

Experimentation in the Algerian Novel: A Study of Tahar Ouettar's "The Earthquake"

L'expérimentation dans le roman algérien : Une étude du « Tremblement de terre » de Tahar Ouettar

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Abstract:

The societal fabric and its veracity are articulated through the prisms of literary character and its artistic frameworks. This representation emerges from a meticulous pursuit of understanding life's exigencies, transforming narrative content into a dynamic structure that aligns with the imperatives of modernism. These dynamics are anchored in the principles of rigorous investigation and inquiry, essential for catalyzing processes of transformation and innovation. Such processes are deeply embedded in the contemporary Arab intellectual milieu, propelling the creative endeavor to become a venue for deliberate artistic skepticism and meticulous evaluation. This paper seeks to elucidate experimentation and its structural nuances within the domain of contemporary Algerian narrative forms, exploring its interplay with creative impulses that propel continuity and change amidst identity negotiations intertwined with both the milieu and the alterity.

Keywords: Novel, Experimentation, Modernism, Innovation, Tahar Ouettar.

Résumé :

Le tissu social et sa véracité sont articulés à travers les prismes du caractère littéraire et de ses cadres artistiques. Cette représentation émerge d'une recherche méticuleuse de la compréhension des exigences de la vie, transformant le contenu narratif en une structure dynamique qui s'aligne sur les impératifs du modernisme. Cette dynamique est ancrée dans les principes de l'investigation et de la recherche rigoureuses, essentiels pour catalyser les processus de transformation et d'innovation. Ces processus sont profondément ancrés dans le milieu intellectuel arabe contemporain, propulsant l'effort créatif vers un scepticisme artistique délibéré et une évaluation méticuleuse. Cet article cherche à élucider l'expérimentation et ses nuances structurelles dans le domaine des formes narratives algériennes contemporaines, en explorant son interaction avec les impulsions créatives qui propulsent la continuité et le changement au milieu des négociations identitaires entrelacées à la fois avec le milieu et l'altérité.

Mots- clés : Roman, Expérimentation, Modernisme, Innovation, Tahar Ouettar.

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Introduction

Literary genres evolve in response to societal visions and prevailing cultural discourses. The construction of a cultural narrative, however, necessitates a foundation in semantically rich knowledge, exploring societal prospects and the dynamics of realism within. Among the most salient examples of narrative forms addressing national and communal discourses is the novel, which intersects with multiple expressive modalities and interacts with a range of artistic significances. Events within the novel expand according to an authenticity that strives for an articulation both comprehensive and expressive.

In this capacity, the novel occupies a pivotal role, burdened yet distinguished by its task of presenting the proactive self through narratives that engage in introspection and disclosure. By transmuting reality with its inherent tools into a narrative thought and revelation, the novel interacts with the discourse's allure and situational artistry, thereby crafting the dynamics of narrative movement.

The Algerian novel adheres to the traditional constructs in narrative theory while boldly articulating realities through a lens that is profoundly vocal and declarative, more so than other forms within Arab literary tradition. This is evident in its literary milieu and the distinct imprints left by Algerian novelists' imaginations and intellects. Consequently, the narrative not only offers a vivid depiction of the situation but also preserves the diverse and multifaceted fields of its discourse, which are delineated by both rural and urban realities. These are characterized by their respective distinctive and activating social circles, juxtaposed with urban dynamics caught between rapid motion and intellectual hesitancy.

"The Earthquake" particularly encapsulates the concentrated ideological structures within a confined spatial setting, seldom venturing beyond certain streets of Constantine, encapsulated within a brief temporal frame not exceeding nine hours. From Abdul Majid's initial encounter with the city through his quest for familial connections to the eventual descent into madness, the novel exemplifies the narrative innovation championed by Tahar Ouettar as a leader in the realistic experimentalism, aimed at affirming the symbolism of identity and belonging.

Through "The Earthquake," Ouettar pioneers a new narrative vision, juxtaposing societal realities with their transformations, thus documenting history from the revolutionary contradictions in "El Laz (The Ace)" to the narrative of reforms in "The Earthquake," through the depiction of power struggles in "Wedding of a Mule" and "The Fisherman and the Palace," and extending to the age of religious extremism in "The Candle and the Corridors." This trajectory culminates in the seclusion depicted in "The Mystic Returns To His Pristine Shrine" and "The Mystic Lifts His Palms in Supplication." It is unsurprising, therefore, that these titles have become integral to the literary heritage, charged with creative potentials manifested through diverse structural elements in form and content within experimental narratives known in Ouettar's works, reflecting the socio-political and cultural shifts in post-independence Algeria.

