

Identity Fragmentation and Self-Division in HadjerGouideri's Novel "Al-Raïs"

تشظي الهوية وانشطار الذات في رواية "الرايس" لهاجر قويدري

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Received: 25/11/2024 Accepted: 15/01/2025Published:01/02/2025

Abstract:

Exploring central themes of identity and self, particularly within literature, remains pivotal given their profound influence on both individual lives and societal dynamics. HadjerGouideri's novel "Al-Raïs" exemplifies seminal explorations into the intricacies of identity and belonging, set against the backdrop of Dey rule in Algeria. This novel intricately navigates the conflicts between the Algerian self, symbolizing the 'I'- and the 'Other,' represented through European, Ottoman, and Hebrew identities. This study seeks to elucidate the legitimacy and complexity of identity interrogation within "Al-Raïs," aiming to articulate how identity fragmentation and self-division are pivotal in shaping the narrative's architecture.

Keywords:Identity, Division, Fragmentation, Novel, Self, Other.

ملخص:

تمثل إشكاليات الهوية والذات من القضايا التي شغلت الأدباء عامة والروائيين خاصة نظرا لمركزية الموضوع في حياة الإنسان والمجتمع والتجارب أيضا، ولما له من انعكاسات كبيرة على عمليات تأييد العالم الروائي والتشكيل الخطابي. تعدّ رواية "الرايس" لهاجر قويدري إحدى أهم النصوص التي اشتغلت على إشكالية الهوية والانتماء كذلك أبانت عن الصراع الذي كان بارزا في فترة تاريخية وهي فترة حكم الدايات في الجزائر، كما عالج المتن الروائي الصراع القائم بين الذات الجزائرية التي تمثلت في الأنا، والآخر الذي تجسّد في الذات الأوروبية والعثمانية والعبرية أيضا، من هنا تأتي مشروعية المسألة الهوية لنص المدونة من أجل إبراز الطبيعة الشذرية للهوية التي

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تسكن نص رواية "الرايس" وبيان مظاهر تشظي الهوية وانشطارات الذات في الرواية الرايس، وكيف أسهم ذلك في بناء معمار الرواية.

كلمات مفتاحية: الهوية، الانشطار، التشظي، الرواية، الذات، الآخر.

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Introduction:

The novel, as a literary genre, has garnered substantial attention from contemporary scholars, outshining other forms due to its enchanting narrative realms replete with diverse spaces, characters, and linguistic richness, alongside its capacity to foster vivid imagination. The thematic exploration of identity and its interplay with the 'Other' has notably resonated within critical discourses, positioning it as a focal point of literary analysis.

This study delves into the characters of "Al-Raïs" to uncover the explosive manifestations of identity within the narrative, highlighting the themes of fragmentation, division, and the resultant splintering of self that underscore the complex dimensions of identity in turmoil. The analysis adopts a cultural lens, prompted by the question: What are the manifestations of identity fragmentation and self-division as depicted in the novel "Al-Raïs"?

1. Concept of Identity:

Identity is a multifaceted construct, encompassing physical, psychological, social, historical, and cultural dimensions that collectively empower an individual to distinguish themselves from others. This construct is recognized both at the individual and societal levels, encompassing the singular and the collective. Identity, inherently a human concept, involves the internal divisions that individuals experience, the paradoxes and transcendences, the gaps between reality and ideals, past and present, and present and future.

It is within these divisions that individuals encounter experiences akin to schizophrenia, where identity can morph into a state of alienation. For an individual's identity to be fully realized, there must be an interaction with a

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community, people among whom they live, exert influence, and are influenced in return, sharing common traits that concurrently distinguish them from other groups.(Hasanein, 2012, p. 11) Given its sacred status to humans, there is an inherent drive to preserve identity against any form of dissolution.

