

Cultural Periodisation: Towards a Third Theory of the Novel A Cultural Approach to the Foundational Texts of the Algerian Novel

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Abstract:

The critic Al-Yamin Ben Toumi became profoundly aware of a grave issue, namely, the penetration of cultural narratives* by the disciplines of theory and the conditions imposed by the centre, when he attempted, in a contrapuntal manner, to reproduce a contrapuntal theory that he implicitly termed the "third theory", drawing in this respect on the propositions of Edward Said. He went further in his argument when he deconstructed the intertextuality produced by the interwoven production between the earliest texts and their structuring within the systems of Algerian cultural reason. There is no doubt that the critic Ben Toumi's interest in Foucault's archaeology led him, on this occasion, to be influenced by the systems of thought discussed by Michel Foucault in *the Order of Things*.

Key words: Cultural dimension; The time period; The Algerian novel ;Algerian narrative.

introduction:

The significance of a theory of the Algerian novel branches out under a meaning synonymous with a narrative project that bears the specificity of Algerian society. We would not be overstating matters by refraining from calling this project a theory, given that a theory denotes a systematic configuration of ideas possessing a distinctive character and an

independent frame of reference. This systematicity permeates the dynamic relations that mark the Algerian narrative project's differentiation from Western theorisation, for when this theory is conceived from within the social model and wagers on debating its parameters to produce knowledge that does not replicate the Western experience. "Here, theory neither solves a problem nor transcends the problematic situation; the outcome remains an exposition, an explanation, and a justification, taking divergent and fluctuating directions, oscillating between what is ethical, what is formal, what is descriptive, and what is evaluative... This pattern captivates us, yet we shall not discover a theory in the strict sense, but rather knowledge of what precedes theory: knowledge concerning issues and disparate positions that share no bond other than their affiliation with a particular critic. It has not attained, in its scope, the degree of coherence whereby hypotheses are established in its premises; it is general knowledge that one might set down after reading critical theory while

imagining that one is uncovering the elements of theory through their demonstration.”¹

‘Al-Yamin Ben Toumi’ invokes a corpus of texts that have accumulated in our cultural history and become entangled with national identity and national culture, within which the Algerian question is lodged, to deconstruct the totality of possible and impossible cultural entanglements in our cultural history. Like ‘Ammar Belahcen’, he criticises the rupture that has occurred at the level of history, which he termed “cultural segmentation”, attributing this neglect to the successive political mind within our historical consciousness, which, according to him, did not dare to transform those texts into a cultural, discursive, and procedural matter within the national cultural mind, thereby preventing the most effective exploitation of the texts.

The representations advanced by the critic reveal an awareness of the necessity of determining the point of reference from which he proceeds in approaching the texts, away from the disciplines of theory. The critic sensed the imperative of difference that marks the aesthetics of the Algerian text and its distinctive philosophy in

the face of the regularities of Algerian novelistic art. He sought the dynamism and systematicity of that regularity, stating: "This compels us to periodise Algerian narrative within a profound and rigorous theoretical situation, and thereby to overcome all the historical obstacles that have precluded the emergence of a literary/cultural front; it remains as it is, still suffering a foundational problem or a problem in the foundations which is historical and primary, always related to ..."²

The critic Ben Toumi then moved to examine the law of correlation between literature, life, and history through exercises on cultural reasons in the organisation of social institutions under the influence of historicist aesthetic effects (decoloniality) that are not connected by any apparent resemblance. Here, he declares: “To speak of the act of absolute ownership of writing means that we liberate ourselves from the various voices that dictate to us an institutional history on demand, a packaged history, either in the form of a unifying rank, or in a leftist form, or in a liberal form; that we engage in a romantic

* Narrative, in its historical and anthropological origins, is inseparable from life, culture, and society, because it constitutes an essential component of human nature. Nothing attests to this more clearly than the philosophical proposition that "the human being is a storytelling creature." For this reason, the geography of "postmodern narrative" is situated within that unstable system that expresses the continuous dynamism of individuals' writing consciousness. Since literature is "symbolic knowledge," the concept of cultural narratives, from a topological perspective, is the product of a distance between a produced text and culture. This epistemological adjustment to the concept of postmodern narrative moves beyond structural ossification towards constructing a concept of structuration and of building the world (the process of structuring). In accordance with the proposition that "nations are narratives," narrative crystallises as a cross-cultural discursive strategy that deploys a new aesthetics to formulate "alternative narratives" that bring together narrative plot and critical catharsis. The writing

consciousness of cultural narratives derives its project from the distance it produces between the aesthetics of narrative and the politics of discursive representation (représentation narrative), through a simultaneous consciousness—precisely what cultural narratives plead for by producing constructive systems of the self and the world. Cultural narratives derive their alternative project (“alternative narratives”) and are bound to what is called “critical equalisation,” insofar as, through their simultaneous consciousness, they contain a critical text parallel to the narrative text. See al-Walid Lahwah, “What Are Cultural Narratives?” a critical paper presented to the project of the international colloquium “Cultural Criticism,” University of Guelma, January 2023.

