

Civilizational Dialogue between the Mashreq and the Maghreb through the Art of the Novel " Selected Models"

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• Abstract:

This study explores the theme of civilizational communication between the East and the West through the art of the novel, focusing on selected models from Arabic literature that engage with the image of the other and the dialectic of identity and difference. The study seeks to reveal how Arab novelists have represented the West and how these representations reflect complex relationships characterized by contradiction, hybridity, attraction, rejection, and cultural dialogue. By analyzing two key novels—Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North" and Inaam Kachachi's "The American Granddaughter"—the research highlights the extent to which the novel as a literary form has been capable of addressing the dilemmas of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity in postcolonial and globalized contexts. The study adopts a descriptive analytical approach, relying on postcolonial theory and the theory of the image of the other, while drawing on the cultural criticism frameworks that focus on the dialectic of self and other, center and periphery, tradition and modernity.

Keywords

Civilizational communication; Image of the other; Identity; The East; The West; The novel; Cultural hybridity.

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Introduction

Civilizational communication constitutes one of the most prominent manifestations of the encounter between peoples and nations. It represents the bridge through which cultures meet, identities intermix, and the artificial barriers erected by ignorance and isolation dissolve. Literature has never been detached from this civilizational dynamism; rather, it has consistently served as one of the most powerful symbolic vehicles for this human interaction, encompassing visions, experiences, and narratives that condense in characters, events, and symbols—serving as mirrors reflecting the dialectic of self and other, center and periphery, tradition and modernity. Within this context, the novel emerges as a modern art form capable of embracing these dialectics, presenting them through a narrative framework that captures the intricate details of East-West relations with all their complexities and ambiguities. The novel is not merely a means of entertainment; rather, it is a critical and analytical tool that interrogates reality and explores the contours of civilizational encounter and conflict. Arabic modern fiction, in particular, has been among the most engaged literary forms in this endeavor. Numerous Arab novelists have tackled the issue of East-West relations, producing rich narrative texts teeming with themes and visions that reflect the oscillating dimensions of this relationship—ranging from conflict to coexistence from fascination to rejection, and from aspiration to disappointment. This civilizational interaction between the East and the West is not new; it stretches back over centuries of political, religious, cultural, and economic encounters. However, the profound transformations witnessed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rendered this relationship a central theme in Arabic literature, especially with the rise of colonialism, migration, and globalization—phenomena that have disrupted value systems and provoked questions of identity and belonging. From this awareness of the significance of civilizational communication arises this study, titled "Civilizational Communication between the East and the West through the Art of the Novel: Selected Models." The study attempts to shed light on this topic by analyzing specific narrative models that embody this complex interaction with all its contradictions and intricacies. We have chosen to examine two novels in particular: "Season of Migration to the North" by Tayeb Salih and "The American Granddaughter" by Inaam Kachachi, given the symbolic resonance of these works in articulating the dialectic of conflict and encounter between the two worlds. The importance of this study stems from its focus on the mechanisms of representing the other and internalizing their image within the framework of the Arab narrative discourse. The study aims to deconstruct the visions formed about the West in the Arab imaginary, as well as the reciprocal visions the West constructs about the East. It also seeks to highlight the possibilities of intercultural interaction and dialogue through the analysis of characters, events, and narrative spaces. The central problematic of the study revolves around the following question: How has the modern Arabic novel embodied the dialectic of civilizational communication between the East and the West? What visions and images has each side constructed of the other through these selected narrative models? To answer this problematic, the study adopts a descriptive analytical approach, based on critical reading of the narrative texts, while drawing on theoretical frameworks relevant to the image of the other, civilizational communication, and postcolonial theory.

I. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

1. The Concept of Civilizational Communication: Background and Theoretical Determinants

The concept of civilizational communication occupies a pivotal position in human thought across ages, due to its intrinsic link to the relationship between humans and the other, and their continuous quest for interaction and acquaintance with diverse peoples and cultures. Civilizational communication is defined as "the totality of reciprocal processes based on dialogue, acculturation, and interaction between different civilizations and cultures, aimed at achieving proximity, understanding, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences"¹ In this sense, it represents a civilizational and ethical necessity to ensure the continuity of humanity in this world and to overcome isolationist tendencies that have long produced wars and conflicts. The issue of civilizational communication has constituted one of the pillars of modern human thought, especially with the emergence of globalization and the intensification of cultural intermingling among the peoples of the world. This has led to the emergence of complex issues regarding cultural identities and their ability to withstand the waves of cultural homogenization. This reality has been affirmed by numerous contemporary thinkers, such as Edward Said in his book "Orientalism," where he emphasized that civilizational communication should not be based on dependency or arrogance, but rather on mutual recognition and active participation in shaping the common destiny of humanity²

2. The Image of the Other in the Novel

Since ancient times, literature has played a fundamental role in shaping the image of the other and expressing the group's view of other communities. The other has held a central position in the novel, serving as the background through which the self defines itself. Many critics have highlighted this dominant presence of the image of the other in literature, considering that the novel, in particular, has greatly contributed to constructing stereotypical images of the other, either by portraying them as enemies, strangers, and sources of danger, or by presenting them in a civilized and humanistic light, reflecting the evolution of the self-other relationship within a specific historical context. In this regard, Tzvetan Todorov argues that the image of the other is often characterized by duality, oscillating between appreciation and fascination, and rejection and hostility, depending on the political and social conditions in which literary texts are produced³ This is clearly manifested in modern Arabic fiction, which has witnessed radical transformations in its perception of the West, transitioning from a phase of fascination and identification to a phase of critique and interrogation, and then to a phase of rethinking the relationship with the other.

3. Acculturation and the Dialectic of Self and Other in Arabic Fiction

¹ Huntington, S. P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* Simon & Schuster, New York, 1st ed., 1996, p. 10.

² Said, E. W., *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1st ed., 1978.

³ Todorov, T., *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1st ed., 1984, p. 32.

The dialectic of self and other constitutes a central axis in Arabic fiction, being one of the most significant themes that Arab novelists have preoccupied themselves with, particularly those who have experienced migration and exile or directly engaged with Western civilization. This dialectic has expressed itself through the duality of conflict and acculturation, where in some novels we find depictions of a fierce civilizational struggle between East and West, while in others, we encounter narratives that celebrate the convergence and creative interaction between the two cultures. Many contemporary critical studies have focused on the concept of acculturation as a dynamic process of give-and-take, interaction, and mutual influence, far from the logic of arrogance and alienation. Among the Arab critics who have called for overcoming the conflictual vision of the relationship between self and other is Abdullah Al-Ghadhami, who advocates for adopting acculturative critical approaches that acknowledge the necessity of dialogue and creative interaction between cultures¹ Based on the above, the study of the image of the other and civilizational communication in Arabic fiction allows us to trace the transformations of Arab consciousness toward the West and to uncover the narrative strategies employed by Arab novelists in representing this dialectical relationship.

II. The Dialectic of Confrontation and Acculturation in Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North"

Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North" is considered one of the most significant Arabic novels that address the issue of the East-West relationship, presenting it through a profoundly problematic lens via the character of Mustafa Sa'eed. He embodies the model of the Arab man who chose to travel to the West, carrying with him a legacy of oppression and marginalization, seeking revenge and affirming his identity by penetrating the Western space with all its symbolic connotations of power and domi...

1. Mustafa Sa'eed: Between Fascination with the West and the Desire to Destroy It

Mustafa Sa'eed embodies the contradictions of the contemporary Arab self. On the one hand, he is fascinated by Western civilization, enthralled by its sciences and knowledge. On the other hand, he harbors a deep-seated hatred toward the West, which he considers responsible for his nation's tragedy. This contradiction is clearly reflected in his behavior and relationships, where he uses Western women as a tool for symbolic revenge against the entire West, exploiting his image as a mysterious and seductive...

2. The Narrative Space: From Sudan to London, the Journey of the Self into the Heart of the Other

The journey from Sudan to London forms a structural axis in the novel. It is not merely a geographical transition but a symbolic movement from the space of the periphery to the space of the center. However, this transition quickly reveals the impossibility of Mustafa Sa'eed integrating into Western society, where he remains perceived as the other, the stranger, the threat. London is depicted as a cold city, full of hidden racism, refusing to accept the different other, even if it pretends to tolerance ...

3. The Western Woman as a Symbol of the West: Fascination and Hostility

¹ Al-Ghadhami, A., *The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca, 1st ed., 2004, p. 45.