Identity is both precious and vulnerable, subject to erosion over time through changes in society and individual circumstances. It is described as "what persists of a person over time, accompanying them, shaping their personality, and defining their features steadfastly, thus imbuing their creativity with a distinctive character that is not easily swayed by external influences. Therefore, identity is intricately linked to the individual, profoundly influencing the community and bestowing it with a unique attribute.

Consequently, the 'self' and 'us' become inseparable as identity fosters an instinctual sense of belonging to a group and identifying with it, reciprocating recognition, making identity complex and not easily delineated in simple terms." As inherently social beings, humans cannot exist in isolation; they require others for interaction and communication, denoted as 'the Other'.(Hamoud, 2013, p. 15) This 'Other' stands in contrast to one's own psychological, social, cultural, and even physical traits, thus forming the fundamental binary of 'self' and 'the Other', "two images capable of modification and change despite their apparent constancy.

The dynamics of this relationship are subject to the variances imposed by real-world events and circumstances, such as the differing perceptions of the 'Other' in times of peace versus war, shaped by their negative or positive interactions with the 'self'.(Al-Mahdawi, 2013, p. 40) " This duality has emerged as a pivotal theme in literature, reflecting and expressing societal dynamics through various facets of human existence.

Arab authors have prolifically explored identity and the dynamics between the self and the other in their literary works, each offering unique perspectives shaped by personal ideologies and cultural contexts.

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HadjerGouideri, through her novel "Al-Raïs," exemplifies this exploration, suggesting that "the novel serves as one of the most potent art forms for articulating the complexities of the self and the other, providing a platform for the 'self' to voice its inner fears, pains, and contemplations, thereby enabling a critical examination of both the self and the other." (Hamoud, 2013, p. 14)

The novel emerges as a mirror to reality, portraying and analyzing human relationships while often proposing solutions to societal issues. Novels not only dissect and critique societal structures but also vividly depict the human condition and the ongoing struggles with the 'other', encapsulating the profound impact of these interactions on an individual's identity.

This investigation seeks to shed light on novelist HadjerGouideri's depiction of the intricate relationship between the 'self', representing Algerian identity, and the 'Other', embodied by Western European influences, alongside the broader issues of identity and belonging as portrayed through the characters in "Al-Raïs". By revisiting the period of Ottoman rule in Algeria, Gouideri selects the historical figure Raïs Hamidou as her protagonist to explore the social and political dynamics in Algeria under Turkish dominion and the ensuing power struggles among the Deys through the novel's various characters.

2. Fragmentation of Identity and Rejection of Belonging:

The character Bavarito, initially a young man exiled from his town, Dermengiler in Cyprus, for his questionable morals, finds himself relocated to Algeria. There, his attempt to flee results in him being sold like a slave at the port. Purchased by Raïs Hamidou, Bavarito undergoes a forced identity change: his name is altered to Ali Tatar. Despite this outward transformation, he internally clings to his Cypriot identity and his memories of his beloved Linda.

This dichotomy fuels a profound internal conflict: internally, he remains Bavarito, while externally, he adopts the persona of Ali Tatar, the pirate fighting alongside his comrade Hamidou in support of Islam. His journey

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back to his homeland, driven by nostalgia and longing, ends in disillusionment as he discovers that Linda has married and everything he cherished has changed. Disheartened, he returns to Algeria, where he ultimately buries his Christian identity to fully embrace his new life as Ali Tatar the Muslim, a transition marked by conviction and satisfaction.

Philosopher Hassan Hanafi Hasanein articulates this duality, stating, "Identity is for one to be oneself, consistent with one's essence, whereas alienation is to be other than oneself after being divided into two parts, a remaining identity and an otherness that attracts it." (Hasanein, 2012, p. 12)

The narrative unfolds with the initial deportation of criminals from Cyprus to Algeria, intended both for the Jihad in Islam and for their moral reformation: "The locals petitioned the governor to deport 50 villains from the village of Dermengiler on the island of Cyprus to the province of Algeria for the sake of Jihad in Islam and the Ottoman state, and to reform their souls.(Gouideri, 2015, p. 5) "

Before his exile, Bavarito, a man deeply rooted in his homeland, expresses his turmoil in a poignant monologue: "I had never left my city except once when my mother died, and I sought to escape my grief in Genoa. The same taste invades my throat now, a biting loss, perhaps more searing this time."(Gouideri, 2015, pp. 8-9) Upon arrival in Algeria, his suffering is compounded by harsh treatment, including beatings and torture by Sayyid Ali, the agent responsible for the slave trade.