¹ Muhammad al-Daghmoumi, *Critique of Critique and the Theorisation of Contemporary Arab Criticism*, previously cited, 127.

² Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 13.

play in constructing an authentic imaginary tied to the land and culture?"³

The current consciousness of periodising the Algerian novel, from Al-Yamin Ben Toumi's perspective, is grounded in an ontological dimension that translates the dialogical relationship between the textualities of history and their examination within what Clément Moisan terms the "law of the correlation of forms and aesthetic aims"; that is, the use of a form produced or invoked by differing circumstances necessarily precedes an understanding of that form's properties and force, for the mind acts upon the data presented to it, testing, analysing, and organising its aesthetic potential.⁴ Accordingly, the critic set about seeking to apprehend the coherence obtaining between the levels of the texts he selected as a sample for his exercises in periodisation, and from all of this, he derived a corpus of texts bound by a historical and cultural correlation (a correlation between subsidiary and overarching systems).

Al-Yamin Ben Toumi considers that textuality, in Edward Said's sense, will liberate periodisation from every form of dependency imposed by bourgeois theory through the construction (in Schmidt's sense) of an Algerian textuality that gathers together all the silent texts

that theoretical disciplines have muted or effaced: "which means restoring the cultural front of the textual history that we call (the Algerian novel), which cannot be understood except within the framework of these texts. This concern leads us beyond authoritarian historiography, or institutional historiography, towards the construction of a cultural historiography. This history is defined according to a set of total and partial systems, which several important theories have theorised."⁵

The critic Al-Yamin Ben Toumi holds that, in North Africa, we lack the texts that would enable us, in history, to shield ourselves from a condition of nakedness, even though the great texts of history were written within this geography, which has come to no longer think through its own texts. Thus, these postcolonial regions think through the texts of others and do not think on their own. He adduces as evidence *the Golden Ass*, written in approximately the first century CE, approximately 124 CE, at Madaurus in Souk Ahras*. If we test the deceptive formation of the novel's periodisation, we shall be astonished to find that the Algerian narrative practised its historical presence in the absence of a pure referential framework in its epistemological sense. This referential nakedness renders it inert, not in terms of

³ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 48.

⁴ Clément Moisan, *The Literary Phenomenon*, previously cited, 87.

⁵ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation*, previously cited, 43.

*Al-Yamin Ben Toumi notes that "the writer Apuleius wrote his text saturated with a regional spirit, or an African spirit, which differs profoundly from Roman origins; he therefore chose, with great acuity, to write this text, *The Golden Ass*, in the form of a plea on behalf of Africans' ways of life—those Africans who were deformed, invaded, and effaced by the Romans. Consequently, there

is a profound awareness on the part of the Madaurian African writer of questions of occupation across a number of issues that we shall attempt to investigate more deeply—not with regard to Apuleius, who regarded Madaurus as the city of the spirit, but rather the issues that Apuleius addressed in his text, *The Golden Ass*—this source text that contains a set of questions and issues in which he defends his literary and African specificity. This text belongs, in some sense, to the literature of pleas (*Apologie*), as Abu al-'Id Doudou mentioned, and the writer composed it about himself in response to certain accusations brought against him, accusations that were Roman in essence." See Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation*, 47.

temporalisation but rather in terms of measuring the narrative experience in its theoretical sense, in the absence of a genuine historical system and protection that would safeguard narrative from the imperialism of Western theory.

For the designations proposed by Ben Toumi, which draw on texts of attribution, annexation, and action, although the critic did not apply these classifications to examples drawn from the Algerian novel, they remained abstract and devoid of empirical representation. Nevertheless, the texts he addressed in application succeeded in demonstrating these classificatory propositions without any explicit indication on the critic's part. For "emergence and appearance: the text as matter or *hylē* means that we search for coherence between historical revelation and the matter of revelation; the former is a fixed text, and the latter is mobile across more than one tongue, by virtue of the succession of textualities that have traversed this geography. Here, in Edward Said's terms, we have moved from the text to textuality. This is what causes us to stand on ground replete with radical rooting, upon the modernity of which all the texts we call Algerian are reconciled, by annexation, attribution, and action:

✓ Text of annexation: that which was subordinate to the empire.

