural criticism is one of the most important contemporary critical approaches, aiming to uncover the underlying and hidden cultural patterns in literary texts by decoding them and investigating their structures and contents, with the goal of achieving specific cognitive and creative goals.

A cultural reading of a text does not suffice with apparent meanings alone, but goes beyond them by searching for implicit cultural patterns, where deep reading aims to deconstruct literary discourse, interrogate it, reshape it, and highlight new connotations and meanings within it.

This research aims to uncover the hidden cultural patterns in the novel Al-Tibber by Ibrahim Al-Kouni, in which the novelist excelled in employing the arts and practices of Touareg society, relying on his cultural and cognitive references about Touareg societies, And the vast desert worlds.

Key Words: System, Cultural, Hidden, Novel, Contemporary.

*-Author: Ahmed Bouafia, Email: bouafiaahmed@univ-tam.dz

Introduction:

Cultural criticism focused on the cultural patterns inherent in contemporary novels, with their cultural, intellectual, and historical heritage. Critics therefore sought to define their terms, study their patterns, clarify their facts and meanings, reveal their connotations and references, and understand their methods, while highlighting their functions and uses.

Contemporary novels have attracted the attention of critics and scholars because of their clear influence on the process of reception and the development of knowledge and achievements. They are among the most important literary genres in terms of criticism and reception, as they draw on multiple sources and different sciences, which gives them a characteristic of intellectual openness. This has encouraged contemporary criticism to study, compare, and critique it, both theoretically and practically.

The novel *Al-Tibber* by the world-renowned writer Ibrahim Al-Kouni is one of the contemporary Arabic novels that deals with the arts and practices of the Touareg society in the vast desert. It is a highly informative novel, whose aim is to revive and resurrect cultural heritage.

Based on the above, I will attempt through this study to reveal some of the cultural patterns implicit in Ibrahim Al-Kouni in the novel *Al-Tibber*, with the aim of enriching literary and critical studies of contemporary Arabic novels.

The research problem consists of a series of questions, the most important of which are:

- What is cultural criticism, and what are hidden cultural patterns?.
- What are the forms of Touareg arts and practices in the novel *Al-Tibber*?

The objectives of this research are:

- To define cultural criticism and hidden cultural patterns from the perspective of contemporary criticism.
- To identify the arts and practices of the Touareg community.
- To reveal the implicit cultural patterns in the novel *Al-Tibber*.

With regard to research methods, this study relied on the historical method and the cultural criticism method, considering that the historical method helps reveal the facts of the past by relying on historical information, monitoring it, verifying its accuracy, and interpreting it. The cultural criticism approach is used to uncover the meanings hidden within the text through interpretation and analysis.

First: Cultural Criticism and the Implicit Cultural Paradigm From the Perspective of Contemporary Criticism:

1- Cultural Criticism:

Cultural criticism emerged within literary criticism and its semantic fields, drawing on various theories of literary criticism, including the function of literature that focuses on linguistic aesthetics and literary enjoyment, which led it to call for more comprehensive and noble functions than literary criticism.

Cultural criticism is concerned with culturally embedded patterns, as "cultural criticism is one of the latest critical and epistemological trends that emerged in the Western world at the end of the last century, as a methodological alternative to modern and contemporary critical mainstream. It manifested itself in the critique of the central tenets of literary criticism, foremost among which is the term and concept of aesthetics, to cultural criticism concerned with the cultural patterns embedded and latent in the linguistic structures of literary texts and the disclosure of the cognitive load acquired by the incidental interactions between sciences and disciplines" (Nour Eddine & Mohammed, 2019, P.61) , drawing on all sciences to investigate these patterns and understand their true nature by deconstructing and dissecting texts, then interpreting them to uncover the true background of the text.

Cultural criticism is an open activity with no specific field, says Samir Khalil: "Cultural criticism is an activity and not a specific field of knowledge in itself" (Aisberger, 2003, P.30) It is a multidisciplinary approach whose goal is to interrogate the text about its implicit cultural components, where "the project of cultural criticism began, which looks at the text in terms of what it achieves and what it reveals about cultural systems. The text here is a means and a tool, and cultural criticism will remain one of the achievements of postmodernism" (Khalil, 2012, p. 97), as it undermined rhetoric, broke the centrality of the text, and turned to questioning the system rather than the text itself.