This paper presents the strategies of experimentation and their connection to narrative consciousness and significance, delving into the underexplored taboos in the corpus of Arab, and specifically Algerian, narrative novels. It engages with the structural and contextual flows that shape the narrative act, related to the experimental vision in "The Earthquake," thereby addressing the following questions: to what extent can experimentation be linked to the discourse of foundationalism in modern Algerian literature? What is the fate of experimental content amid the

struggle for identity assertion and literary dominance on the artistic and creative stage? This inquiry is underpinned by an analytical methodology appropriate for exploring the nature of the novel and experimentation, as well as the foundational stages of their development.

2. The Fundamentals of Experimentation

Experimentation in literature is intrinsically linked with the embrace of novelty and innovation, cultural, and intercultural trends, clearly adopted by new approaches such as competency-based and action-oriented approaches, have led to an appreciation of this type of document. Literary studies now have not only aesthetic but also educational, intellectual, emotional, linguistic, and cultural purposes" (SOLTANI, nd, p:273) constituting a rebellion against traditional aesthetic norms whose themes have stagnated and whose forms have become petrified. "Artistic ventures," often characterized as experimental (Cork, 1989, p. 45.), suggest that experimentation serves as a bridge between scientific methods and literary creativity.

2.1. Conceptual and Procedural Framework

Experimentation transcends the confines of physical scientific laboratories, extending into art and abstract knowledge, where materiality is eschewed in favor of intellectual and aesthetic exploration.

2.2. Experimentation as a Scientific Paradigm:

Traditionally, experimentation was solely within the purview of the sciences, where it was closely associated with processes based on empirical knowledge, measurement, and testing. This process emanates from an agent engaged in conscious action, undertaking experimental tasks to garner experience and mastery over the phenomena under investigation (Boulfous, (2009-2010), p.7.). This methodical approach to experimentation was succinctly encapsulated by critic Martin Esslin, who asserted, "Experimentation, fundamentally a scientific term, suggests that to discover anew, one must experiment. (Ben Aisha, 2005.p. 46.) " The objective of such scientific endeavors is to establish robust laws derived from empirical observations that encapsulate the essence of experimental activities. The term 'experimental' gained prominence through Darwin's evolutionary theory, which advocated for a departure from antiquated theories towards the discovery of new scientific truths—a notion further explored by Claude Bernard in his seminal work, "Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine. (Ben Aisha, 2005.p. 46.)."

Claude Bernard eloquently described the experimentalist as someone who, through potentially novel interpretations of observed phenomena, can design experiments that logically anticipate outcomes to verify or refine a preconceived hypothesis (Chartier, 2000, p. 151.).

Hence, the imperative of experimentation lies in the rigorous examination of thought processes to ascertain their validity and reliability. The initiation of scientific inquiry must invariably adhere to the established protocols of experimental methodology, which rely fundamentally on the articulation of an idea, the cognitive capabilities of the researcher, and the governing principles of nature. Therefore, an individual engaged in experimental reasoning is required to critically engage with nature, directing inquiries comprehensively and systematically, based on the array of hypothetical scenarios that emerge (Badawi, 1st 1985, p.83.)

2.3. Experimentation in Literature:

In literary discourse, the term 'experimental' was first employed by Émile Zola in his seminal text, "The Experimental Novel." Zola argued that the experimental novel reflects the scientific evolution of the century by replacing the study of the abstract, metaphysical human with that of the natural human, governed by physical and chemical laws and influenced by environmental conditions – a literary manifestation of our scientific age (Chartier, 2000, p. 154.).

Zola applied the experimental method to the novel, suggesting that novelists should perceive social life as an extensive laboratory where continuous actions unfold, positing that the novel should depict these interactions accurately. He asserted that social beings are inherently subjects of experimentation (Al-Bardi, 2002, p. 37.).