✓ Text of attribution: that which allows us to move within our own empire.

✓ Text of action: that through which we were able, figuratively, to construct an imperial act through writing.

These are textual forms from which the threads of Algerian literature emerged. This kind of rehistoricisation transcends the linear system of the historical."⁶

⁶ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Novel and Cultural Segmentation*, previously cited, 43.

The organising principle for the periodisation of these novels is constituted by the criteria and models that confer upon that organisation a historical value, through the intervention of other criteria and models originating from within or from without, which alter their development, their functions, and even their very nature at the heart of that organisation, as measured against the experience of these texts within historicity. Dr. Ben Toumi considers that these marginalised texts contain a prior decolonial project, through which the Algerian self was able to discern the question of Algerian-ness within the text before discerning it at the level of reality or geography; in other words, it was the text that propelled this movement towards liberating national culture from the theoretical repressed content in which urban culture had imprisoned it. He states, "This kind of writing will lead us beyond the traps of zeal in the search for texts, only for us to fall into a profound dependency; that is, in our work, or in our search for textuality, we fall into dependency on others, even as we continue to live the content of concealment within the textuality of others, for example, in our search for the referential framework of the text of *The Golden Ass*, which is, by right, a cultural and geographical text."⁷ This period constitutes a squandering of national culture and of the text as a cultural representative of what is called the Algerian cultural project in its totality, not in its partial vision. The simultaneity of the decolonial moment and its correlation with all the textualities of national culture has remained a form of memory closely bound to the national cultural mind, and this "simultaneity is a

⁷ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Novel and Cultural Segmentation*, previously cited, 45.

permanent possibility for culture "8 As 'René Wellek' puts it.

The all-encompassing totality that enabled the critic to crystallise the concept of a theory is the constructive vision produced by the overarching systems in the organisation proposed by the critic in his periodising examination of noncollective functional organisation. This is the method proposed by "Ivan Zahr", through which he replaced the aggregative positivism of data with a functional method based on the analysis of relations, conceived as systems through which it became possible to describe and interpret how the totality of different signs operates, by means of the dynamic correlation among them. This is what marked his work as a poetics of periodisation and a social poetics*, in which poetics is articulated on two complementary levels: the first is the level of significant structures and consists of analysing the social value of genres and forms; the second, at the level of the text's particular structures, consists of analysing the construction of aesthetic and ideological effects linked to the social value of forms, according to the various poetic states corresponding to different states of society.

Al-Yamin Ben Toumi seeks to wager on a project that brings together two major critics, Edward Said and al-Jabri: the former on

textuality in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, and the latter on reason. For a text to belong to culture, meaning that it speaks of the homeland or that it was written on its geography, such texts attempt to ground their legitimacy in cultural entanglement with national geographies. The critic Edward Said states, "What was intended was not texts or inheritances, but rather a condition of being that we may rightly call textuality ... these are ideas about borders and frontiers, accompanied by ideas about everything connected to the homeland literature, genre, epoch, a particular text, and an author which appear to have lost their force."⁹

Al-Yamin Ben Toumi problematized history/the world as an artificial memory*. He approached the Algerian novel as a literary phenomenon: "Even if these elements are tangible elements, they take their place within a theoretical framework of a systematic nature; once again, practice works to form theory and to confer upon it the cause of its modes of being. Nevertheless, we must affirm that these elements that constitute this complex unit, called the phenomenon, are disparate elements and that it is their correlations that organise this system. At the end of the process, unity is the fruit of the organisation itself. However, the literary system does not exist independently in and of itself; it

⁸ See René Wellek, *Critical Concepts*, trans. Muhammad 'Asfour, 'Ālam al-Ma'rifah series (Kuwait), no. 110 (1987), 41.

*Égine Robin draws on a social poetics and on Claude Duchet's concept in order to derive this new approach: the cotext (*cotexte*), the text (*texte*), the extratext (*hors-texte*), and the sociogramme (*sociogramme*). The latter term, grounded in purely textual data, is defined as an ambiguous, unstable, and dialectical ensemble of representations centred on a nucleus, in interaction with one another. On this basis, Robin proposes the following definition: the manner in which social discourse crystallises and stabilises in particular topics around words and images that become the primary raw material of imaginings, which the writer will invest and set to work in

the text through the text. In contrast, Alain Viala seeks to connect a poetics of forms with the sociology of the field, which together constitute the foundation of social poetics.