Cultural criticism also focused on applying various scientific theories as tools for uncovering the political, historical, cultural, social, and ideological dimensions within the text, in terms of understanding and interpretation, without neglecting the poetics and aesthetics of literary criticism theories.

Vincent Leitch believes that cultural criticism "is characterized by three points: 1-It does not frame cultural action within institutional frameworks in order to promote what is aesthetic and ignore what is not aesthetic, but rather seeks to reveal the hidden patterns beneath the patterns that culture uses to promote its tricks by resorting to aesthetics.

2-Cultural criticism focuses on the theory of textual disclosure in discourse, through which advocates of modernity, such as Derrida, believe that (nothing exists outside the text).

3-One of the manifestations of cultural criticism is that it benefits from or invests in historical, social, psychological, cultural, and even institutional approaches to analysis in order to reveal the hidden meaning of discourse" (Khalil, 2012, pp. 48/49).

In addition to critiquing and analyzing society's culture through cultural studies, "perhaps one of the most important issues that cultural criticism is concerned with is defining culture and forming a concept of it, critiquing and analyzing society's culture, and revealing the mechanisms of intellectual domination and hegemony".(Khalil, 2012, P.80) This is without overlooking the differences between cultural criticism as a methodology and cultural studies, as cultural criticism is concerned with cultural patterns and their implications in text and discourse, while cultural studies is concerned with studying the cultural phenomena that appear in text and discourse.

2- Implicit Cultural Patterns:

The modernist movement paid particular attention to the implicit cultural patterns in texts and discourse, which led to creativity and diversity in the field of critical studies. This diversity contributed to the transition from structural closure to cultural openness and a focus on cultural criticism rather than literary criticism. Abdellah Al-Ghazzami believes that the implicit system is the intellectual basis of cultural discourse (Al-Ghazzami, 2005, P.163), as implicit cultural systems are hidden behind literary texts and may contain a great deal of cultural and cognitive baggage, which requires careful examination of these texts to reveal their textual implications. In this context, "Lotman shares with Eco a cultural approach to the term (system) .For him, the system has become indicative of the history of culture, literature, and social thought in general" (Al-Kaabi, 2005, P.22) This makes cultural systems define the overall characteristics of human culture in general.

One of the mechanisms for revealing the hidden structures in text and discourse is deep reading of the text, with awareness and the ability to analyze, for "reading is a mental activity practiced by the reader" (El-Aid, 1986, P. 13), if that reader possesses the tools of reading and is able to grasp what is hidden in the text. "it is not permissible for the reader to remain a mere recipient subject to the authority of the text, ... like a sponge that absorbs everything that reaches it" (El-Aid, 1986, pp. 19/20) .At that point, reading becomes a cognitive process, not a consumptive one, based on perceiving and revealing hidden meanings. "The text, which is the focus

of cultural criticism, is not read for its own sake, but is viewed as the bearer of a pattern or set of patterns that are not apparent from a direct, superficial reading. Perhaps the reason for this atrophy is the magical touch with which the aesthetic aspect appears" (Mohammed, 2016, PP. 116/117).

Those who follow cultural affairs are well aware that cultural criticism has imposed itself, through its tools and procedures, on the understanding of the content of texts and discourse, by revealing their hidden patterns beyond the aesthetics of literary texts.

Second: An Introductory Overview of the Touareg (Imohag) Community:

The Touareg are a large community living in the Sahara Desert. They call themselves Imohag, their language is Tamashek, and their alphabet is called Tifinagh. It is one of the rare African languages that has a clean alphabet dating back thousands of years. This is evidenced by the writings and inscriptions found in the northern African desert. The Touareg adhere to Islam and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

The Touaregs have a fairly uniform dress code, wearing loose shirts, wide trousers, and leather sandals. Touareg men are also known for wearing large turbans, which can reach up to five meters in length, covering everything but their eyes. They cover their faces with their turbans, which is why they are called (The Masked Men).

The geographical boundaries of the Touareg tribes are spread across the African continent through a group of countries. They are spread in Algeria, specifically in Tamanrasset, Djanet, Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timiaouine, Ain Guezzam, and Tin-Zaouatin. In Libya, they are found in Ghadames, Derg, Oubari, and Ghat. They are also present in Niger, especially between the Algerian-Nigerian border and Tawa, as well as in Mali, Timbuktu, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania,... and other countries. They are united by shared traditions and customs, and their love for the Sahara and all it contains.

