

The ideology of writing in the Algerian novel: between history and imagination

-A Reading of Amin Zaoui's Novel *Al-Khullan*-

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Abstract:

This study seeks to uncover the underlying ideology in the narrative discourse that derives its storytelling material from history. We chose Amin Zaoui's novel *Al-Khullan* as a model; a novel in which the author himself stated in a press interview that it is a writing against official history. It rewrites the history of the Algerian Liberation Revolution, in which all Algerians participated regardless of their "beliefs, affiliations, and origins." It attempts, through narrative imagination, to write what official history remained silent about.

From this emerges the central problem of the research: how does narrative discourse reproduce a counter-history and articulate what was silenced? Out of this central problem branch subsidiary questions: What does "writing against official history" mean? To what extent can it escape the danger of ideology?

One of the most prominent findings reached is that there are many challenges in confronting writing against history without falling into the traps of ideology and the risks of turning narrative discourse itself into an ideologically charged discourse.

Keywords: *Al-Khullan*, Amin Zaoui, writing, counter-history, narrative imagination.

Le roman algérien et l'idéologie de l'écriture contre-historique - Une lecture du roman d'Amin Zaoui *Al-Khullan*-

Résumé :

Cette étude cherche à découvrir l'idéologie intégrée dans le discours narratif qui tire son matériel narratif de l'histoire. Nous avons choisi le roman d'Amin Zaoui *Al-Khullan* comme modèle. Ce roman, dont l'auteur a dit dans une interview à la presse, est un écrit contre l'histoire officielle. Il réécrit l'histoire de la révolution de libération algérienne, à laquelle tous les Algériens ont participé, quelles que soient leurs « croyances, affiliations et origines », et tente d'écrire ce que l'histoire officielle est restée silencieuse à travers l'imagination narrative. Sur cette base, le problème de recherche émerge : Comment le discours narratif reproduit-il une contre-histoire et l'énoncé non dit ? À partir de ce problème central, il y a des sous-questions : Qu'est-ce que « écrire contre l'histoire officielle » ? Dans quelle mesure peut-il échapper au danger de l'idéologie ?

L'une des conclusions les plus importantes qui y sont liées est qu'il existe de nombreux défis pour confronter l'écriture à l'histoire sans tomber dans le piège de l'idéologie et les dangers du discours narratif lui-même se transformant en discours idéologique.

Mots-clés : Al-Khullan, Amin Al-Zaoui, écriture, contre-histoire, imagination narrative

Introduction:

Amin Zaoui's *Al-Khullan* is a fabric woven from the intersection of narrative and history; a fabric that draws its threads/material from history yet diverges from it at the same time. This is the very nature of narrative imagination, which rises above historical documentation even as it relies on it. If history tells what was, literature tells what ought to be, following Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history:

The work of the poet is not to narrate what has happened but what may happen, what is possible according to probability or necessity (...). Hence poetry is more philosophical and of higher value than history, for poetry tends to express universals, while history expresses particulars. (Aristotle, 1993, p. 64)

Thus, literature is more perilous than history because it presents within its literary world a new image in which a universal truth is embodied. There is no doubt that "the value of the novel does not lie in the knowledge it may provide in this or that direction, but in the questions it raises." (Saleh, 2003, p. 305)

The existential wager of the novel—at least outwardly—is the establishment of a hybrid cultural identity that celebrates difference and lays the foundations for values of citizenship and secularism, values that can only stand by removing religion fanaticism from the public sphere so that peaceful coexistence among various groups, classes, cultures, and religions may be realized far from coercion. This cannot be achieved without emphasizing humanist and Enlightenment values and updating the French Revolution's slogan: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." (Tiyara, 1953, p. 9)

Accordingly, this study seeks to deconstruct the narrative imagination that draws its storytelling material from history and elevates it against official history within Amin Zaoui's *Al-Khullan*. The following problematic is posed: how does narrative discourse reproduce a counter-history and articulate what was silenced? From this central problematic arise subsidiary questions: What does "writing against official history" mean? To what extent can it escape the danger of ideology?