⁹ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, trans. 'Abd al-Karim Mahfoud, previously cited, 174–75.

*These organised "places" were rooted in topological relations (it was not for nothing that Descartes found an echo of this place in the physiology of the human body, in memories condensed with boredom and pressure in the brain). Similarly, Bodin and his colleagues repeated the clichés of geography in the name of history's "artificial memory." See Timothy J. Reiss, "Periodicity: Considerations on the Geography of Histories," *Modern Language Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (December 2001): 444.

enters into relations with other systems social, educational, and cultural, which are themselves subject to the structures of the state and its decisions and to the various networks of communication. To describe the system, one must first segment its basic elements, that is, its genres, works, topics, and institutions, while determining their characteristics and functions; then, one must clarify the organising elements of that system and constitute them within a determinate whole.”¹⁰

From Al-Yamin Ben Toumi’s perspective, the contours of the “third theory” of the novel took shape through exposing the features of inclusion and exclusion of this decolonial memory within history.

The contours of the third theory, in Al-Yamin Ben Toumi’s conception, took shape through mapping the correlations between the overarching and partial systems of national culture that are embedded within narrative phenomena, thereby enabling him to establish a link between the novel’s artistic form and the social class: “Form must prevail over content because it alone is capable of providing an artistic image of the ‘maximum possible consciousness of the class’, whereas explicit contents are condemned to remain at the level of ‘real consciousness’. It follows that the form of the accomplished work is always superior to what it states explicitly and that, according to a strict linear aesthetic scale of values, a work’s genius is proportional to its capacity to rise above real consciousness.”¹¹ Thus, the possible consciousness of this narrative form was constituted as the promise of the text (Michel

Foucault) to liberate geography (textuality) from colonialism and colonisation.

With Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, we may consider that the Algerian novelistic moment was culturally constituted before the geographical moment was constituted, in the sense that culture succeeded in liberating the promise of the text, in Michel Foucault’s terms, so that the Algerian moment could take shape as a decolonial moment that reliberated the geography that successive colonialism had usurped: “I believe that acknowledging the ‘historical event’ should not implicate us in reproducing it; rather, we should study it only in a way that prevents us from such reproduction that is, studying it in order to produce a likeness and hence attempt to find an aesthetic independence that proceeds from our own reality, not from the reality of the coloniser. Nevertheless, we must regard this kind of literature as no more than a historical possession, ‘it happened there and belongs there’, for reproducing it here means arousing the feeling of ‘longing for the colony’. It is a denunciation of transgression, not of reproduction. Nothing can be restored from pain, for it opens the door to hatred, and there is no scope or space today to speak of hatred. Our placement in the depths of the Mediterranean space was driven by a colonial understanding: on the one hand, it seeks to situate us within the depths of Western modernity, on the conditions of the northern Mediterranean.”¹² He therefore set out to authorise a draft theory that aims to vindicate a pure production that invests in the historical possession of the event through an aesthetic independence translated by systems conscious of the politics of literature (the

¹⁰ See Clément Moisan, *The Literary Phenomenon*, previously cited, 65.

¹¹ Alain Vaillant, *L’histoire littéraire, op. cit.*, 82–83.

¹² Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Novel and Cultural Segmentation*, previously cited, 15.

national novel) and pursues the production of a literature that articulates the condition of “we”. Clément Moisan criticises historical practices as interpretative practices incapable of confronting representations of systems and regimes as complex systems, considering that these practices have devoted most of their effort to interrogating historical interpretation without attending to nonhomogeneous texts, texts that Ben Toumi regards as “texts that belong, by virtue of affiliation, to the space of literature for a geography whose official façade is wounded, because it is an artificial façade written by political authorities in different historical phases”.¹³

The concept of intertextuality carries into the text the full measure of sociality ... that is, in this context, society manifests itself in the literary text through an intertextual trajectory that is an assimilative, dialogic trajectory (critical, oppositional, and ironic). The disciplinary value of theory has also left us inattentive to the formation of a pure vision of issues, for the novel is nothing other than that continual, cunning breach of form. Hence, we must acknowledge the consciousness that resides in its form, by which I mean the consciousness of historical continuity. Conversely, from Ben Toumi’s perspective, we must ask about that systemic seepage of texts of attribution that took shape for historical reasons: “Can we say that *The Golden Ass*, through the attribution conferred upon it by the translator Abu al-‘Id Doudou as ‘the first novel in the history of humanity’, may be considered an Algerian text by virtue of ‘attribution’, or does it open into a space broader than the present geographical signification,

towards the universal? Here, we determine what is said within the rubric of national literature, which did not stabilise until after the stage of geographical liberation; that is, can we consider *the Golden Ass* an Algerian text? ... This confusion between more than one language refers us to the cultural anxiety in which Apuleius found himself: he mastered the languages of colonisation, yet he wanted to write within the language of the Roman coloniser in a popular style that expresses the Phoenician persona. All of this was in order to find the Algerian’s identity at the level of historical and textual reference.”¹⁴