However, Raïs Hamidou's compassionate treatment begins to heal Bavarito's wounds: "I began to heal after Hamidou took me to the port's rest area. He demanded nothing from me, allowing me to recuperate in bed before I joined his small sambuk. Gradually, I began to forgive my fate, casting my resentment into the sea."(Gouideri, 2015, p. 40) This shift significantly alters his perspective on his new life in Algeria, gradually dissolving his resentment towards the city of Algiers and its inhabitants.

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Bavarito's encounter with Santiago, a Spanish Christian cook who, unlike Bavarito, has embraced life in Algeria, further influences his journey of integration. Captured by the Algerians and having refused a return to Spain after Hamidou paid his ransom, Santiago tells Bavarito, "We would gather with Hamidou after the sailors had their meals.

Santiago was a skilled cook who loved Hamidou dearly, preparing delicious dishes with the cinnamon flavor he adored. He told me he had been captured here ten years ago and that Hamidou had paid his ransom. A Spanish ship came to take him back to his country, but he refused and decided to stay on this ship. I have gotten used to my life here, and I will never leave Hamidou."(Gouideri, 2015, pp. 40-41) Santiago also aids Bavarito in learning Arabic, which helps him to gradually let go of his past in Dermengiler and find solace among the ship's crew.

Initially, Bavarito was known within his community in Dermengiler solely as a criminal engaged in petty thefts. Yet, his transformative interactions aboard Raïs Hamidou's ship catalyzed a profound change in his identity. Immersing himself in a milieu distinctly different from his notorious past, he learned from the diverse crew and transitioned from a feared thief to a sailor dedicated to protecting the Algerian coast and repelling invaders.

This transformation underscores the pivotal role of the 'Other' in identity formation; isolation fosters a simplistic, flawed, and static self-conception, whereas engagement with the 'Other' enriches one's identity, introducing complex dimensions and connecting one to multiple worlds.(Hamoud, 2013, p. 17) Through these new relationships, Bavarito encountered and adapted to a world far removed from the narrow confines of his former life, thus embodying the idea that identity is "the essence of a person or thing." (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 1990, p. 660)

Ali Tatar's journey of self-discovery continued even during his encounters on the high seas. When he and his crew captured a Portuguese ship, he was profoundly moved by the sight of a monk who cried and prayed to Saint Mary for protection from the Algerian pirates. This poignant moment

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rekindled memories of his childhood and the church visits with his mother, stirring his dormant, original identity.

Drawn to the monk's plight, Bavarito approached him and facilitated his passage to another Mediterranean destination. Learning from the harbormaster about several available ships, he allowed the monk to choose his journey. The monk opted for France, parting with harsh words: "They may call you the guided one, but if our ships capture you, we will hang you on a cross and burn you in the public square, you traitor to your religion and your people." These biting words left Bavarito unsettled and catalyzed a deep reflection on his identity, questioning, "Where is Bavarito now?"(Gouideri, 2015, p. 88)

This critical moment of confrontation with his past was echoed by Santiago, who also shared a history of transformation yet advised against revisiting abandoned identities. Santiago asserted that once a person moves past certain aspects of their life, they should not dwell on them or seek to return.