1 – Studying the Title: "Al-Khullan"

The title is a semiotic system with semantic and symbolic dimensions that tempt the researcher to trace its meaning and attempt to decode its symbols. The title is the first threshold the researcher can step on in order to interrogate and interpret it visually and linguistically, horizontally and vertically (Quttus, 2001, p. 33). In other words, the title is one of the most important textual thresholds that signal many significations and help the reader access the world of the text and its imaginative universe. It is a semantic condensation of the text's data. It may clarify the text further or obscure its meaning. In itself, the title carries secrets and symbols.

The title contains a single word, “Al-Khullan,” which denotes brotherhood, friendship, and strong bonds. *Lisan al-‘Arab* records: “Al-khill is affection and a friend,” and “al-khalil is the beloved in whose love there is no flaw (...) and it is said that friendship is called khulla because each fills the gap of the other in affection and in need.”(Manzur, n.d, p. 218) Thus, friendship is by excellence “the field of intersubjectivity.”(Benabdelali, 1999, p. 75)

Syntactically, it is a nominal sentence with the predicate omitted, leaving the entire novel as a predicate of “Al-Khullan.” This word, laden with ethical and moral value, is depicted in the narrative as friendship affirmed in the time of occupation and dismantled after it, in the face of the religiosity of Afoulai/Apuleius, Augustine’s friend. These are the two main characters in the novel’s world: a friendship gradually undone across historical events stretching from the Algerian Liberation Revolution to the Black Decade. It begins with the Muslim Apuleius’s refusal to rebury the remains of the Jew Levy al-Naqawa Zimmerman in the martyrs’ cemetery, and ends with the Muslim Apuleius slaughtering the Christian Augustine on the grounds that a Christian should not exist in the land of Islam. This illustrates the horror of betraying friendship, when a friend betrays his companion to satisfy his ideology and belief—confirmed by the author’s words in the prologue, printed on a white page: “A human does not feel betrayal unless he has been a sincere lover.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 6) Both Levy and Augustine were lovers of Algeria, compassionate toward its people during and after occupation, and both died by “friendly fire.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 234)

Thus, the novel manifests as a literary struggle for a homeland that embraces all, and as an ardent desire for human values— “liberty, equality, fraternity.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 234) This is confirmed by the second threshold following the title: a dedication to freedom fighters of different faiths who struggled for the homeland in defense of human values:

To the Khullan:

Ahmed Zabana, Fernand Iveton, Maurice Audin...

You differed in religion but united in the homeland.(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 5)

From the text’s thresholds, two dominant significations emerge: the possibility of establishing friendship and brotherhood beyond religious difference, and the precedence of belonging to the homeland over belonging to religion. This suggests a cultural identity in contrast to a religious identity, aiming to establish a society of coexistence instead of conflict, strife, and murder in the name of religion. What unites people is the homeland, not religion. Hence, “Al-Khullan” holds ethical, political, and cultural significance.

“Fraternity” is one of the slogans of the French Revolution, which stressed “religious freedom for all, respect for each individual’s beliefs, and rejection of religious exclusion.”(Tiyara, 1953, p. 9) It is as though the text revolves around reviving this ethical and human value and erasing all religious conflict in the name of liberation, while pointing to its national dimensions politically, culturally, and historically.

Accordingly, the thresholds reveal a secular ideological stance opposing the presence of religion and religiosity in the public sphere. If the history of the revolution united people regardless of religion in defense of higher human values, foremost among them fraternity, then today we must struggle for our homelands and forget our ethnic, religious, and political differences. The shared national concern and allegiance to higher human values were the

driving forces of the Liberation Revolution, which stands as one of the sacred memories of the Algerian people and the world. And if the Other upheld higher human values and stood with justice against his own homeland, then it is even more necessary for the self to liberating itself from the illusion of closed identity and the illusion of denying the other's difference.