If *the Golden Ass* provokes an ontological and cultural anxiety regarding the consciousness of identity, does the search, through periodisation, for a theory in history within this text refer to a pure field of knowledge or to a colonial mode of production? How can thought be related to interaction with reality while developing independently of it? Ben Toumi holds that “there will be further immersion in coloniality, which produces its mechanisms through a highly complex symbolic language. This depth enables us to move beyond the forms of fragility that enter our consciousness to build a radical consciousness through deconstructing consciousness itself and its internal manoeuvres. This can only be achieved by deconstructing malignant consciousness and reproducing national policies grounded in vigilance against colonialism those signs that cause the national collective to move within a fundamentally colonial semiotic and symbolic system.”¹⁵

The propositions concerning the liberation of the human being from the ghetto of periodisation call for a radical transformation of the general ideological structure within the social field through a revolutionary act of thought and by tracing historical formation so that it does not

¹³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Novel and Cultural Segmentation*, previously cited, 38–39.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

remain captive to structure. "Here, we must pose a historically demanding question in epistemological terms: what does it mean to periodise our history, and where do we begin this periodisation? Does the study of *the Golden Ass* lead us to a form of reproducing the discourse of colonisation 'Romanisation' since we are dealing with a discourse that was formed within a specific temporal and spatial context related to the Roman period in Algeria?"¹⁶

Robert Young considers that there is a disturbance in the spatial maps of postmodern space*, a mental disturbance derived from postmodern urban disarray; hence, there is a need to recalibrate space by attempting to situate it through maps. I suggest that Ben Toumirecalibrated historical geography, which has become confused within cultural reasons under colonial domination. Accordingly, Ben Toumi proceeds to reterritorialise and resituate the earliest texts and to redraw them, a process made possible only through a historical constructivism of the overarching systems of the Algerian individual. He states, "We would thereby fall into asserting attribution to Algeria, that is, into 'the Romanisation of Algerian literature', which is also a fall into the spectre of dependency. This is a frightening or troubling matter that unsettles national identity; therefore, we must beware of claims of adherence to a periodising system in the geographical/regional sense, as they may harbour a dreadful aggrandise of some form of Romanisation of Algerian literature. We must thus probe the depths of this historical system when Romanisation erupted in favour of internal resistance. Perhaps the debate

opened by *The Golden Ass* will enable us to interpret the text in a manner consonant with the cultural telos of Algerianisation, as it is inscribed within the text as an act that refers to the indigenous inhabitants or natives. Accordingly, in contrast to the narrative of Romanisation adopted by Saint Augustine, we find an alternative system within the ideology of liberation embraced by Father Donatus."¹⁷

The Golden Ass by Lucius Apuleius is among the novels that have received extensive critical study at the formal and generic levels. However, Al-Yamin Ben Toumi moves beyond these formal questions, considering them, by his own account, pedagogical issues. The critic's concern thus shifts from a pedagogical to an ontological question, excavating the epistemological formation of the Algerian novel's art within its sociohistorical milieu.

Perhaps the reterritorialisation of Apuleius' text realises the concept of historical cultural reason within a geographical/textual setting; it is a cultural reordering that closely resembles Jamesonian precursors (Fredric Jameson) in reorganising the colonial confusion affecting the text. The entanglement of *the Golden Ass* with national history constitutes a total vision that examines overarching systems and contests historical segmentation. Apuleius wrote his text saturated with a regional or African spirit that differs profoundly from Roman origins; he therefore chose, with excellent acuity, to write *The Golden Ass* as a plea for African ways of life, those Africans who were deformed, invaded, and effaced by the Romans.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

*For Jameson, the political form of postmodernity has as its function the invention, conceptualisation, and drawing of global cognitive maps at both the social and spatial levels. Robert Young argues that the totalising force is no longer class consciousness, nor even history, but capitalism itself. However, the totality cannot be understood; so long as it cannot be understood, it cannot be resisted. Cognitive mapping, which is supposed to confront the experience of postmodernity, represents Jameson's specific counterpart to Lukács's class

consciousness within postmodernity's dominant cultural condition. See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, trans. Ahmad Mahmud (Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 2003), 248–49.

