

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Identity Construction of the Contemporary Human Being at the Intersection of Arabic Literature and Transformations of Cultural Discourse: A Critical Reading of the Trajectories of Self-Formation in the Age of Globalization and Cultural Pluralism

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## Abstract

This study examines the mechanisms of identity construction of the contemporary Arab self as manifested in modern Arabic narrative discourse. Under the pressures of globalization and cultural pluralism, identity can no longer be conceived as a fixed entity; rather, it has become an ongoing, negotiable process of becoming. Adopting a cultural critical approach, the study seeks to deconstruct the ways in which literature operates as a symbolic space where the "local" and the "global" intersect and contend. Through the analysis of prominent narrative models such as *Celestial Bodies* by Jokha Alharthi and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi the study concludes that contemporary Arabic literature has moved beyond the logic of identity "conflict" toward the construction of hybrid and composite identities capable of accommodating change without dissolving into it. In doing so, it offers an alternative narrative that resists stereotyping and affirms the right to difference.

## Keywords

Identity construction; contemporary Arabic literature; cultural discourse; globalization; cultural pluralism; hybrid identity.

## Introduction

Amid the accelerated cultural fluidity and unprecedented flow of information characterizing the contemporary world, the question of identity emerges as one of the most urgent and anxiety-inducing concerns. Identity is no longer reducible to a simple affiliation with a group or a territory; it has instead become a complex individual and collective project, continuously formed and dismantled under the pressure of globalization which, on the one hand, seeks to melt particularities, and on the other, provokes rigid reactions clinging to roots and origins. This intense tension between the universal and the local, openness and withdrawal, places the contemporary human being particularly

the Arab subject at the heart of a symbolic struggle to define the meaning of existence and one's position in the world.

From this perspective, the present study arises from a fundamental concern: to trace how Arabic literature has responded to these profound transformations. Literature, as the conscience of the nation and its aesthetic laboratory, does not assume a passive, observational stance; rather, through its narrative and discursive mechanisms, it actively engages in the very core of the process of identity construction. Accordingly, this paper pursues two main objectives. First, it seeks to move beyond the simplistic view that regards literature as merely a "reflection of an identity crisis," toward an analytical level that reveals how literature actively produces and reshapes identity. Second, it aims to highlight the role of literary criticism in deconstructing dominant identity discourses and offering more complex and pluralistic readings.

The central research question guiding this study may thus be formulated as follows:

To what extent does contemporary Arabic literature amid the intersections of cultural discourse and the constraints imposed by globalization contribute to the reshaping of identity construction, not as a finished entity, but as an ongoing, negotiable process between the self and the other?

The significance of this study stems from the contemporaneity of this engagement. Rather than remaining at a purely theoretical level, it approaches the actual laboratory of these transformations: the novel. Literature is not merely a reflective mirror; it is also a document of indictment and a space of resistance in which the Arab subject seeks to reconstruct a fragmented self.

This study further aims to achieve several objectives, most notably:

-Deconstructing the mechanisms of identity construction within literary texts, and understanding how the fictional character shifts from a "fixed type" to an "active subject" engaged in negotiation with the other.

-Revealing the narrative strategies employed by Arab novelists to confront globalized stereotyping, whether through the reactivation of heritage or through the deconstruction of Western centrality.

-What distinguishes this study from previous works which have largely confined themselves either to tracing the "image of the Other" in Arabic fiction or lamenting the "loss of identity" is its focus on the concept of Hybrid Identity as a realistic and aesthetic solution rather than a problem. It does not seek an "impossible pure identity," but rather examines how literature can establish what Homi

Bhabha terms the Third Space, wherein one is neither enclosed within a self-sufficient "we," nor dissolved into an alienating "they." This is a study of processes of formation, not of fixed essences.

Accordingly, the core problematic may be reformulated as follows:

-To what extent does contemporary Arabic literature contribute, under the intersections of cultural discourse and the pressures of globalization, to the reconfiguration of identity construction?

-Does narrative merely depict an "identity crisis," or does it move beyond this depiction to propose new identity alternatives capable of coexisting with pluralism without sacrificing specificity?