2 – Writing Against Official History and Its Techniques:

In a press interview (Al-Jahiziyya, 2019)—which serves as a paratext to our text of study—Zaoui described his novel as a narrative against official history, which he considered “the most dominant form of history, precisely because it focused on individuals as great men and victors, serving as their voice in the service of their interests, while disregarding the documentation of the toiling masses and paying no attention to recording their sacrifices and pains.”(Hennawi, 2020)

From his statement “a novel against official history,” we understand that narrative is directed toward opposing history and its sanctities, uncovering what was silenced historically and politically, what was forgotten culturally, and what was excluded socially—whether out of denial, belittlement, or fear. It seeks to explore the ruptures and vertical fractures within the horizontal course of official history upheld by authority and considered among the nation's sacred collective memory, with its legendary heroes. This necessarily results in reversing the positions of the marginal and the central. For “the tools of counter-history are structural opposition, multiplicity, and perspectivism. It is a history that tracks the points that explode the system and the margins that scandalously violate its rules. This history hunts the ‘trivial’ points that are distant from the center to reveal them as centers themselves, as points where centrality falters.”(Benabdelali, 1999, pp. 68–69)

A reader of the novel discovers many mechanisms and tools used in this writing against history, through which it attempts to say what official history did not. We will examine some of these tools and techniques as they appear in *Al-Khullan*:

1-2 The Ethnic Self and The Historical Self

Writing against official history appears through returning to local national history, drawing from it the names of characters. The narrative emphasizes the national dimension over Arab and Islamic nationalism, in a way that allows the construction of a cultural—not religious—identity, by recovering the Amazigh past of the Algerian people. For example, the Christian Augustine is named after Saint Augustine, the Amazigh bishop, native of Madauros (present-day Souk Ahras), born to a French mother and a North African tinsmith father. Levy al-Naqawa Zimmerman, a Jewish Algerian, traces his origins to his grandfather Abraham al-Naqawa, buried in the Jewish cemetery of Tlemcen. The third character is the Muslim Apuleius, named after Lucius Apuleius, author of *The Golden Ass*, a name given to him by the Portuguese Mr. Gomez's wife.

2-2 Inclusion of the Different Other in the Making of the Historical Event / The Algerian Revolution

The novel's characters who drive the events come from various Algerians and lovers of Algeria, belonging to different religions, cultures, and origins, all of whom participated in the historical event of the “revolution.” Yet these heroes' stories were never told. This produces an important meaning: this history was not made by Muslims alone. This also explains why

the narrative shows little interest in a significant character like Houari Souih, the revolutionary fighter resembling many heroes of official history, who appears marginalized and occupies only a few pages compared to the narrative dominance of other characters marginalized by official history.

In a novel against history or against forgetting, Christian and Jewish forces, traitors from the locals, and prostitutes constitute the heroes of this fictional world as part of the revolution, for they loved Algeria and defended its cause.

A- The Participation of Christians

The text brings forward a group of characters onto the stage of the revolution from among the Christians, from the highest to the lowest in social, political, and cultural rank, with the aim of magnifying their role in the events of the revolution and their defense of its cause before the world. Some of them are fictional, while others are inspired by history, among them: Nicole, the goddess of the sun, wife of the Jewish military leader Levy al-Naqawa, a social and political activist who works with the Red Cross to vaccinate the children of the locals in schools, collect money for them to equip schools, feed them, and house them. She shares in the locals' religious festivals (Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 146, 152). Also, the communist film director Pierre Lalos, who films the conditions of the local workers in the settlers' colonies (Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 128). And Father Léon Étienne Duval: Archbishop of Algiers, the human treasure, this father who defended Algeria's cause internationally, who stood for Muslims even though they differed from him in religion. The French press branded him a terrorist, and his name became Mohammed Ben Duval because he condemned injustice, becoming more Muslim than Muslims (Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 142–145).

Perhaps the most prominent Christian character the novel highlights is Augustine Ben Kiran, son of the African tinsmith, from a French mother and an African father (who fled before his birth), a doctor and an artist, sent to Algeria in the framework of military service, a reflective, dreamy, leftist, romantic man. This man fell in love with Oran, but paradoxically, in his bag this Frenchman who came for military service carried papers, colors, pictures, and song tapes (Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 76–78), as if the man had not come in a time of brutal colonialism and for military service, but on a journey to discover the East.

His grandfather was a communist senator, an educated unionist, sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and African liberation movements, opposed to colonialist thought (Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 80). This grandfather continued to echo inside Augustine against colonialism, rejection of this conscription, and the necessity of standing on the side of truth against injustice and oppression.