¹⁷ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 45.

¹⁸ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 47.

Apuleius' textualities will expel all the narrative centralities that fashioned a cultural paternity and went on to impose what Donata Meneghelli termed the Greenwich line of literature and the novel; these narratives drew a historical arrangement for a periodising turning point and an estrangement from the cultural reality of the environment that nurtured this achievement. From the researcher's perspective, the narrative seeks "to displace the layer of false consciousness embodied by the official doctrine in favour of true consciousness, to delineate for us the profound struggle in understanding what exists as false consciousness the condition of the ass because official Roman culture celebrates metamorphosis as a cultural condition".¹⁹ The critic Al-Yamin Ben Toumi considers that the representations contained in *The Golden Ass*, its symbols, signs, and significations undermine the learned, global, universal vision of the Roman Empire, as "the belittlement of the indigenous person who has been transformed into an 'ass' is, in itself, a double critique of the hegemonic discourse that stripped all Roman culture outside Rome of its representations. It was therefore necessary for transformation to occur at the level of the Roman language, where the act of moral condemnation took place at the level of culture and language, which is regarded as the most important cultural façade."²⁰ Systems theory thus pursues the play of forms (systems). Art must therefore replace interconnected forms with what cannot be observed as a unity, and consciousness must allow the world to appear within the world. Accordingly, the world within cultural reason was expelled in the name of

coloniality; hence, the consciousness of textuality worked to disclose the world and to replace its semiotic systems with cultural systems.

Texts are constituted in history as transcendent textualities that translate systemic games (the game of systems/games for life) and a cultural system that Mark Seltzer terms the schemata of the official world* (Official World). The play of texts, as supergeneric or supergenealogical forms in Niklas Luhmann's sense, challenges the scholarly and centralist vision by uniting art and life within a conscious narrative that delineates the contours of national cultural reason in confrontation with scholarly reason/the official world.

The literary period imposed by the scholarly vision comes to protect its text within history. Thus, the periodisation of tradition, understood as the maturation of a system, constitutes the historical protection of beginnings in favour of the official world. It therefore becomes necessary "to examine historical origins, insofar as present cultural systems are essentially historical systems and temporal entities that invariably prevail."²¹ Since the novel's theory defines the foundational structures of its art in terms of the initial situations of these narratives' emergence, it also expresses the "regularities" conferred upon them by the nurturing milieu's experience. These theories (or theories) must

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Ibid., 55.

*The "official world" (*Official World*) designates an organised sociosystemic form that has spread over the span of five hundred years—what used to be called the Age of Discovery, the age of globalisation, and the bourgeoisie—an age that approaches the realisation of the term in the era of social systems and their human technologies, or art with human beings. The term "human technologies" was used for a time to describe technical human assemblages. The broader usage concerns practices and forms of life (one might think here of Wittgenstein's

language-games, or Foucault's games of discourse) that enter into what the American commentator Patricia Highsmith called "games for life". This art with human beings—these repetitive practices and technologies of the self, these informal games—defines the networks, schemata, and zones of practice in the official world: "games of form". See Mark Seltzer, *The Official World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

²¹ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *Dialogue of Systems in Contemporary Arab Critical Discourse: A Reading in Communication Systems* (PhD diss., University of Sétif 2, 2012–13), supervised by al-Tayyib Boudarbala, 27.

therefore adapt to practices and structures, that is, to situations and objective moments that organise this formation.

The revision of periodisation within the theory of the novel aspires to a considered reading of parts of the established canonical corpus. There can be no reading of Algerian narrative history unless the formative colonial experience is taken into account. Accordingly, the researcher Ben Toumi moved to another text that provoked the beginning as a scholarly periodising enigma: “By reading the novel *Ḥikāyat al-‘Ushshāqfi al-Ḥubbwa al-Ishtiyāq* by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, we find ourselves before two beginnings, an Arab and an Algerian one, written sixty-six years before MuḥammadḤusaynHaykal’s *Zaynab*, which we date as the beginning of the Arabic novel.”²² The tale is an act of rebellion against a given condition, one that requires a singular linguistic situation that will restore the unity of form. Colloquial language, a language that has prevailed over the conventions and laws of classical Arabic, is a language of defiance against the institution, which signifies settlement; within it resides one thing only: opacity and the capacity of the tongue within the rigid linguistic system.²³

Every form of practice, including the genre of literary criticism, contains and presupposes in advance a form of theory; even the most methodical kinds of literary or textual analyses carry a theoretical charge.²⁴ From this perspective, theory is regarded as a second-degree text, or a second writing, in Fredric

Jameson's sense, through a powerful language and a fundamental interpretative code, according to a rigorous strategy. Freud's reliance, in his psychological theory, on an allusion to a text concerning *the Golden Ass* is highly significant, for Milan Kundera's novel observed that the unconscious existed before Freud; this demonstrates forcefully how the novel delineated the boundaries of theory.