## **First: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

### **1. Defining Identity and the Concept of Identity Construction in Contemporary Thought**

The researcher confronting the problematic of identity faces an epistemological challenge rooted in the profound fluidity of this concept, which has migrated from the domain of metaphysical philosophy to the heart of contemporary cultural and political debates. In the context of liquid modernity and its aftermath, it is no longer possible to rely on the traditional definition of identity as a fixed essence or as a completed biological and historical inheritance bestowed upon the individual at birth (Bauman, 2004, p. 11).

On this basis, the two key concepts of this study may be approached as follows:

#### **1.1 Identity: From Essence to Becoming**

In contemporary thought particularly within cultural studies identity has shifted from being conceived as an essence or transcendent truth to being understood as a form of strategic positioning. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues that identity is not so much a discovery of past roots as it is a mobilization of the resources of history, language, and culture within a process of becoming rather than being. Identity, in this sense, is not what we are, but what we are in the process of becoming (Hall, 1996, p. 4).

In the Arab intellectual context, this perspective converges with Amin Maalouf's critique of the notion of a single, "murderous identity" that reduces the individual to one exclusive affiliation. Maalouf affirms that identity is composed of multiple belongings (linguistic, religious, national, professional), whose hierarchies shift according to historical and social circumstances, rendering identity a living entity that evolves rather than ossifies (Maalouf, 1999, p. 13).

#### **1.2 .The Concept of Identity Construction**

If identity is the product, then identity construction is the process. Operationally defined in this paper, identity construction refers to:

"A dynamic, conscious or unconscious process through which the self selects specific cultural and symbolic elements, reassembles and reshapes them in order to define itself and distinguish itself from the other within a changing social context."

This concept underscores that identity is a construction rather than a given. In the age of globalization, such construction becomes a complex and strenuous process, as individuals are compelled to continuously reconstruct their identities in response to the global circulation of images and symbols. Here, narrative plays a crucial role. Paul Ricœur maintains that human identity is fundamentally a narrative identity; the self constructs its meaning only by narrating its story. The human being, in this sense, is "the story he tells himself and others" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 73).

## **2.Theoretical Approaches to Identity: From Social Determinism to the Third Space**

The phenomenon of identity is marked by complexity that necessitates multiple analytical perspectives. Identity is not an isolated psychological datum, but the product of a dialectical interaction between the individual and the surrounding world. To understand identity construction in the age of globalization, this study draws upon the intersection of three major theoretical approaches:

### **2.1. Sociological Approach: Identity in the Age of Liquid Modernity**

This approach proceeds from the assumption that globalization has dismantled traditional social bonds (family, tribe, neighborhood), propelling the individual into what Zygmunt Bauman terms liquid modernity. Within this framework, identity is no longer an inherited legacy transmitted ready-made by society, but has become an anxiety-ridden individual task, requiring the continuous reinvention of the self to keep pace with rapid change (Bauman, 2000, p. 82).

In the Arab context, sociological studies document a shift among youth from inherited identity to hybrid identity, wherein the self is shaped through the symbolic consumption of globalized images and products, generating forms of alienation from the local social environment (Abdel Aal, 2018, p. 140).

### **2.2. Cultural Studies Approach: Identity as Commodity and Discourse**

Cultural studies critique globalization as a force of standardization that seeks to transform identity into a commodity. Scholars such as John Tomlinson argue that cultural globalization does not merely

entail communication, but carries the risk of cultural imperialism that threatens local particularities with erasure (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 28).

This approach aids the present study in understanding how literature becomes a site of resistance against the commodification of the human, and how the literary text attempts to reclaim authenticity not in a folkloric sense, but as a deeply human value against the superficiality of consumer culture.

### **2.3. Postcolonial Critical Approach: Hybridity and the Third Space**

This is the most significant approach for analyzing the narrative corpus of this study. It transcends the binaries of (East/West) and (Self/Other) entrenched by Western centrality. Homi Bhabha introduces the key concept of the Third Space, an in-between realm in which identity belongs neither entirely to the origin nor entirely to the other, but emerges as a hybrid identity formed in zones of transition (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37).

This theory enables a reading of contemporary Arab fictional characters not as culturally "defeated" subjects, but as active agents engaged in cultural translation, continuously renegotiating their identities. Such negotiation endows the literary text with its capacity to represent complex reality.