For Zola, the experimental novel adopts a scientific approach, where the novelist conducts experiments on the 'social human,' supplanting imagination and arbitrary invention (Al-Bardi, 2002, p. 37.). with empirical documentation and experimentation. The novelist studies how natural elements interact within various contexts and environments, which he saw as making the genre a primarily experimental art form. This approach is inherently linked to the advent of modernity and the dazzling scientific advancements of the contemporary world – from the industrial to the technological and the digital information age. The novel has always mirrored shifts in civic consciousness, with each era distinguished by its unique experimental contributions (Ta'ib, 2011, p. 7.), owing to the genre's adaptability to diverse forms, which make it particularly conducive to experimentation (Al-Gharibi, 2005, p. 10.).

This constant search for new narrative modes that break free from convention enables writers to challenge and innovate within traditional structures. If language is the primary tool for creators to shape their narrative works, experimentation serves as a secondary center of creative energy in the novel (Bousahah - Salah Awad, June 2023, p. 428.). According to Abdel Karim Berrachid, genuine experimentation is guided by the principle of "oppose to discover," encouraging the exploration of varied and necessarily innovative paths. Those who tread the same path repeatedly arrive at the same well-known destinations (Berrachid, 1995, p. 19.). Berrachid advocates for the use of new writing mechanisms and approaches to achieve the necessary transcendence, thereby freeing oneself from prevalent forms, dismantling rigid molds, and formulating new inquiries within creative writing.

The contemporary Arab novel has undergone significant evolution, enabling novelists to depart from antiquated frameworks, reject prefabricated forms, and rebel against them by venturing into new realms of adventure and experimentation, thereby transcending established norms and reshaping them anew.

In modernism, experimentation in literature not only addresses content but also transforms form, involving condensation and fragmentation to present language in a new mold that conveys fresh meanings. Its manifestation is often more apparent in form than in content (Al-Momani, 2009, p. 21.), suggesting that literature itself has become a field of experimental material, operating according to the principles of presentation, analysis, synthesis, and conclusion, fully embodied in the narrative spirit of the contemporary novel that aligns with the paradigm of experimentalism.

3. Experimentation in the Algerian Novelistic Text

Arab authors have actively sought to rejuvenate and modernize the Arab novel by dismantling entrenched artistic conventions, thereby moving beyond stereotypical forms and templates. This innovative drive often utilizes what is now referred to as 'experimentation,' a technique that resonates with a deep-seated desire to authentically represent an uncertain and turbulent reality characterized by skepticism, disorientation, and anxiety. Consequently, literary focus has shifted from harmony to discordance, from certainty to ambiguity, from singularity to plurality, and from uniformity to diversity. This shift has redirected attention from narrative content to the structure of discourse and the diversity of narrative techniques (Mutasim, 2004, p. 25.).

The Algerian novel, in particular, reflects this desire for transformation, moving away from narratives of coercion and rigid authoritarianism toward significant shifts in narrative discourse. These shifts have occurred through various stages, notably during the periods of revolution and independence, "because this kind of countries are suffering from many problems on the difference sectors in their communities," (ALMSEMARI, nd, p 95.) through the era of national construction and engagement with the events of the 'Black Decade,' and extending into the modern era and beyond. Algerian novelists have not remained insulated from global developments, resulting in a writing phenomenon that presents a bolder narrative and critical event through experimentation. Algerian writers, in this context, have engaged with experimentation to track and respond to contemporary phenomena that align with the social, political, and cultural realities of Algeria.

Since the 1970s, the Algerian novel has witnessed substantial dynamism, elevating it as a preeminent literary genre in terms of dissemination and influence, both within the broader Arab literary context and specifically within Maghrebi literature. This prominence is attributable to successive generations of writers and intellectuals who have significantly shaped the novelistic output, recognized for its profound literary value among the populace. Notable contributors include Ahmed Reda Houhou, Nourredine Boujedra, Abdelmajid Chafei, Kateb Yacine, Mohammed Dib, Malek Haddad, Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Rachid Mimouni, Assia Djebar, Abdelhamid Ben Hadouga, Tahar Ouetar, Rachid Boudjedra, Djilali Khellas, Abdelmalek Mortad, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Mohammed Sari, Wasini al-Araj, Yasmina Khadra, Bashir Mefti, Hmida Al-ayachi, among others.