The symbolic event embedded in the great texts becomes the first text of the second writing (theory), or a secondary text; that is, what we call the world of theory is the inner content it holds within itself, to be subjected to the transformations of form (the text). This is what Ben Toumi indicated in the textuality of *Ḥikāyat al-‘Ushshāqfi al-Ḥubbwa al-Ishtiyāq* by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm: “A dreadful liquidation of dictatorship has taken place throughout this text, which is characterised by democracy; indeed, it is a manifesto not for peoples, but for ruling/political regimes in which the prince calls upon them to cast love into the street, and to speak from within the literary genres that the street fashions among its interlocutors ... Accordingly, the imposition of the king, in its cognitive form, is a display of official culture, which is no longer able to communicate with popular culture. The prince's recovery of the idiom of the present (the popular) on the ground, the recovery of all the humanistic values that transcendent, or rather residence within official culture in its various representatives, has lost, is the first sign that confirms this acquisition. The humanistic is the

²² al-Tayyib Ould al-‘Arousi, *A'lām min al-Adab al-Jazā'irī al-Ḥadīth* (Algiers: Dār al-Ḥikmalil-Nashr, 2009), 30.

²³ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 69.

²⁴ K. M. Newton, *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, trans. ‘Issa ‘Ali al-‘Akoub (Egypt: ‘Ayn lil-Dirāsātwa al-Buḥūth al-Insāniyyawa al-Ijtīmā’iyya, 1996), 273.

recovery of the heart, insofar as it has been forgotten in the official culture of sultanic.”²⁵

These foundational texts constitute generic texts, such that their textualities affect the propositions of being, existence, and identity within history. Epistemological historical writing is thus bound to moments of foundation that these textualities contain as foundational texts, through the construction of alternative knowledge to the paradigms of theory governing the scholarly, centralist vision: “At that point, we move from knowledge whose ideological backgrounds linked to the colonial movement we uncover, to knowledge that we want to be an answer to other, new questions posed by national researchers.”²⁶ For example, the critic Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, through these texts, lays the groundwork for the formation of a national culture through the overarching systems of national history.

Mahdi ‘Amil anchors the formation of the Arab bourgeoisie fundamentally in the context of a relationship of colonial dependency, which, as a result of colonial penetration into our social structures, explains “this class's objective, historical incapacity to accomplish the task of liberation.” For the material base from which it proceeds in its hostility to imperialism that is, the nature of the relations of production that render it a dominant class is itself the very material base for the existence and persistence of that dependency: between preserving this base as an essential condition for the renewal of this class’s dominant class existence, and abolishing it as an essential condition for liberation from

imperialism.”²⁷ Through this extended exposition, Mahdi ‘Amil elucidates the successive movement of history, which rests primarily on structural homology and, in doing so, appeals to the European model in analysing Arab historical contexts, criticising what he calls the successive framework that results from ruminating on the sequential relations between the earlier and the latter. Critique directed at the successive framework generated a new episteme, in which “capitalism becomes the horizon of the backwards reality produced by colonialism, and national capitalism often an invention becomes the heir of the feudal class that has passed away.”²⁸ This led him to seek the history behind successive formalist temporalities, that is, within the renewed colonial social structures.

Al-Yamin Ben Toumi’s conception of theorisation differs on account of the structural difference between the mode of production of Western and European theory of the novel and its Algerian counterpart. He seeks to deny that the Algerian novel was born of a dependent mode of production, given the evident divergence in the structure of social production. The critic therefore warns us, stating, “We must dismantle these colonial mines, undermine this wretched consciousness, and build a coalitional identity that stands upon the facts of history and refutes all the official colonial narratives that sought to segment the Algerian and to construct cultural biases within him, and thus to fragment

²⁵ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 71, 74.

²⁶ Waqīdī Muḥammad, *Kitābat al-Tārīkh al-Waṭanī* (Rabat: Dār al-Amān lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 1990), 67.

²⁷ Mahdi ‘Amil, *Theoretical Introductions to the Study of the Impact of Socialist Thought in the National Liberation Movement* (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1972), 303.