## **3. The Role of Arabic Literature in Shaping Identity Meaning Across Historical Periods**

Throughout its historical phases, Arabic literature has never been a mere aesthetic luxury; it has consistently functioned as the primary symbolic institution through which Arabs articulated their self-conceptions and worldviews. The literary text has acted simultaneously as guardian and interrogator of identity. The trajectory of identity meaning may be traced through two pivotal moments:

### **3.1. From the "Diwan of the Arabs" to the "Narrative of the Nation": Foundational Identity**

In classical Arab heritage, poetry served as the repository of collective identity. The poem particularly the mu‘allaqa functioned as a document affirming belonging and exalting the tribal self in opposition to the other. Identity here was constructed through mechanisms of pride and valor, as the poet glorified the shared past and pure lineage to reinforce communal cohesion (Hijazi, 2012, p. 45).

This foundational role extended into the period of the Arab Nahda, when the historical novel (with Jurji Zaydan and others) played a central role in reviving national identity and constructing a unified Arab narrative in the face of colonialism and Ottoman domination. Literature thus became a tool for healing a wounded self and reclaiming lost grandeur (Ibrahim, 2002, p. 112).

### **3.2. From Certainty to Doubt: Identity in the Age of the Modern Novel**

With the transformations of the second half of the twentieth century particularly after the 1967 defeat and the subsequent intensification of globalization the function of literature underwent a radical shift. The literary text was no longer concerned with celebrating a ready-made identity, but with questioning and dismantling it. The Arabic novel became a corpus of doubt, exposing the contradictions of the self and revealing its fragility.

In this context, critic (Faisal Darraj) argues that the novel has become the epic of the marginalized, expressing Arab alienation and the collapse of grand narratives. Contemporary fiction does not offer definitive answers to the question "Who are we?", but instead poses open and painful questions, revealing that identity is no longer a sacred inheritance, but an anxious process of becoming torn between the values of authenticity and the pressures of modernity (Darraj, 2004, p. 88).

This trajectory demonstrates that Arabic literature has moved from being a preserving memory to a critical laboratory. In the age of globalization, it no longer protects identity through closure, but through openness to plurality transforming identity into a dialogical, evolving entity rather than a static museum artifact.

## **Second: Arabic Literature and Cultural Intersections: In-Between Narratives**

### **1. Manifestations of Cultural Pluralism in Modern and Contemporary Literary Discourse**

Contemporary Arabic literary discourse has undergone a radical transformation at the level of its deep structures. The novelistic text no longer confines itself to representing a single voice or an enclosed national identity; rather, it has opened itself to the spaces of cultural pluralism (Multiculturalism) imposed by the conditions of globalization. This pluralism manifests itself in literary texts not merely as an external theme, but as a writing strategy that permeates language, characters, and narrative space alike.

#### **1.1. From the "Purity of Identity" to the "Hybridity of the Text"**

In earlier stages, narrative tended to draw rigid boundaries between the self and the other. Today, however, we encounter texts that celebrate hybridity and position it as the narrative's center of gravity. This is clearly exemplified in *The Bamboo Stalk* by the Kuwaiti novelist Saud Alsanousi, which presents the character of "Issa/José" as a striking model of a divided and dual self. Here, cultural pluralism does not appear as a benign or decorative condition, but rather as a painful existential fate endured by a protagonist whose features, name, and language carry the genetic

imprints of two conflicting cultures (Filipino and Kuwaiti). His very body thus becomes a multicultural text (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 45).

## **2.1. Polyphony and the Deconstruction of Centrality**

The Arabic novel is no longer the exclusive voice of an omniscient author; instead, it has become following Mikhail Bakhtin a field of polyphonic and often dissonant voices. In Hoda Barakat's *The Night Mail*, the reader encounters a chorus of migrant and exiled voices that speak multiple languages and belong to diverse referential worlds, yet converge within the space of lost letters. This multiplicity of voices reflects a new awareness that identity-based truth is not owned by a single party, but is dispersed among subjectivities (Barakat, 2018, p. 12).

Similarly, contemporary Algerian novels by writers such as Waciny Laredj and Ahlam Mosteghanemi reveal a conscious engagement with the other, no longer as an enemy, but as a partner in memory and place. This narrative strategy dismantles exclusionary discourses and establishes what may be termed a narrative of tolerance (Al-Aref, 2015, p. 135).

## **3.1. Mediating Language and Cultural Crossing**

Cultural pluralism is also evident at the linguistic level. Arabic in the contemporary novel is no longer a pure or isolated language; it has become a permeated language, interwoven with dialects and foreign tongues French, English, Spanish reflecting the lived reality of globalized characters. This linguistic hybridization is not a weakness, but an aesthetic response to a culturally entangled reality. It seeks to represent the double consciousness of the Arab character living at the crossroads of cultures (Ibrahim, 2002, p. 210).