Despite this advice, Bavarito remained unconvinced, compelled by a deep-seated need to reconcile his past with his present. Resolute, he declared, "The next morning, I woke up early, washed my face, dressed, and called out to Bavarito. I kept saying, 'Get up, Bavarito... Hurry, Bavarito...'. It was as if my name had suddenly fallen upon my head. I no longer thought about the big things, not about Christ, not about my circumcision, nor about the testimony of the Muslims.(Gouideri, 2015, p. 107) " This declaration marked a pivotal turning point, indicating his readiness to confront and potentially integrate his fragmented identities, striving for a cohesive sense of self that transcends religious and cultural divisions.

Determined to reconnect with his roots, Bavarito returned to his birthplace, Dermengiler, fueled by hope of rediscovering his past life and the affection of his once-beloved Linda. Yet, upon arrival, the stark realization dawned upon him that neither his city nor Linda, who had since married and moved on with her life, held any remnants of the past he cherished.

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Disheartened by the absence of recognition and the profound changes, Bavarito faced the ultimate disillusionment: "I returned to seek Hamidou's company. No one but him knew that I was not well, that I had come back here without Bavarito. Now, I want nothing but to be Ali Tatar, while Bavarito, I left there in Dermengiler, a ghost biting his fingers in regret over his lost love.(Gouideri, 2015, p. 172)" In this moment, Ali Tatar fully embraces his new identity, laying to rest his former self, and vowing loyalty to his new life and comradeship with Hamidou until death.

This narrative encapsulates the profound journey of Bavarito, a Cypriot young man exiled to Algeria, who, over the years alongside Hamidou, transitioned into Ali Tatar, oscillating between these identities. After fifteen years, his return to Cyprus revealed the loss of all ties to his former life and persona, marking a definitive end to his quest for his old self.

3. Self-Division Between the Self and the Other:

Talar, another poignant character in the novel "Raïs Hamidou," epitomizes the struggle with self-division. Originating from Sidon and having previously collaborated with the English, Talar abruptly shifts allegiance to the Americans, influenced by their better compensation and her husband Zahrab's opportunistic tendencies: "I left Sidon with no return, left everything, and escaped with my life. I wanted to leave it with Sita before today, but I was blessed with a third child and had to care for him. Yet, I left my entire life behind, and now I am on my way to Tangier and then to America (Gouideri, 2015, p. 77)." Her decision to flee Beirut stems from a palpable fear of assassination, either by the English or potentially even by her own husband.

Reflecting on her fragmented identity, Talar confesses in a deeply introspective monologue: "The sea still awakens my sorrows, and it does not let me sleep. I looked at my face in the mirror this morning and did not recognize it. I have lost this face. It wanted to go to America after George promised to help, and it wanted to start a new life free from fears. Here I am, like a sister of mine, lost by love, yet I managed to escape with my

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three children. But midway, I lost my face and with it all the desires it brought from Sidon.(Gouideri, 2015, p. 79)" This admission captures her profound sense of alienation and loss, reflecting a deep psychological split where her external actions diverge dramatically from her internal sense of self.

Talar's narrative illustrates the psychological fragmentation often experienced during significant life transitions. Her story is a testament to the dissonance that can arise when external circumstances force a departure from one's past, leading to a fractured identity.

This division is poignantly described as "a declaration of parts of the personality about their state of divorce from each other, shattered in their relations and maintaining amnesiac barriers where there should be connections." (Oumgharan, 2005, p. 95) Such conditions manifest when an individual's self-confidence erodes, feelings of inadequacy prevail, and a profound sense of non-belonging takes root, as vividly portrayed through Talar's tumultuous experiences and internal conflict.

Talar's harrowing narrative draws to a close marked by betrayal and loss. Her tragic end is a direct consequence of her dual engagements: "I thought this story had ended, and they promised me a new life in America with my children in exchange for all the troubles and dangers I faced in Sidon, Beirut, and Istanbul for their sake. My strength has waned, and I can endure no more.(Gouideri, 2015, p. 102) " Her hopes for a peaceful future with her children were shattered when her complex dual identity as both a tailor loyal to the English and a spy for the Americans was exposed. The revelation led to a series of fatal events orchestrated by her husband Zahrab, culminating in her murder.