Western women play a central role in the novel, transforming into a symbol of the West with all its temptations, charm, and dangers. Mustafa Sa'eed treats British women from a vengeful, instinctive standpoint, attempting to destroy the West through them, which he holds accountable for the tragedy of Eastern peoples. However, this behavior reveals, in essence, a deep-seated inferiority complex toward the Western other, who appears superior and dominant in all fields.

4. Civilizational Confrontation and the Crisis of Identity

The novel clearly reveals that the encounter between East and West, in the context of Mustafa Sa'eed, did not produce true dialogue or fruitful interaction but rather led to a bitter internal conflict within the protagonist, culminating in alienation and symbolic death. Mustafa Sa'eed could not overcome his colonial past nor liberate himself from his complexes toward the West but remained imprisoned within the memory of colonialism and marginalization, leading him to live in a state of perpetual aliena...

5. The Novel as a Space for Symbolic Liberation

Despite the grim depiction of the East-West relationship presented in the novel, the text opens, at its conclusion, a symbolic horizon of liberation, where the question of fate is posed through the character of the narrator who ultimately decides to resist death and suicide, expressing thereby a choice of life and staying in his land despite its harshness and tragedies. This can be considered a transcendence of revenge and retaliation toward an attempt to build a new relationship with the self and the ...

III. The Dialectic of Identity and Belonging in Inaam Kachachi's "The American Granddaughter"

notable contemporary Arabic novels that address the problematic of identity and belonging within the context of globalization and contemporary wars. The novel intricately interweaves themes of exile, cultural duality, and the collision between Eastern and Western identities, reflecting the complexities of the fragmented Iraqi reality, torn between its local affiliations and foreign interventions. Through the protagonist, Zeina, the novel presents...

1. Zeina: The Image of the Hybrid Self and the Fragmented Identity

Zeina's character is the central axis of the narrative, representing the daughter of an Iraqi immigrant to the United States, raised in a life split between two contradictory cultures: the heavy historical and religious Iraqi heritage, and the liberal and open American culture. Thus, Zeina embodies the model of the hybrid identity as defined by Homi Bhabha, where the character lives in an "in-between" zone, belonging fully to neither identity, but rather swinging between them, resulting in a constant fee... Zeina suffers from a deep identity crisis, feeling disconnected from her Iraqi roots, while at the same time failing to integrate completely into American society, which views her as a "stranger" and "other." This duality vividly reflects the dilemma of the immigrant identity, which loses its connection with the past without succeeding in fully integrating into the present. This is clearly evident in her tense relationship with her Iraqi family, particularly her grandmother Rahma, who represents the voice...

2. The Iraqi Family's Discourse: Authentic Identity and Nostalgia for the Homeland

Characters such as Grandma Rahma, Muhaymin, and Tawoos play an essential role in the novel by embodying discourses of authentic national identity, representing Iraq as a space of collective memory, resistance, heritage, and deep-rooted belonging to land and history. The novel presents these characters as bearers of conservative national values, rejecting all forms of foreign domination and viewing Zeina's enlistment in the American army as a clear betrayal of national identity.

Grandma Rahma, in this context, symbolizes the archetypal mother who preserves the memory of the homeland, its tragedies, and victories, and makes desperate attempts to reclaim her granddaughter to the ranks of the nation. However, the novel simultaneously highlights the failure of this discourse to attract the new generation raised in a different cultural environment, leading to

a violent clash between the two identity discourses: the past discourse clinging to the homeland and the present discourse op...

3. The Western Other: The Image of Temptation and Disillusionment

The novel portrays the West through American society, which represents for Zeina a space of opportunities, freedom, and emancipation from the constraints of the conservative Eastern society. However, this idealized image quickly unravels to reveal a reality fraught with cultural and political discrimination, where Zeina realizes that the West uses slogans of freedom and humanity as a cover for its colonial interests, embodying the postcolonial discourse of Edward Said, 1978. This sudden awareness dawns on Zeina when she realizes that her role as a translator in the American army is part of the machinery of occupation and that the discourse of "liberating Iraq" is nothing but an illusion hiding expansionist projects. At this point, her identity crisis deepens, as she finds herself torn between her loyalty to the state that granted her legal identity (America) and her cultural and spiritual belonging to Iraq.