## **2. Analysis of Narrative Models: Fragmented Identity and the Reconstruction of the Self**

If the previous section outlined general features of cultural pluralism, the present section deconstructs the mechanisms of identity at work in two prominent narrative models that exemplify Arabic fiction's response to the question "Who are we?" in times of war and profound transformation.

### **2.1. Frankenstein in Baghdad: Identity as a Bloody Mosaic**

Ahmed Saadawi's novel (2013) offers a shocking approach to the concept of collective identity in post-invasion Iraq. Through the character of "Al-Shesma" (the creature assembled from the remains of victims), the novelist proposes the idea of a unifying identity, albeit in a terrifying form. This being does not embody a single identity (Sunni or Shiite, Arab or Kurdish), but rather a biological mixture of the bodies of all Iraq's warring components.

Here, identity functions simultaneously as burden and salvation. In one of the creature's revealing internal monologues, he declares:

"I am an Iraqi citizen, the sum of the victims; I am the essence of Iraqi pain"  
(Saadawi, 2013, p. 115).

The novel demonstrates that the search for a pure identity within a fractured society is a lethal illusion, and that the only remaining shared identity is the identity of victimhood, which unites individuals by force rather than by choice (Abdel-Muttalib, 2018, p. 55).

## **2.2. Sarajevo Firewood: Transnational Identity**

The Algerian novelist Said Khatibi (2018) transports the reader into a broader space of globalization and shared human suffering by linking two tragedies: Algeria's "Black Decade" and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The text dismantles closed national identity in favor of a human identity forged through shared pain.

The character of "Salim the Algerian" does not find redemption in withdrawal into the self, but in opening himself to "Ivana the Bosnian." Identity here becomes a communicative act rather than a defensive trench. The novel reveals that the other Eastern European in this case is not entirely alien, but another self experiencing the same fragmentation. In a telling dialogue, Salim states:

"We do not possess a history; we possess fragments of histories... and each of us tries to patch his garment with pieces taken from the other's garment"

(Khatibi, 2018, p. 210).

This model reflects a new narrative awareness that contemporary identity is not constructed solely through a return to origins, but through the capacity for translation and interaction with analogous human experiences (Al-Aref, 2020, p. 89).

This dual reading demonstrates that the contemporary Arabic novel has departed from the realm of identity certainty. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, identity is a local stitching of a shattered body; in *Sarajevo Firewood*, identity is a global crossing toward the other. Both affirm that identity construction is no longer an automatic process, but a conscious act of resistance against erasure and oblivion.

## **3. Literature and the Question of Self and Other: The Dialectic of Authenticity and Modernity**

The relationship between the self and the other has constituted the vital nerve of the Arabic novel since its inception. Yet the treatment of this binary has undergone profound transformations that reflect the maturation of Arab consciousness in confronting the shock of modernity. Contemporary Arabic literature no longer addresses the question of authenticity and modernity through the logic of opposition or rupture, but through a creative dialectic that seeks to dismantle all forms of centrality whether Western or traditional. This shift is what Faisal Darraj identifies when he argues that the Arabic novel has moved from the function of nationalist proclamation to the critique of unhappy consciousness and the alienation of the self (Darraj, 2004, p. 45).

### **3.1. From "Fascination/Rejection" to "Mutual Deconstruction"**

In the foundational phase, as in *The Latin Quarter* by Suhail Idriss, the Western other oscillated between being an idealized model of desired civilization and an oppressive colonial enemy. This duality placed the Arab protagonist in a dilemma of loss: either dissolve into the other and lose authenticity, or retreat into the self and lose contemporaneity.

In contemporary fiction, this impasse has been transcended through the deconstruction of stereotypes on both sides. In Tayeb Salih's masterpiece *Season of Migration to the North*, "Mustafa Sa'eed" is not merely a victim of colonialism; he becomes a symbolic invader who penetrates the other's territory, exposing the falsity of Western claims to moral superiority (Salih, 1966, p. 98). This narrative overturns the equation: the other is not destiny, and the self is not merely reactive.