Women also enjoy a high and distinguished status among the Touareg, and unlike men, Touareg women do not cover their faces and in most cases wear blue cloth.

Weddings are particularly important to the Touareg, with celebrations lasting a week or more. They hold banquets and slaughter camels and livestock. Wedding ceremonies are characterized by joy and happiness, with a variety of folk dances and local songs, the most important of which is the Tindi dance.

In the past, the Touareg practiced trade through caravans, in addition to herding and raising livestock such as sheep, goats, camels, and cows. They fed on their

milk and meat, and used their skins to make various items they needed in their daily lives, such as tents, slippers, bags, belts, and so on.

The Touareg also hunt wild animals such as gazelles, mountain ibex (Aoudad), and ostriches using spears, traps, and other weapons.

The Touaregs travel across the vast desert, following wet and rainy areas in order to graze their livestock and water their animals. They are not particularly interested in agriculture.

Third: An Analytical Reading of the Implicit Cultural Patterns in the Novel Al-Tibber by Ibrahim Al-Kouni.

Through his novel Al-Tibber, Ibrahim Al-Kouni presents many of the arts, practices, customs, and traditions associated with Touareg societies through sophisticated linguistic structure, giving free rein to his imagination in crafting the plot. This creativity helps the reader understand the wonders and worlds of the desert and its spaces, and clarifies the relationship between humans, the desert, and animals.

The novel Al-Tibber by the international novelist Ibrahim Al-Kouni is one of the novels in which the novelist employs an animal, (Mahri Ablaq), in the course of the novel's events. Through his novel, Al-Kouni has excelled in employing the culture, traditions, and history associated with his society and environment, describing it as a cultural and social product that must be defined and preserved. Al-Kouni style of narration reflects the author's level and genius in achieving the literary quality of his text. This novel won the Japanese Translation Committee Award in 1997.

The events of the novel revolve around the character of (Oukhid), the protagonist, who was gifted to him by the leader of the Ahhegar tribes (Mahri Ablaq), who was very fond of him. One day, Ablaq mated with a camel and contracted scabies, prompting Oukhid to search for a cure for his beloved in the desert. He vowed to sacrifice a fat camel in exchange for Ablaq's recovery, until he found a herb called (Asyar), a legendary plant that cures all diseases, thanks to which Ablaq was healed.

After that, Oukhid bought a camel to offer as a sacrifice for the healing of his son, but he forgot about the sacrifice and slaughtered the camel at his wedding, where he married a girl his father had rejected. At that time, war broke out between the Italians and the resistance fighters, and famine struck the desert, killing people from severe hunger. One day, Oukhid had a dream in which he was told to slaughter the camel as a sacrifice.

Oukhid refused and pawned the camel to his wife's relative, (Doddo), in exchange for two camels. He sold one of them and used the other to feed his family, but the camel kept escaping from its owner and returning to Oukhid. The pawnbroker Doddo offered to return the camel to Oukhid in exchange for Oukhid divorcing his wife and marrying Doddo. In addition, he would give him two handfuls of gold dust and take care of his son, who would accompany his mother.

Oukhid initially refused to divorce his wife and give up his son, but he eventually gave in to the situation. Thus, Oukhid became free with his wife, but rumors spread among the Touareg tribes that Oukhid had sold his wife and son in exchange for gold dust. Oukhid decided to take revenge on his wife's relative and killed him. The tribe of the deceased rose up in search of Oukhid to kill him, because according to the customs of their society, the tribe could not divide the inheritance (the estate of the deceased) unless the killer was killed. Oukhid managed to escape and hide in the caves of the mountains, but Al- Mahri Ablaq soon went to his friend and revealed Oukhid's whereabouts to his enemies. Oukhid was captured and killed in a gruesome manner, while his wife remained alive. The events of the novel end in tragic drama.

Although Arabic novels have been influenced by Western civilization, Ibrahim Al-Kouni has managed to offer cultural and intellectual alternatives that transcend Western centrality. These alternatives are represented in the use of desert culture, given its dominance in the narrative content and its direct influence on the cultural formation of the reader.

The use of the desert and its cultural and historical heritage is an indication of the modernization of contemporary Arabic fiction, as it breaks away from the dominance of civilized places that Westerners have been describing for centuries.