The aftermath of her death further underscores the profound betrayal and its consequences: "A few days after Talar's murder, her personal servant Youssef disappeared from the house, confirming to George that her husband Zahrab had betrayed her, leading the English to eliminate her. Some Americans who were monitoring the situation informed me of this. I filed a

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report to the foreign relations officer in the New York office, requesting justice for her children and compensation for the loss of their mother." (Gouideri, 2015, p. 150)

Talar's life and tragic end illustrate how an individual's identity, when divided and manipulated, can lead to their downfall, leaving her children dispossessed and her legacy tainted by betrayal and murder.

4. Self-Awareness and Deconstructing the Centrality of the Other:

The character Khoja Al-Ghana'im Yahya Medilio presents a compelling study in self-awareness and identity struggle. Born to a Muslim father, Abdelkader Tlemceni, and a Jewish mother, Nouria from R'bat, Yahya's identity was marked by cultural and religious intersections from the outset. His mother, who favored her daughter Jawhar and her Jewish heritage, always viewed Yahya as an outsider within his own family. Despite Yahya's efforts to embrace his Jewish roots and gain his mother's acceptance, she remained distant, treating him as a stranger and showing preference for her daughter's husband.

Yahya's complex identity came to a profound realization in an unexpected moment: "One day, Yahya came across a body buried in his garden and inadvertently began reciting Quranic verses, realizing that he was a Muslim at heart, even if it did not show." (Hasanein, 2012, p. 11)

This poignant discovery signifies a critical junction in his life, where the inherent tension between his upbringing and his innate religious identity surfaces dramatically. Yahya's journey underscores the fluidity and complexity of identity, which can remain concealed until catalyzed by significant life events. This moment of self-realization challenges the centrality of the 'Other' in defining one's identity, suggesting that true self-awareness might emerge independently from the external labels and affiliations imposed by society.

"Identity, despite its metaphysical underpinnings, is profoundly rooted in psychological problems and emotional experiences. An individual may find

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alignment or deviation within themselves when mirrored by others. This bifurcation manifests as two distinct parts: identity and otherness." Within this framework, Yahya found solace, allowing him to gradually distance himself from the memories of Dermengiler, his previous home.

Nouria, the resolute mother of Yahya, dominated her family life, particularly after her husband deserted her and returned to Tlemcen. She fervently raised Yahya in the Jewish faith, yet she harbored deep-seated shame and disdain for him due to his Arab Muslim heritage: "I gave birth to you with my heart. Your father was an Arab and I didn't think about what would come. As much as the story of birth from the heart impressed me, I cried that night. I wanted to be like her, but she never looked closely, even though I completely resembled her, perhaps even a better Rashbati than her daughter's husband. Afterward, I dedicated myself to the teachings of her religion, becoming skilled in interpreting the Torah. I also learned the Semitic languages, but she did not notice, and she died without leaving me a man of this house." (Gouideri, 2015, p. 97)

Yahya's relentless efforts to assimilate and gain his mother's approval were met with indifference, leaving him feeling perpetually inferior and unaccepted within his own family.

This dynamic shifted dramatically when Yahya, while gardening, accidentally unearthed the body of a woman. The shock of the discovery elicited a deep, instinctive response as he proclaimed the Shahada: "The next morning, I rushed my coffee, then left without drinking it. I kept replaying the details of what happened yesterday; it was unbelievable. But suddenly, I started laughing at myself. I remembered that when I realized it was the face of a dead woman, I started running and screaming: 'There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.' I repeated it many times sincerely. Was my soul Muslim?" (Gouideri, 2015, pp. 98-99) This moment of crisis triggered a profound realization for Yahya, confirming his Muslim identity, which he had perhaps subconsciously suppressed to maintain his mother's affection and conform to her expectations.