### **3.2. A New Authenticity: Re-imagining Heritage through a Modern Lens**

Confronted with the flood of globalization, the Arab novelist has returned to heritage not to sanctify it, but to transform it into an active force within the present. In *Taghribat al-Abdi* by Abdelrahim Lahbibi, the protagonist excavates a heritage manuscript by a Moroccan traveler, not as an escape from contemporary reality, but as a means of posing urgent questions: Why did we fall behind while others advanced? Here, authenticity becomes a critical act rather than a nostalgic enclosure, and heritage serves as a mirror through which the fractures of the present are understood (Lahbibi, 2013, p. 15).

### **3.3. Deconstructing the Self and Humanizing the Other**

This dialectic reaches its climax in works that rehumanize the other, once demonized in popular imagination. In *The Handsome Jew* by Yemeni novelist Ali Al-Muqri, religious and social taboos are shattered through a love story between a Muslim woman and a Jewish man. The text affirms that

human identity love, pain, shared destiny is the essence, while religious and cultural differences remain surface layers (Al-Muqri, 2009, p. 60).

Thus, literature moves from the function of protecting borders between self and other to that of building bridges, proposing a new concept of contemporaneity one that does not mean imitating the West, but rather the ability to coexist and to accept difference as a fundamental human condition (Jassim, 2020, p. 50).

Through these models, contemporary Arabic literature does not resolve the dilemma of authenticity and modernity with a definitive answer; instead, it preserves it as an open and fertile wound, compelling the reader to continually rethink their position. We cannot become "them," nor can we remain "who we once were." We exist in a state of perpetual becoming and this is the very essence of contemporaneity.

### **Third: Transformations of Cultural Discourse and Their Impact on Identity Formation**

#### **1. Cultural Discourse Between Global Openness and Local Rootedness**

Contemporary Arabic literature functions as a precise observatory of the radical transformations that have affected cultural discourse, as conflict has shifted from the battlefield of military confrontation to the arena of symbols and values. Within this context, the binary of openness/rootedness emerges not merely as two contradictory choices, but as a condition of enduring tension experienced by the Arab fictional character.

##### **1.1. The Seduction of Openness: Globalized Identity and a New Alienation**

Recent Arabic fiction often portrays characters who have assimilated into a "universal culture," only to discover its spiritual emptiness. In *The Bow and the Butterfly* by Mohammed Achaari, the protagonist "Youssef" confronts a world in which values have been radically altered, as religious extremism intersects with excessive material consumption. The text shows how non-critical openness may lead to the loss of one's moral compass: the son who studied at the most prestigious universities becomes an extremist, reflecting the failure of a superficial modernity discourse to build a coherent identity (Al-Achaari, 2010, p. 115).

Here, literature condemns an openness that does not construct a self, but manufactures a cultural "monster" that belongs neither here nor there (Hamouda, 1997, p. 42).

##### **2.1. In Defense of Rootedness: Locality as Refuge or Constraint?**

Conversely, other texts present locality not as a return to the past, but as a condition for existing in the world. In *In Every Heart a Grave* by the Saudi novelist Nada Shaalan, we witness an attempt to restore the value of place and local specificity in the face of the domination of globalized "glass cities." The novel works through the idea that rootedness in local culture is the only fortress against the "liquefaction imposed by globalization," yet it simultaneously warns against rootedness turning into a "prison that blocks communication with the other" (Nasser, 2018, p. 70).

Identity in these texts is not closure, but a launching platform: one cannot be truly global without first being profoundly local.

### **3.1. An Anxious Identity: Oscillation Between Two Worlds**

This dialectic appears in its most extreme form in *The Night Mail*, where characters hang suspended between an overwhelming longing for the "time of roots" and a frantic desire to flee into the "time of globalization." This oscillation generates what criticism terms an anxious identity one that finds reassurance in neither shore arguably the dominant trait of contemporary humanity (Barakat, 2018, p. 15).

Here, the novelistic discourse reveals that the solution lies not in choosing between openness and rootedness, but in managing the tension between them. Literature seems to suggest: "A healthy identity is a tree whose roots are in the earth and whose branches extend into the space of the world." Any imbalance in this equation produces either extremism (roots without branches) or alienation (branches without roots).

## **2. The Impact of Digital, Media, and Social Transformations on Identity Construction**

Globalization has not only altered patterns of consumption; it has penetrated the deepest fortresses of the self through digitization. The shift to virtual space has produced what is known as cyber identity or a hybrid identity formed between "reality" and "screen." Contemporary Arabic fiction has confronted this phenomenon, exposing the fragility of the self under the tyranny of image and simulation.