Through the novel *Al-Tibber*, I will attempt to reveal some of the hidden cultural patterns, arts, and practices of Touareg society through a series of narrative examples, as follows:

1- Touareg Poetry (Imohag Poem):

Poetry among the Touareg is a poetic expression called (Tasaouit) and its plural is (Tesiouay). Poetry can be oral or written in the Tariki language called (Tifinagh), and the poet is called (Amesiway) (Fertouni, 2021, PP.38/39).

The themes of Tuareg poetry are social, military, and heroic, in addition to descriptions of the desert landscape and its mountains, animals, places, and so on. The poetic purposes of Touareg society are varied, including love, praise, pride, condemnation, and others.

Ibrahim Al-Kouni used the opening lines of a poem in his novel, saying: "He lay on his back and raised his voice in one of those magical melodies that traveling knights in the desert use as a charm against wild animals, ending his sad song with the well-known verses:

"Asad Yankard Amoud Nukfi Tizdag.

Idh Shaghat Tajnin Yajir Nimzad" (Al-Kouni, 1992, P.07).

-Translation of the Passage:

(When I accepted Amoud, we welcomed him with our martial skills. and gave him knights who never miss their target).

After reading the beginning of this poem, readers who do not have a cultural background in Touareg society may have questions about the characteristics of Touareg poetry. To clarify these ambiguities, I summarize the answer as follows: (Fertouni, 2021, PP.38-45)

- The poem is in the Touareg language, and its letters are written in the Tifinagh alphabet, although we sometimes find Arabic terms used.
 - The poem is written in a single-verse format, with the meaning completed in each verse.
 - Most Touareg poetry is oral literature that is passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.
 - Touareg poetry (Imohag) has many purposes, such as praise, criticism, description, pride in glories and heroism, as well as courtship and other purposes.
 - Touareg poetry, in its similes and descriptions, does not stray far from the desert and its contents.
 - Touareg poetry is usually sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Perhaps the most important musical instrument among the Touareg is the imzad.
- It is clear from the above that poetry in Touareg society (Imohag) is a sociological cultural phenomenon, with poems conveying meanings that express the uniqueness and singularity of Touareg society.

2- Tindi, One of the Popular Dances among the Touareg:

The Touareg community is known for a number of popular dances, such as the Tindi, the Jakmi, the Takouba, the Sabiba, and others.

One of the cultural motifs implied in the novel Al- Tibber is the name of the dance (Tindi), which Al-Kouni refers to semiotically based on the context of the text, but does not explicitly mention in his text. He says:

- "He entered the square in the afternoon. In the plain, the women gathered around the drums, the boys formed a wide circle around them, and the elders took their

places on the southern hill. Opposite them stood the men and young men, their heads crowned with magnificent blue turbans, strutting with the pride of peacocks, while the horsemen stood at attention on the horizon on both sides of the open space. One row stood ready in the west and the other row stood ready in the east.. " (Al-Kouni, 1992, PP.09/10).

In another narrative passage, he also refers to the Tindi dance semiotically, describing the Tindi drum, saying:

- "He reached for the magic whip to urge the camel to set off... He stroked his thigh with the whip again, and the animal's madness intensified. It broke through the circle of women and smashed an elegant drum covered with gazelle skin, causing the women to scatter and the singing to stop" (Al-Kouni, 1992, P.11).

Those familiar with Touareg culture will understand after reading these two narrative passages that the novelist is referring to the Tindi dance in the context of his text, but other readers may not grasp the meaning. The tindi is a type of song known to the Touaregs. This dance is performed at various celebrations and events, as well as competitions to select the most beautiful women of the season and other occasions, where women form a circle in the middle of the desert, singing and beating the tindi, which is made of a wooden bowl covered with animal skin. This vessel is fixed on two thick wooden sticks, with two girls sitting on the sticks, each girl on one end to hold it steady, while another girl beats the tindi after placing a piece of cloth on the skin and sprinkling it with water. The sprinkling of water continues during the singing, while the men dance on the backs of their camels.

The contexts of the text carry semantic and symbolic connotations with cultural and cognitive dimensions that help reveal the patterns implicit in the text and arrive at the intended meaning. Therefore, linguistic studies have focused on semantics and the study of meaning, style, and the study of words and their meanings. True style is that which stimulates the recipient through a set of connotations that highlight and express different meanings.