4. The Dialectic of Belonging and Alienation: Narrative as a Space of Interrogation

The novel employs the narrative voice as a means of deconstructing the problematic of identity and belonging, transforming Zeina's voice into a space for reflecting on her memories, personal experiences, and dual affiliations. The novel can be read as a form of self-confession that re-examines the complex relationship between self and other, between homeland and exile. In this context, it is evident that the novel does not offer a definitive resolution to Zeina's crisis but keeps her in a state of perpetual existential anxiety, reflecting the reality of Arab immigrants living between two worlds without finding their place in either. The novel also shows that returning to the homeland is not always possible, especially in the context of war and destruction that represents a tragic rupture between the immigrant and their original homeland.

5. Zeina: A Model of the Crisis of Identity in the Age of Globalization

Ultimately, Zeina embodies the tragedy of the contemporary Arab individual living an identity and belonging crisis in the age of globalization, where identities intertwine and cultural boundaries dissolve without necessarily producing a universal human identity. The novel shows that identity, in this context, becomes a heavy burden haunting the individual in their exile, depriving them of the inner peace they hoped to find in the space of the other. Thus, the novel presents a complex and multifaceted image of identity and belonging transcending rigid binaries and highlighting the fragility of the contemporary individual, lost between a burdensome past and a troubled present.

IV. Globalization, Migration, and Civilizational Intertextuality in Modern Arabic Fiction

Modern Arabic fiction has, since the last decades of the twentieth century, witnessed profound transformations in its themes and narrative structures. These transformations have come as a response to the social, political, and cultural changes that the Arab world has experienced, characterized by complex phenomena such as migration, globalization, cultural alienation, and the fragmentation of national identity. These changes have prompted the novel to question the Arab self's relationship with itself and with the world, particularly in light of the intensifying cultural and economic intertwining with the Western other, and the emergence of new concepts such as the "global village," "erasure of borders," and what Zygmunt Bauman calls the "liquid identity"¹

¹ Bauman, Z., *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1st ed., 2000, p. 8.

1. Globalization and the Dismantling of National Identity in Arabic Fiction

Globalization is one of the most impactful phenomena on the representations of identity and belonging in contemporary Arabic fiction. It has created a new reality marked by the intermingling of cultures, the swift flow of information, and the dissolution of borders between societies. This reality is clearly reflected in narrative texts that have engaged in questioning these major transformations, exposing the psychological and social crises experienced by fictional characters who have lost their fixed references. This context has produced novels charged with themes of loss, alienation, and nostalgia for roots, such as "The American Granddaughter," which presents the character of Zeina as a symbol of an identity torn under the pressure of globalization, appearing incapable of settling into any identity, living in a state of constant estrangement, and unable to establish a natural relationship with American society.¹ At the same time, she becomes aware of the impossibility of returning to Iraq, destroyed by war and occupation. In this framework, globalization, in the context of Arabic fiction, appears as a hegemonic force reshaping identities according to the logic of the market and consumer culture, thus deepening the identity crisis of the contemporary Arab individual, who finds themselves caught between an endangered authentic culture and a dominant global culture that does not necessarily grant them a sense of belonging or security²

2. Migration as a Dual Journey Between Salvation and Alienation

Migration has become one of the most significant themes occupying modern Arabic fiction, transforming into a complex existential experience that intertwines the dream of salvation from a stifling reality with the traps of alienation and dislocation in Western societies. Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North" embodies this theme through the character of Mustafa Sa'eed, who migrated to the West seeking knowledge and liberation, only to find himself ultimately engulfed in an identity crisis, unable to integrate into a society that perceives him as the "other." The novel illustrates that migration, in the postcolonial context, is not merely a geographical movement but a symbolic journey that redefines the relationships between self and other, while simultaneously reproducing binaries of dominance and subjugation. In this regard, Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that migration reshapes collective memory, placing the migrant in a suspended state between two memories: the memory of the homeland and the memory of exile³