### **2.1. The Virtual Self: From Being to Appearing**

Literature registers how identity in the age of the "digital revolution" has shifted from an inner essence to a mere "profile," a façade for display. In *Girls of Riyadh* by the Saudi writer Rajaa Al Sanea, characters construct entire lives in virtual space as an escape from a frustrating social reality. The novel reveals that such digital identities function as fragile shelters and masks: the protagonists

live a sharp split a kind of double life between a repressed reality and an online freedom mediated by email messages. Here, digital space becomes a "voluntary exile" that deepens the self's alienation rather than curing it, as identity turns into a digital narrative detached from the living body (Al Sanea, 2005, p. 30).

This shift echoes what Jean Baudrillard calls the murder of the real, in which the "image" (Simulacra) becomes more real than the original, and "true" identity dissolves behind layers of digital falsification (Baudrillard, 2008, p. 45).

## **2.2. Surveillance and the Prison of Identity**

The impact of contemporary transformations does not stop at alienation; it extends into becoming a tool of control and erasure. This shared anxiety appears across many texts: from Girls of Riyadh, which reveals society's surveillance of virtual space, to Celestial Bodies by Jokha Alharthi, which traces the authority of custom over the female body, and onward to Mama Hissa's Mice by Saud Alsanousi, which anatomizes the dominance of sectarian and political censorship. Collectively, these works show how identity becomes a "besieged space," as the individual finds themselves in a continuous struggle against ready-made molds of stereotyping, and against the "eyes" of society that pursue them both in public life and in solitude (Al Sanea, 2005, p. 45; Alharthi, 2010, p. 30; Alsanousi, 2015, p. 120).

## **2.3. Social Media and the Fragmentation of the Reference Community**

From a sociological perspective, the digital revolution has fragmented a solid collective identity in favor of new forms of neo-tribalism organized around fleeting interests. This is reflected in novels addressing the "Arab Spring" and the influence of blogs and hashtags, where the fictional protagonist appears to belong more to a global "virtual community" than to their neighborhood or nation. This "soft detachment" produces a generation living a floating identity that never fully settles in place an idea resonant with Said Yaqtin's notion of the "hyperlinked text," which parallels a "hyperlinked self" that is simultaneously connected and fragmented (Yaqtin, 2012, p. 60).

In approaching these transformations, fiction concludes that digitization has not abolished identity; rather, it has rendered it more complex and fluid. The contemporary human being is compelled to manage multiple identities (offline and online), thus living in a condition of permanent negotiation in order to preserve a thin thread of psychological coherence.

## **3. Cultural Interpenetration and the Question of Specificity Under Globalization**

In what Edward Said calls the "intertwining of histories," Arab culture can no longer claim purity or isolation. Contemporary Arabic fiction poses the question of specificity with intensity not to defend a bygone past, but to protect the right to difference within a global system that seeks to standardize human beings.

### **3.1. Specificity as an Act of Resistance, Not Withdrawal**

In *The Dove's Necklace* by the Saudi novelist Raja Alem, Mecca appears not only as a sacred religious space, but as an arena of struggle between "deep history" (local specificity, alleyways, stories) and the "bulldozers of globalization" that seek to erase memory and replace it with concrete and glass. The novel develops the idea that defending spatial and spiritual specificity is the final defense of the "human spirit" against reification. Here, literature becomes a "document of ownership" for a memory threatened with confiscation (Alem, 2010, p. 55).

### **2.3. Cultural Interpenetration: From Invasion to Critical Acculturation**

On the other shore, *Papers* by Moroccan thinker and novelist Abdallah Laroui offers a different vision: "Idris" (the intellectual) does not view cultural interpenetration as a threat, but as an opportunity for rereading the self. Rather than fearing the other, the text calls for the indigenization of modernity (Indigenization) that is, digesting universal knowledge and reproducing it in an Arabic idiom. Specificity here lies not in what one possesses of heritage, but in how one engages that heritage through a critical mind (Laroui, 1989, p. 112).