The omniscient narrator dominating the narrative broadcasts to the reader an alternative image of humanitarian Christians who rose against colonialism and took a courageous stand on the Algerian revolution. The narrative reimagines Christian forces as historically active, kind people with the locals, kind to animals, for “love and tolerance are from the commandments of Christ.” (Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 226) When the local Muslim Apuleius told his commander's Jewish wife Nicole, while they were at a table drinking coffee, the reason for his naming as Apuleius, he mentioned to her the name of Saint Augustine, the Berber father. This name attracted her: “When she heard the name of Saint Augustine, she paid more attention to my

speech and examined the features of my face deeply, which opened her appetite to talk about the harassment faced by Monseigneur Mohammed Ben Duval, Archbishop of Algiers, by the military authorities and extremist media accusing him of terrorism, only because he stood on the side of the weak and oppressed.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 225) Out of the craftiness of the narrative comes reference to another event with another Christian so as not to appear in the position of generalization, mentioning the deceit of clergyman Gabriel Lampierre who deluded the people of Oran that he would bring them fresh water at a time when he was seeking his own interest, like the lie of enlightenment that accompanied the French occupation of Algeria.

b- The Participation of Jews

The Jew retains in the collective memory of the Arab nation in general and Algerians in particular a “detestable” image, resulting primarily from their occupation of Palestine, added to that is what is mentioned in the Qur’an about their killing of prophets, betrayal of covenants and treaties, and deceit (even with God), not to mention what has been entrenched in world literature of degrading images of the Jew. The dark, “detestable” image of the Jew was confirmed after the catastrophe of Palestine, portraying the Jew as a murderer and criminal(Saleh, 2003, pp. 197-198), while he played the role of the victim after the Auschwitz Holocaust where Western colonial powers were most hostile to Jews and decided to burn and eliminate them.

The Arab novel witnessed a major shift in integrating the Jewish character into the narrative, The presence of the Jewish character in Arabic literature appeared different from what was common and stereotypical in Arab and Western historical and literary narratives. the emphasis began on the necessity of distinguishing between the Zionist and the Jew, stressing a fundamental issue: Jews form part of the social structure of Arab states, and any attempt to exclude them is a “savage and barbaric” attempt that has nothing to do with human values and falls under what is called “anti-Semitism.”

What concerns our research is the engagement with the novel *Al-Khullan* as a novel against history that revives the Jewish component considered part of the Algerian social structure, the Jew as “son of the country,”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 137) who participated in its revolution.

The narrator recounts a forgotten part of the history of Jews in Algeria starting from a historical incident: the descent of the Al-Naqawa family into Tlemcen and their settlement there, fleeing from the Catholic Inquisition in Andalusia. The sultan allowed them to build houses of worship in a special neighborhood for them called “Jewish Alley,”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 137) because the rabbi and physician Abraham al-Naqawa, the grandfather of Levy, treated the sultan’s daughter from an illness the doctors of Tlemcen failed to cure. So the sultan honored him with residence in Tlemcen according to his wish. The narrator affirms that Levy al-Naqawa, the novel’s hero, is native to Tlemcen.(Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 124, 133)

However, while elevating their status and mythologizing the grandfather Abraham al-Naqawa, the narrative is silent about an issue we see as fundamental, undermining the text from within: why did they establish a separate neighborhood for themselves, especially since the narrator defends them as part of the social structure and sons of the country? The establishment of a special neighborhood yields the meaning of refusal to integrate with

Algerians, which means their religious and historical isolation that contradicts the narrative of their being members of the social body and one of its most important components. And without daring to delve into the private life of Jews in their closed quarter.

The narrative went further, portraying the main character, Commander “Levy al-Naqawa Zimmerman,” in a noble and virtuous image that makes this Jew into a legendary hero standing against everything inherited in the collective consciousness about Jews. He is the noble commander, the strict, alert, disciplined military man, few words, Marxist, respectful of socialism, protective of poor farmers and peasants, humane, compassionate toward animals (his noble relationship with his horse, Fliche). He was sensitive and transparent, an honest and just officer, not discriminating between soldiers based on belief or geography; all were equal before him in reward and punishment.(Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 120, 121, 233)

We may ask about the secret of mythologization behind the representational structure of these characters and the insistence on making them socialist, anti-imperialist figures. No doubt the goal is to convince the reader and change his convictions. Khairy al-Dhahabi says: “Their captivating presence with that attractive power of persuasion succeeds in drawing us to accept them and attempt coexistence with them as part of our current consciousness in our present time, and perhaps this very issue is the essence of the idea of returning to history to write a novel.”(Khairy Al-Dhahabi, 2020)