3. Civilizational Intertextuality in Arabic Fiction: Between Acculturation and Domination

Modern Arabic fiction is a fertile space for civilizational intertextuality, as narrative texts engage with symbols, myths, and various cultures, aiming to deconstruct the complex relationship between East and West and reframe it within a critical perspective. Many Arabic novels have employed intertextual techniques with Western literature to interrogate the image of the Western other, as Tayeb Salih does by invoking the figure of "Othello" in Mustafa Sa'eed, rewriting this character from a postcolonial perspective that deconstructs stereotypes and questions them in light of the Arab experience. Similarly, Inaam Kachachi's "The American Granddaughter" utilizes intertextuality with American discourses on "democracy" and "liberation," as the author critically examines these discourses from the perspective of the Arab immigrant, revealing their hypocrisy and contradictions, and showing how the humanitarian rhetoric of America turns into a tool for hegemony and justifying occupation. Thus, modern Arabic fiction employs civilizational intertextuality as a mechanism to dismantle hegemonic discourses and reconstruct the Arab self in confrontation with the other, while opening up to other cultures without falling into the trap of mimicry or cultural alienation.

4. Arabic Fiction as a Space for Possible Civilizational Dialogue

¹ Kachachi, I., *The American Granddaughter*, Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, Doha, 1st ed., 2008, p. 112.

² Hall, S., *Modernity and Its Futures*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1st ed., 1992, p. 302.

³ Ricoeur, P., *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1st ed., 2004, p. 58.

Despite the bleak image of East-West relations presented by Arabic fiction in the context of globalization and migration, the novel remains an open field for possible civilizational dialogue, offering the Arab self an opportunity to express its anxieties, fears, and tragedies, while simultaneously rebuilding bridges with the other on the basis of mutual recognition and shared humanity. Edward Said emphasized this in his book "Culture and Imperialism"¹, where he argued that the novel is the most suitable space for establishing critical dialogue between cultures, as it can embrace complexity, plurality, and deconstruct colonial discourses from within. Within this framework, modern Arabic fiction can be read as a space for self-questioning and acknowledging the other, avoiding rigid binaries by adopting a hybrid and flexible vision of the world that recognizes the fragility of cultural boundaries and celebrates difference and plurality as human values.

V. Conclusion

Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North"² and Inaam Kachachi's "The American Granddaughter"³ present two complex models of the dialectic relationship between East and West, revealing aspects of conflict, acculturation, hybridity, and alienation experienced by the Arab individual under the pressures of war, globalization, and migration. This study has demonstrated how modern Arabic fiction has transformed into a dynamic space for self-interrogation and reconstruction of the relationship with the Western other, moving beyond reductionist and stereotypical views shaped by colonial discourse, and posing profound questions concerning identity, belonging, and citizenship in a changing world.

The study has shown that characters such as Mustafa Sa'eed and Zeina experience a multilayered identity crisis, torn between the desire to integrate into Western society and the need to preserve their cultural roots. It also revealed that globalization, despite offering opportunities for openness and communication, has deepened the Arab individual's crisis of self⁴, facing challenges of redefining their identity and their position in the world.

This study also confirmed that Arabic fiction has utilized civilizational intertextuality as a mechanism for dismantling hegemonic colonial discourses⁵ and reconstructing the Arab self from within its contradictions, benefiting from the flexibility of the novel form to contain complexity and multiplicity. Thus, the novel becomes a living space for possible civilizational dialogue, where the Arab self can critique itself and the other simultaneously, transcending the binaries of victim and perpetrator towards a shared intercultural human horizon.

This study opens new research avenues, including:

- ✓ Deepening the analysis of the relationship between literature and migration in the context of post-globalization.
- ✓ Exploring the representations of self and other in other Arabic literary texts, particularly those of Arab women writers in the diaspora.

¹ Said, E. W., *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1st ed., 1993, p. 5.

² Salih, T. *Season of Migration to the North*, Heinemann, London, 1st ed., 1966, p. 45

³ Kachachi, I. *The American Granddaughter*, Dar al-Adab, Beirut, 1st ed., 2003, p. 78.

⁴ Hall, S. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1st ed., 1992, pp. 222-237.

⁵ Said, E. W. *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1st ed., 1993, p. 15.

- ✓ Examining the portrayals of globalization and identity in contemporary Arabic fiction from a critical intercultural perspective.

Ultimately, the novel remains a humanistic space open to addressing the major questions haunting the contemporary Arab individual, torn between endangered roots and an ambiguous future.

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