### **3.3. Composite Identity: Accepting "Unfinalizability"**

In *Adjacent Lives* by Mohammed Berrada, characters live a comfortable linguistic and cultural plurality, surpassing guilt-ridden anxieties about specificity. The text proposes that true specificity in the age of globalization lies in the capacity for synthesis: to be Arab and universal at once without splitting. This "interpenetration" generates a living culture, whereas insisting on the "purity of specificity" may reduce culture to "dead folklore" (Berrada, 2009, p. 40).

Novelistic discourse ultimately suggests that specificity is not a fixed given, but an ongoing project of construction. Globalization imposes interpenetration, yet literature imposes the conditions of that interpenetration so that it becomes not an erasure of the self, but an enrichment of it. It is as if the text declares: "I interpenetrate with you in order to expand not to disappear.

## **Forth: Discussion and Applied Analysis: A Reading of the Mechanisms of Self-Formation**

### **1. Selected Texts: Celestial Bodies and the Fragmentation of the Self Across Temporalities**

In order to move from theorization to critical practice, this section offers a close, microscopic reading of a contemporary narrative experience that powerfully embodies the problematic of self-formation under violent transformations: *Celestial Bodies* by the Omani novelist Jokha Alharthi. This text represents a model of the Arab self striving to emerge from the "cocoon" of the past without losing its own "skin."

### **1.1. The Self and the Authority of Memory: "Maya" and the Speaking Silence**

Alharthi constructs the character of "Maya" as a model of feminine subjectivity shaped through silence and passive resistance. In a traditional society undergoing a rapid modernizing shift, Maya does not scream in order to assert her identity; rather, she retreats inward, transforming silence into an alternative language. This mode of identity formation corresponds to what feminist criticism describes as identity under erasure: she is present through her absence, building an independent self by refusing to participate in the new consumerist "game" imposed by society (Alharthi, 2010, p. 30).

### **2.1. The Migrant Self: "London" and the Impossible Break**

By contrast, the character of "London" (Maya's daughter) presents the other face of contemporary subjectivity: a rebellious self seeking an identity construction grounded in rupture with inherited legacy (even her name, "London," carries a mark of estrangement). Yet the novel intelligently reveals that such escape is impossible. "London," the modern physician, remains haunted by the stories of grandmothers and mothers. The text thus foregrounds a central idea: contemporary identity is not the cancellation of the past, but a renegotiation with it. In a revealing inner address, London says:

"I am not my mother, and not my grandmother... yet I cannot be myself except through them."

(Alharthi, 2010, p. 150).

### **3.1. Deconstructing "Class Identity": Slaves and Masters in the Age of Globalization**

Most strikingly, the novel engages the identity of the margin through the characters of "Zarifa" and "Sanjar." It shows how globalization and oil have altered external surfaces (cars, phones) yet have not fully erased older identity hierarchies (masters and slaves). The text thus delivers a sharp critique of a "modernity of appearances" that fails to touch the deep structures of identity construction, insisting that the "liberation of the self" requires an internal cultural revolution, not merely economic change (Al-Aref, 2019, p. 75).

Through *Celestial Bodies*, we see that contemporary self-formation is not a straight ascending line toward modernity, but a circular and painful route, full of fractures and regressions. It is a novel that

declares: identity is not what we freely choose in absolute terms, but what we make out of what remains available to us as choices.

## **2.Highlighting the Mechanisms of Literary Criticism in Deconstructing Identity Structures and Their Resistance or Response to Change**

Arabic literature did not merely accompany identity transformations; it was also accompanied by an alert literary criticism that moved beyond the traditional function of "aesthetic evaluation" toward that of cultural anatomy. Contemporary criticism especially cultural criticism relies on a set of procedural mechanisms to deconstruct how identity operates within texts. Among the most significant are:

### **2.1. Exposing the Implicit Pattern**

This mechanism, consolidated by the critic Abdullah Al-Ghadhami, is among the most prominent tools for dismantling "authoritarian identity." The critic reads the text not for what it explicitly says, but for what it conceals. When analyzing, for instance, modernist poetic texts, cultural criticism may reveal that, despite their claims to renewal, they reproduce inherited patterns such as the "phallic paradigm" and the "prophet-poet," indicating that change remained superficial while deep identity structures stayed traditional and resistant to transformation (Al-Ghadhami, 2005, p. 65).

Through this mechanism, criticism exposes the "falsehood of modernity" in certain texts, clarifying how identity may wear a contemporary mask while hiding a solid, archaic face.