²⁸ Mahdi ‘Amil, *Fi Tamraḥul al-Tārīkh*, intro. In addition, commentary by Fayṣal Darraj, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013), 24.

geography. Hence, we have invoked the text *al-Taghrība al-Hilāliyya*.²⁹

He thus rejects recourse to an economic or political concept by introducing a class struggle from outside the social structure and the national reason, tracing the movement of time and theory in its succession across historical conditions that ultimately made it possible to follow this movement from structure to production (the decolonial production of the colonial movement within historical cultural reason). In doing so, he criticises any analysis external to the conceptual apparatus of this theoretical analysis, since this organisation cannot be understood except through an understanding of the literary system or structure within the context of society's systems of representation. This led the researcher Al-Yamin Ben Toumi to effect a rupture with colonial reality, stating, "We must dismantle these colonial mines, undermine this wretched consciousness, and build a coalitional identity that stands upon the facts of history and refutes all the official colonial narratives that sought to segment the Algerian and to construct cultural biases within him, and thus to fragment geography. Hence, we have invoked the text *al-Taghrība al-Hilāliyya*."³⁰

The broader functionalism of systems is tied to revealing the scheme of the interweaving functions of literature in bourgeois society within history, alongside the history of normative, or regulatory, aesthetic treatments of literature. "Marital alliances repair the gaps within the clan system," and the BanūHilāl migration, or the third cycle of this sīra, concerns the Hilālīs' deeds in the West, especially in North

Africa; this period is one of the most important in Islamic history.³¹

Al-Yamin Ben Toumi proceeded to examine the consonance between aspects of textual organisation and specific aspects of social organisation for national cultural reasons: "The Hilālī tendency is by no means Hegelian; it stamps out the entirety of Hegelian dialectic. It does not contain within it the master-slave binary; rather, it respects masters and appoints from among them and within them. Its law is founded on the sovereignty of custom, which is not disputed; it therefore overturns the entire colonial edifice. It removes of a drive to cultivate or rather, out of a drive to seek life after the drought that struck Najd, meaning that the Hilālī migration was not driven by control and domination, but by life."³²

These social organisations interpenetrate in a shared manner, and even though they are grounded in material forces, they were constituted within a semicultural organisation of national cultural reason, wherein decoloniality and the response to Roman culture took shape. "Hilālī existence did not devastate the human composition of the Amazigh as the Romans and the French did; rather, they forged bonds of affection with them through a system of marriage that established a movement of existence with *l'être-avec*. The superior race did not drive their settlement but rather the search for continuity and love and intermarriage, which contributed to consolidating relations of existence with *être-avec*. The latter is realised at the level of every text, which means that there is no place for those transcendences on which

²⁹ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 95.

³⁰ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, 99.

³¹ Ibid., 101.

³² Ibid., 101.

imperial reason is founded, that is, no place for the logic of occupation on which all colonial reason is founded.”³³

The Golden Ass, *The Tale of Love and Longing*, and *al-Taghrība al-Hilāliyya* constitute the moment in which the literary form (to avoid all the pedagogical problematics of the question of type/novel) was raised to the level of theoretical consciousness, as a moment in which literature passes to the level of self-consciousness (as a postcolonial point of departure). In this way, these textualities liberate geography from colonialism and become intertwined with the systems of the overarching reason of national culture. The cultural intertexts embedded within these textualities encompassed the memory of the system/structure; they thus enabled narrative production through the political unconscious (Jameson) of the symbolic systems of these narratives.

Conclusion

Ben Toumi's attempts to periodise the Algerian novel were not merely an update of periodisation systems. Instead, through his works *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, *Towards a Third Theory*, and numerous articles and diverse studies, he sought to develop a theory of the Algerian novel. The theoretical problem arises from an attempt at critical theorisation on a geographical/cultural basis that depends upon updating the historical periodisation systems of the earliest texts by activating the movement of subsidiary systems towards a totalising vision that breaks with all previous atomising critical attempts to account for Algerian creative practice.

For Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, the novel takes shape as a cultural organisation: a dense system of consciousness of the world and an absorption of

figurative systems that are conscious of the movement of history and society. The productive practice of the art of the novel is a complex practice that emerges in the struggle of systems within narrative discourse; accordingly, procedural and critical practice has required that it be approached through a conscious movement, a doubled supervisory movement (the observer).

³³ Al-Yamin Ben Toumi, *The Arabic Novel and Cultural Segmentation: Towards a Grounded Bias for Framework Narratives in Algeria*, previously cited, 102.