3- The Imzad Instrument among the Touareg:

Musical instruments are diverse and present in the Touareg regions, and they bear the same name in most of these regions. Each musical instrument has its own dance and artistic field. Among the most important musical instruments among the Touareg are: the Imzad, the guitar, the Tizmar, and others.

The imzad is an ancient and beloved musical instrument among the Touareg. Al-Kouni refers to it in his novel, saying: "When they were the sound of the wind. An echo of a song, the wailing of the imzad between the fingers of a beautiful woman" (Al-Kouni, 1992, P.111).

We note that the author links the imzad to the echo of a song and lament, and to the fingers of a beautiful woman. The semantic connections between the words of the text may form the semantic field, which is playing and singing, but the author does not explicitly clarify the ambiguity of the term imzad, or what the imzad is, who plays it, how it is played, and what its characteristics are.

To reveal the cultural implications of the imzad, I will attempt to clarify the ambiguity surrounding this musical instrument as follows:

- The imzad is a musical instrument of the Touareg people, similar to the Arabic rabab. It is made of a wooden bowl covered with skin and has a single string made of horsehair. It is played with a wooden bow strung with horsehair.
- One of its peculiarities is that it is played by women and cannot be touched by men, as it is considered taboo for them to do so, based on the belief that it diminishes a man or may bring a curse upon him.
- The imzad is played in times of joy and sorrow.

From the above, we can see the importance of singing and playing music in Touareg societies, as it is present in their peace and war, their settlements and travels, their joys and sorrows.

4- Tea, The Drink of the Touareg:

The desert is a vast world rich in culture, history, customs, and traditions. It is characterized by the beauty of its space in its artistic, geographical, and anthropological dimensions. It is a place of facts, landmarks, and cultural heritage. Like most of the desert's inhabitants, the Touareg have a tradition of drinking tea. Al-Kouni referred to this drink when he said: "The shepherd gave him a cup of tea and said gruffly:

You shouldn't have pawned this jewel for him. If you had pawned it for me, I would have thought of a devilish trick to steal it from you.

He smiled mysteriously and sipped his tea:

'You treat strangers as if they were your peers. One does not become a stranger without reason. A secret always lies in the heart of a stranger.

Oukhid did not sip his tea. He left the cup buried in the sand and listened to the bubbles of foam as they dissolved and disappeared. Their sound was clear in the excessive silence" (Al-Kouni, 1992, PP.104/105).

The author did not tell us about how to prepare tea, when to drink it, and on what occasions. To clarify the meaning and reveal the mystery surrounding the cultural patterns associated with tea drinking, I will try to explain it as follows:

- It is a daily drink that is prepared several times a day.
- It is served to guests as a sign of generosity and hospitality.

- It is also an essential companion during evening gatherings.
- It is an indispensable drink at all occasions and celebrations.
- Tea is prepared over a wood fire and boiled three times in succession. The first time, the tea is strong; the second time, it is medium strength; and the third time, it is light and sweetened. This is served to women and children.
- The Touareg also care about the quality of their tea.

Al-Kouni used the customs of Touareg society in his writing, with the intention of preserving the cultural heritage of the Touareg in its various forms, "as the narrative contains an element of intentionality that is not lost on the writer" (Eljalil, 2005, PP.59/60) Intentionality contributes to the development of literature and is a feature of contemporary novel writing.

Conclusion:

Through my research on this topic, I conclude with the following findings:

- Cultural criticism is the ideal method for uncovering the cultural patterns implicit in contemporary novels, as it provides critical tools and modernist approaches that have greatly contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the text.
- The hidden pattern is an active and influential cultural structure in the text, hidden behind literary texts, which requires the critic to delve into the text and study it across various fields of knowledge to uncover the hidden cultural patterns.
- Ibrahim Al-Kouni, through his novel *Al-Tibber*, has excelled in employing the characteristic of textual subtext, opening the way for the reader to interpret and reveal what is hidden.
- After revealing the subtexts in the novel, it becomes clear that the arts and practices of Touareg society carry within them many cognitive meanings associated with the cultural heritage of this society.
- The desert space has contributed to the development of the contemporary novel in terms of form and content, structure and meaning, as well as to the development and growth of literature in general and the cultural knowledge it produces.
- In order to preserve the arts, practices, customs, and traditions of the Touareg community, we must document, classify, and revive them so that future generations can benefit from them.
- We commend the effective role of those interested in Touareg culture (Imohag) through their various literary, cultural, and historical writings.

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