These authors have been instrumental in the evolutionary trajectory of the Algerian novel, which has explored diverse thematic and conceptual paths thanks to their innovative writings and creative endeavors crafted across various stages. Their work has aimed to forge new novelistic forms that resonate with the aspirations of Algerian social strata.

Tahar Ouetar, regarded as a patriarch of Algerian novelists, has significantly influenced the development of the Algerian novel through his creative works produced over his intellectual and activist career. From his inaugural novel "Al Laz" (1972), Ouetar experimented with disrupting the linear progression of time, employing memory and flashback as foundational narrative devices. From the outset, he began experimenting with various modern narrative techniques, encapsulating the profound implications of civilizational ideological conflicts within the Algerian reality, which at that time was undergoing political (socialist) and economic (agricultural revolution) transformations. These themes are further explored in his subsequent novel "The Earthquake" (1974).

"The Earthquake" exemplifies Ouettar's experimental prowess. While traditional elements may be present, such as the protagonist Abdelmajid Boularwah and a conventional hierarchical structure, the architectural construction of the novel presents a novel approach by structuring the narrative to mirror the city of Constantine. The novel is divided into seven chapters, each named after one of the city's seven bridges (Bab al-Qantara, Sidi Mecid, Sidi Rached, Mejaz al-Ghanam, Jisr al-Mis'ad, Jisr al-Shayatin, and Jisr al-Hawa), thereby integrating the urban landscape into the narrative framework.

In addition to the monumental rock and the dividing valley that bisects the city, the setting evokes a dual imagery of grandeur and foreboding—externally representing stability while internally harboring a spirit of trepidation and instability, elements that resonate deeply with both the novelist and the protagonist, Boularwah. Rather than returning to Constantine, the ancestral city, to cultivate his inherited lands, the novelist strategically relocates to the capital to assume a directorial position at a secondary school. This relocation spans several years during which he neglects any familial visitations.

Upon hearing rumors of the state's impending requisition of agricultural lands from their proprietors, Boularwah, driven by a desire to circumvent these governmental decrees, opts to revisit his city after a prolonged absence. His return is calculated to reacquaint himself with remaining kin and to strategically distribute portions of his land among them. He imposes a condition that the land not be formally registered in their names until posthumously, thereby ensuring that the parcels remain below the threshold for state acquisition.

Tahar Ouettar, the novelist, deliberately portrays Majid Boularwah in a negative light, a strategy aimed at both maligning and unveiling his character. Boularwah's return to his homeland follows only after the cessation of the War of Independence, and his return to his native town occurs only upon hearing of the state's impending land expropriations under the nationalization schemes and the establishment of collective farms. These policies, aimed at redistributing land and wealth, ultimately failed as they negated the primary motivation for labor—monetary gain—and indiscriminately equated the diligent with the idle, as evidenced by their failure even in their country of origin.

Abdul Majid Boularwah, devoid of empathy for any aspect of life in post-independence Algeria, vents his anger indiscriminately, invoking Sidi Rashed to cast upheaval upon the city, now rife with tumult and squalor. He recites the Qur'anic verse "*On the day when ye behold it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant one will be delivered of her burden, and thou (Muhammad) wilt see mankind as drunken, yet they will not be drunken, but the Doom of Allah will be strong (upon them)*" (Surah Al-Hajj, verse 2), beseeching the revered Wali: "O Sidi Rashed, O Wali of God, I have endured nine arduous hours from the capital under this sweltering heat for a matter of great importance to me and to all the righteous who have been bequeathed this land by God. You are privy to what lies within our souls. I have devised a strategy to obstruct the government's reach to my land by registering it in the names of my relatives, under the stipulation that they neither possess it nor enjoy its yield until after my demise." (Ouettar, 1982, p. 132.) "

After a relentless and ultimately fruitless search for his relatives, whom he had abandoned for nearly two decades, Boularwah is compelled to return, driven by state intentions to expropriate agricultural land. His journey from the capital spans approximately nine hours.

Abdul Majid Boularwah's gradual descent into madness is precipitated by life's vicissitudes and a convoluted array of circumstances. Tahar Ouetar, the novelist, intentionally casts a negative light on his protagonist, portraying him as infertile – a condition so burdensome that it prompts one of his wives to attempt infidelity in an effort to appease his desire for progeny, echoing the narrative found in John Steinbeck's play-novelle " *Burning Bright*." However, her attempt is unexpectedly exposed upon his premature return.