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Tahar Labib elaborates on this concept, stating: "There is no doubt that the sense of identity, or self-awareness, and thus the awareness of one's own self-image, or conception of oneself, and its relation to the concept of otherness, meaning the awareness of the existence of a different other, knowing the distinctive features and boundaries between self and other, directly raises the issue of the mechanisms of internal formation of identity itself, its ongoing dynamics, and thus its approaches to viewing the other, are among the oldest, most established, and clearest realities of human existence.(Labib, 1993-1996, p. 21)" This assertion highlights the intrinsic complexities of identity as not only a personal journey of self-discovery and acceptance but also a relational dynamic shaped by and shaping interactions with 'the Other.'

Ali Medili, caught between his affections and his heritage, faced a profound identity crisis that culminated in a pivotal familial confrontation. His decision to marry a Bedouin Muslim Arab girl under the false name Hamdan sparked intense familial backlash: "Hello, Hamdan, how could you deny your identity just to marry her? I stood silently watching her perfectly play the role of Lala Nouria the Rashbati, then her husband intervened and began hurling insults I could never have imagined... I didn't utter a word, but they threw me out of the house after Jawhar told me: 'You are the son of Abdelkader Tlemceni... You are a miserable Muslim Arab (Gouideri, 2015, p. 140).'" This confrontation was not just with his family but with himself, challenging his internal alignment with his Muslim identity while outwardly conforming to Jewish customs to maintain familial bonds.

Overwhelmed by the confrontation, Ali reflects on his internal conflict and the larger implications of his dual identities: "I left their house gasping like women, although I knew everything, I never expected someone to confront me with this truth, especially Jawhar, whom I held in the same regard as my mother (...) Did I rid myself of my great lie? And which is the greater lie? Hamdan or Yahya? And who resembles me more?(Gouideri, 2015, pp. 140-141)" This introspection highlights his struggle between self-identity and

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the imposed identity by his family, illustrating the profound challenge of reconciling these aspects of his life.

Ali's story exemplifies the complex interplay of self-awareness and the rejection of the imposed 'Other.' His journey underscores the painful realization that identity can sometimes force a person to magnify their attributes, even at the cost of diminishing or denying the 'Other.' This dynamic is vividly captured in the reflection: "Identity can kill, mercilessly. In many cases, a strong and absolute sense of belonging limited to one group can carry with it the recognition of the distance and difference from other groups." (Sen, 2008, p. 2)

The relationship between the self and the 'Other' in this context presupposes exclusion and denial, portraying a scenario where one's happiness and identity are seemingly secured through the negation of the other. This harsh reality reflects in Ali's life, as he grapples with the values and ideals that are foreign and unconvincing to his essential identity, ultimately leading to his estrangement from his Rashbati family.

5. Conclusion:

The findings of this study can be outlined as follows:

- _ The fragmentation of identity within the novel stems from inherent conflicts, mirroring a historical era when diverse nationalities, Arabic, Hebrew, European, and Turkish, converged in Algeria, each striving to assert and preserve their distinct identities amidst a backdrop of political and cultural turmoil.
- _ Within the narrative, various identities adapt to or resist changes, leading to fragmentation or the bifurcation between the self and the 'Other.' Some characters, in their attempt to affirm their identity, designate the 'Other' as an adversary, engaging in conflicts that underscore their existential threats and contribute to a profound lack of belonging.

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- _ The novel articulates a discourse on identity that is inherently based on opposition, difference, and contradiction. This is vividly portrayed through the behaviors and decisions of the characters, which result in intense psychological conflicts and identity crises within themselves.
- _ Through her intricate portrayal of characters, HadjerGouideri unveils the societal dynamics of Algerian society under Ottoman rule, a society marked by racial mixing and power struggles. Characters such as Bavarito experience fragmentation, while others like Talar grapple with being torn between self and 'Other.' Conversely, characters like Yahya Medili, the Jew, ultimately choose and assert their identity, liberating themselves from their imposed pasts.

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