### **2.2. Contrapuntal Reading**

Drawing on Edward Said, Arab criticism employs this mechanism to read texts that address relations with the West. The critic does not read the novel from a single angle, but reads it simultaneously alongside the colonial archive. In analyses of works such as Season of Migration to the North, contrapuntal reading shows that the protagonist "Mustafa Sa'eed" is not merely an individual, but a violent identity response to centuries of historical repression (Ibrahim, 2002, p. 150). This mechanism highlights how identity "responds" to change through fierce resistance even if such resistance leads to self-destruction.

### **2.3. Deconstructing Phallocentrism**

Feminist criticism plays a decisive role in unveiling gendered identity structures. In analyzing works by writers such as Ahlam Mosteghanemi or Alia Mamdouh, criticism does not primarily seek the "beauty of description," but rather investigates how feminine subjectivity is formed outside the

authority of father/husband. It reveals that feminine identity in the Arabic novel undergoes an "arduous labor," resisting social stereotyping through what is termed writing the body, asserting that identity change does not occur by decree, but through wresting the right to speak (Al-Aref, 2015, p. 140).

Accordingly, contemporary literary criticism does not merely "describe identity"; it performs a form of therapeutic function. It diagnoses the points of dysfunction in identity construction whether pathological withdrawal into the self or dissolution into the other and urges the reader to recognize that identity is not an unavoidable fate, but a cultural construction open to deconstruction and reconfiguration.

### **Conclusion: Key Findings and Inferences**

Following this investigative journey through trajectories of self-formation in the Arabic narrative corpus, the study arrives at a set of conclusions that respond to its central problematic and open a horizon for a deeper understanding of "contemporary identity":

- Identity as a Negotiated Process Rather than a Fixed Essence

The analyzed novels (from *Season of Migration to the North* to *Celestial Bodies*) demonstrate that Arabic literature has decisively left behind the concept of ready-made, inherited identity. Identity in contemporary narrative is a difficult and continuous process of construction, realized through daily negotiation between the constraints of globalization and the roots of memory. The fictional protagonist no longer searches for an "origin to return to," but for a "future to build from the fragments of multiple identities."

- The Collapse of the (Center/Margin) Binary

The analysis shows that Arabic literature has succeeded in deconstructing Western and patriarchal centralities simultaneously. The novel no longer confines itself to the role of "victim," but has acquired the authority of representation, foregrounding marginal figures (women, minorities, migrants) who move to the center and rewrite history from their own perspective thus turning the margin into a new center.

- The Emergence of Hybrid Identity as an Existential Option

The study reveals that cultural interpenetration has not necessarily produced the "monstrosity of identity" once feared, but has generated what may be called a "third identity" or hybrid identity, marked by high flexibility and adaptive capacity. Characters such as "Issa" in *The Bamboo Stalk* or

"Salim" in Sarajevo Firewood do not experience duality as "lack," but as "richness," enabling them to live within zones of civilizational contact.

- Cultural Criticism as a Therapeutic Tool

The study concludes that contemporary Arab criticism is no longer an aesthetic luxury, but an indispensable tool for self-awareness. By exposing implicit patterns, criticism contributes to liberating the Arab mind from fantasies of "racial purity" or "absolute dependency," pushing instead toward accepting plurality as an unavoidable human condition.

## **Second: Research Proposals and Future Horizons**

In light of the above, and building on areas still requiring exploration, the study proposes the following research directions:

- Posthumanism Narratives and Identity

Examining how identity is formed in Arabic science-fiction (dystopian) novels, where the self is merged with machines and artificial intelligence. How will the Arab subject define themselves when they become part of a digital network, or a cyborg-like being?

- Ecocriticism and Spatial Identity

Investigating the relationship between identity and environmentally threatened place. How do climate disasters and desertification addressed by some novels affect one's sense of belonging to the land? Will we witness an "ecological identity" that transcends national borders?

- Refugee Literature and the New Diaspora

Expanding research to include "boat literature" and the new Syrian and Palestinian refugee writing in Europe. How does the refugee rebuild identity in "non-place" (camps, borders, detention centers)? Does such experience produce a new "global identity" that moves beyond traditional notions of citizenship?

In conclusion, Arabic literature through its boldness in exposing the self and its engagement with the world affirms that identity is not a "fortress" within which we take shelter, but a "bridge" we cross toward the other, and toward more expansive and humane versions of ourselves.

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