Furthermore, Abdul Majid Boularwah, a descendant of betrayers and collaborators, inherits a tarnished legacy: his grandfather conspired with the French during their invasion, securing safety for himself and his family, while his father, returning from service in Syria during the French invasion, was honored by the French with a ceremonial command. Confronted with the dissolution of his aspirations, Boularwah, depicted as a miserly, infertile traitor, observes his nephew ascend to a high-ranking officer, his illiterate cousin become a high school teacher, and his cousin Isa Boularwah rise as a communist unionist.

These tumultuous shifts and the ensuing chaos deeply afflict Abdul Majid Boularwah, prompting introspective dialogues that draw the attention of local children, who begin to taunt him. This provokes him to retreat to a bridge, seeking respite from their jeers, where he begins to divest himself of his clothing before attempting to leap. The police, alerted by the children's cries, intervene to prevent his suicide and transport him to a hospital. Through this narrative, Ouetar aims to unveil the true antagonists of the agricultural revolution within the feudal class by orchestrating a public critique against them. Set against the backdrop of the early 1970s Algerian democratic transformations, this critique marks a pivotal phase in the agricultural revolution and plays a crucial role in dismantling the outdated class structure of Algerian society. The class divide had reached such a critical point that interaction between classes occurred only upon the ruins of one another (Ben Djemaa, 1999, pp. 331-338.)

4. Experimentation at the Para texts of Title and Dedication

4.1. The Title

Literary creation fundamentally hinges on linguistic artistry, "el uso lingüístico se da en un contexto, es parte del contexto y crea el contexto." (TIOGANG, nd, p :424) with the title serving as an essential component. The title operates as a linguistic envoy that not only introduces the identity of the work but also delineates its content, engages the reader, and invites exploration. It symbolizes the superficial element that signifies the underlying narrative and content (Al-Bustani, 2002, p. 34.). Thus, the craft of title selection, encompassing word choice, formulation, and contextual relevance, demands a specialized understanding of linguistic nuances and an appreciation for aesthetic language qualities. Ouetar exemplifies this finesse in his choice of linguistic structures for his titles, oscillating between singular and compound forms and ranging from brevity to expansiveness. This variety endows his titles with an aesthetic and semantic depth that transcends mere linguistic structure, reaching a profound level where meaning emerges through interpretive engagement. Indeed, a solitary word not only defines the title of his novel but arguably encapsulates its entire thematic essence, given its profound connotative significance that underpins the novel's narrative trajectory.

The term "earthquake" symbolically represents a psychological disturbance catalyzed by external transformations that contribute to its escalation and increase its intensity. Additionally, it embodies a revolt against the stagnation and immutability of an accepted normative context, influencing Algeria's societal fabric during the novel's conception. In grammatical terms, a noun typically relates to a verb by associating with events without temporal dynamics—suggesting stasis and permanence—whereas a verb implies action and transformation. Morphologically, the word "earthquake" derives from the quadriliteral Arabic verb "زَلَزَلَ" *Zalzala* (to shake). Investigating the term's lexical connotation reveals its association with the profound agitation of an object. Abu Ishaq's interpretation of the Quranic verse, "When the earth is shaken with its (final) earthquake," (Surah Az-Zalzalah (The Earthquake), Verse 1) suggests it is agitated with intense motion. Originally, shaking encompasses significant movement and intense disruption, serving metaphorically as a harbinger of fear and caution, indicating a state of considerable unrest and instability (Ibn Manzur, N D, p. 73.).

Consequently, "earthquake" directs us toward notions of change and transformation across various manifestations, most notably implying the earth's subterranean, destructive movements that alter its surface, forging new landscapes over the remnants of old ones. By integrating the lexical significance and grammatical dimension of "earthquake," we uncover the initial aspect of the interplay between implicit and explicit content in the title. The concept of absence is portrayed through the stasis linked to the noun as a grammatical fixture, whereas the emergence of motion is highlighted through the semantic implications of "earthquake." Thus, the title, in its singular form, ostensibly suggests stillness while subtly indicating a potent underlying movement.

This title thus establishes a complementary and interconnected relationship with the novel itself. From this standpoint, "The Earthquake" functions as the semantic core from which all secondary meanings proliferate; these meanings, tethered to the term within the title, encapsulate themes of severe movement, intimidation, warning, distress, discomfort, and disturbance, among others. These themes constitute the semantic frameworks of the text's lexicon.

In "The Earthquake," the protagonist is propelled by an implicit drive to counteract the metaphorical 'earthquake'—in this context, the nationalization efforts. When Boularwah, the feudal character, finds himself exhausted in his quest for hypothetical allies to advance his project against the 'earthquake,' the concept morphs into an internal sensation that fractures his psychological resilience and thrusts him into a maelstrom of internal tensions. These tensions form the narrative elements and structures upon which the novel is constructed. Thus, it can be asserted that the act of experimentation is vividly present in the myriad meanings realized within this text, which transitions from a literary to a tangible, material dimension, amenable to presentation, analysis, decomposition, and synthesis—as if, through this title, we confront a scientific scenario ripe for experimentation.

4.2. The Dedication

The dedication in Tahar Ouettar's "The Earthquake" functions as a crucial paratextual element through which the author unveils his motivations and intentions, thereby serving as a

"semiotic gateway that clarifies and frames the reader's interpretation of the text, suggesting an open-ended perspective.(Hammad, 1997, p. 64.) "

This paratext not only introduces the narrative but also serves as an arena for experimental discourse. Ouettar's dedication specifically addresses the activists pivotal in advancing the agricultural revolution in Algeria, a movement aimed at establishing justice and democracy. He writes: "To the labor activists and to all who have constructed and continue to construct the agricultural revolution in Algeria, contributing to laying the foundations for an advanced democratic society.(Al-Aaraj, 1989. P7) " This dedication is woven throughout the novel; each resolution within the narrative hints at further layers of meaning, all of which are illuminated by the dedication. Here, the author's voice merges with that of the labor activist, while the metaphor of the 'earthquake' symbolizes the revolutionary regime the author envisioned, underscored by the ideals of advanced democratic principles, reflecting the socialist-communist ideologies prevalent at the time.

5. Experimentation at the Level of Language

"The Earthquake" has garnered significant scholarly attention and discourse, having been translated into several major languages including English. Its acclaim stems not only from the thematic concerns it addresses but also from its intricate artistic architecture, which is built upon a foundation of sophisticated aesthetic modernism.

5.1. Linguistic Interplay Between Vernacular and Standard Arabic in "The Earthquake"

In Tahar Ouettar's "The Earthquake," the narrative is marked by a rich interplay between vernacular and standard Arabic. This linguistic diversity is seamlessly integrated with the predominance of internal monologue, enhancing the narrative's dynamism and engaging the reader in the textured world of the novel. Such a blend not only enriches the story's vibrancy but also facilitates a deep immersion into the socio-cultural context of Algeria, which becomes inextricable from the reader's experience.

The novel's artful linguistic melding supports vivid and impactful language, evidenced by scenes that skillfully combine description, narration, internal reflection, dialogue, invocation, action, and a broad spectrum of emotions. Ouettar employs realistic language as a strategic element within his narrative construction, noted for its length variability and the integration of both eloquent and colloquial Arabic that aligns with the thematic exposition.

"With a sharp gesture, he brushed aside the hand of a beggar woman blocking his path, then slipped off his shoes and made his way towards the mosque's doorway.

"Get your hand off me," he grumbled in distaste. "Ya Allah help us! What a disaster! From where do all these people appear? Why don't you return to your villages and deserts?"

"May disaster strike your head!" she shot back. "You act as if you're carrying us all on your back, like we're a burden to you." (Al-Aaraj, 1989. P16)

Such dynamic language, blending formal and colloquial forms, spans the entire novel. The narrative extends from the beginning to the end of the novel, where even brief passages reveal a complex layering of description, narration, internal thought, dialogue, supplication, action, and diverse emotional states. The author experiments with employing a realistic linguistic element within the fabric of the narrative text, which is characterized by both expansiveness and

conciseness. The language intermingles eloquence with colloquialism, capturing dimensions that align with the nature of his exposition, as in this excerpt:

"Ah, Ya yemma al-Hanana, my children are orphaned." ("Ah, my merciful mother, my children are orphaned")

'I ran towards her. So did all the others. Her whole leg had turned blue from the foot all the way up to her navel. Then her entire body turned blue. "Al-Maghbuna" the poor thing, "Chateha" stricken by an evil genie!

'We bled her veins, we tried to give her the best treatment we could, but by night-time, she gasped her last breath. She left seven kids and they all clung to my apron-strings crying: "Nana, Nana!" (Al-Aaraj, 1989. P37) '"

Ouettar experiments with the use of realistic language within the framework of his narrative text, characterized by its length and the integration of standard with the vernacular through borrowing. This suits the nature of his exposition and is exemplified in phrases like ("taclinih , tpolishih "), colloquial transformations of the more formally structured (to clean, to polish).

This nuanced linguistic presentation takes the form of various narrative points that the author employs to enhance his thematic delivery. For example, he articulates:

" 'No, this coin fell from my pocket.'

'No, from mine.'

'O, God's loved ones!'

'May He save and protect you.'

'Think of God and of your parents.'

'I was first!'

'No, I was.'

The voices of the beggars droned in his ears while the stench of their dirty bodies assaulted his nose. There was also the aroma Of a roasting sheep's head and the rancid smell of state pastries, mixed with the scent of jasmine and discarded prickly pear rinds.

The sounds of Constantine are like its odours and facial features.

They have their own distinctive personality. Why didn't I notice it during the days of colonial rule?" (Al-Aaraj, 1989. P20)

6. Temporal Experimentation in Tahar Ouettar's "The Earthquake"

In Tahar Ouettar's "The Earthquake," time is a pivotal element that shapes the narrative architecture, primarily through the sequencing and narration of events. The narrative unfolds within a remarkably constrained temporal frame, spanning only a few hours from Boularwah's arrival in the city to his subsequent suicide attempt. This limited timeframe transforms the spatial journey into a profound exploration of consciousness, stretching from dawn to dusk, thereby mirroring the internal psychological journey of the protagonist.

The narrative's setting, the city of Constantine, divided by a majestic river, symbolically correlates with the narrative's tense temporal progression, oscillating between past and present. The discussion of change within the novel is intricately tied to this temporal dichotomy – contrasting dawn with dusk, hope with despair, and existence with non-existence.

Throughout the novel, the character of Boularwah navigates between a stable, referential past and a disquieting present that provokes disgust. Despite the persistence of the past within Sheikh Boularwah's consciousness, the pervasive sense of change haunts him, encapsulated in his realization that "from the previous life, only the vestiges remain...they have demolished a world to erect another." (Al-Aaraj, 1989. P39)

7. Results and Recommendations:

Tahar Ouettar's "The Earthquake" offers significant contributions by:

- Challenging and transcending traditional temporal frameworks, which typically demand extensive durations for the perception, action upon, and resolution of events. This narrative unfolds within a compressed timeframe, a choice that, despite the gravity of events, suggests that the structure of time itself mirrors the concept of an 'earthquake' due to its sudden and profound impact.
- Crafting the character of Boularwah as a complex figure, embodying dual aspects of consciousness—both visible and hidden, secular and religious—within the narrative's dynamic realm. From a religious viewpoint, the character appears to wield the religious against the political, interpret one in terms of the other, or negate alternatives to ensure only what benefits his interests survives.
- Aligning the novel's language with the thematic content of the narrative discourse; during the era of socialism, Ouettar emphasized defending the principles of the socialist regime, employing terminology congruent with the dominant ideological climate. This approach rendered the language charged and occasionally imbued with violence, particularly during the 1990s crisis, subsequently transitioning to a critical examination of the intellectual's role in post-crisis narratives.
- Utilizing historical references that convey experimental dimensions, reflecting the author's perceptive vision.
- Demonstrating how the socialist regime's burdens, particularly the nationalization of land, heavily impact the protagonist, leaving him feeling fettered and helpless. This perception leads him to view the local populace as adversaries and, feeling incapacitated, he resorts to invoking calamities upon them—plagues, earthquakes, floods. Within this tumult, the author's intertextual engagement with Quranic verses is prominent, interpreted to align with his subjective biases. Moreover, the narrative re-contextualizes historical figures and events in light of divergent economic, political, social, and cultural conditions, aligning them with his articulated vision.

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