Attempting to convince the reader of the nobility of a character and its anti-imperialist ideology contradicts the fact that the very character is part of the colonial military machine exterminating Algerians. How then does the novel portray his kindness and mercy toward animals while it remains silent about his extermination of Algerians and his reactions to their slaughter by the colonial machine? The narrative—against history—remained silent about recounting France’s barbaric acts against Algerians, where the events of May 1945 are presented only superficially, while narrating instead their romantic adventures in brothels or their sympathy with the locals. Thus: can we speak of “humanity” while we kill, or is it, as Fanon said: “Gratitude, honesty, and honor under colonial rule are nothing but hollow words”(Fanon, 2015, p. 237) The answer to our question is found in this novel where we find many blind spots that cause the text to disintegrate on its own, as the text writes something then elsewhere erases it. Apuleius says: “These soldiers do not smile, especially not in the face of those of lower rank, in the face of those who grow tails like monkeys, except out of contempt.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 67)

In the chapter of *The Statement and Clarification*, it rewrites some passages from the statement of the Liberation Front addressed to the Chief Rabbi of Jews in Algeria, affirming that they are Algerians with full rights and thus have the duty to defend Algeria. This was the statement that turned Levy al-Naqawa from the colonial camp to the camp of defending Algerians, a statement that was like a call from his grandfather Abraham al-Naqawa to participate in the revolution, condemn colonialism, and choose Algerian nationality(Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 227–228).

We notice here a common denominator in the transformation of the two central fictional characters, Augustine the Christian and Levy the Jew, namely that the call of the grandfathers was what pushed the grandsons, Levy and Augustine, to struggle on the side of the Algerians

and avenge the honor of humanity. In contrast, Apuleius the local Muslim was pushed by his father toward betrayal, entering the French barracks, and avenging the honor of his mother. Where are the ancestors of the local Muslim (at least Emir Abdelkader, who was the first to fight against the French occupation of Algeria in western Algeria, the very place where the novel takes place)? On the contrary, we find that the one who brought him back to the side of the oppressed was the Jew “Levy,” whom he owed for leading him to the mountain, awakening in him the flame of consciousness, and rescuing him from the hell of hesitation.(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 234)

On the other hand, the narrator shows us the racist treatment by Muslims in the Liberation Front toward him. The commander of the Liberation Front showed some resentment toward Levy’s words about that statement(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 231), and Levy felt marginalized and feared just because he was a Jew and not of their religion(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 229). He insisted to them that Jews included traitors and also militants like Fernand Iveton, who proved to Algerians that he was Algerian, believed in the cause of Algeria’s independence, and fell victim to this belief by the colonizer’s guillotine.(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 230) The narrative went on to heroically elevate Levy al-Naqawa, who was martyred for Algeria.

C- The Participation of the marginalized

Within the novel we discover a narration of the history of betrayal, heroes who betrayed their homeland and threw themselves into the embrace of the colonizer’s camp, but then came back to their senses, returned to the side of the oppressed, and championed the revolution.They are even justified as “victims of violence and distortion.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 206) in the narrative On the other hand, the narrator integrates prostitutes into the making of the revolutionary event: “Three female inmates—two Muslims and one Jewish—were detained, and in their rooms were found weapons, ammunition, and pamphlets inciting revolution and civil disobedience.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 198)

The text works on replacing the positions of the historical agent between the center and the margin in igniting the historical event of the revolution, to establish diversity within the comprehensive holistic vision of the event of the revolution that was carried out by Muslim heroes, who were not alone, but alongside them stood the Christian, the Jew, the traitor, and the prostitute in a moment of awareness of the necessity of championing the Algerian cause and making the history of the revolution.

We also find marginalization of the character Houari Souih, that patriotic militant both on the ground and in intelligence work, within the popular neighborhoods embodying the concept of the organic intellectual, a silent, calm journalist, politically cultured and knowledgeable of history, haunted by politics, saturated with his debates with nationalist ideas close to the left. (Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 101, 102, 236, 237.)Houari is the one who exposed the deception of Father Gabriel Lambert, and he is the one who undermines the claims of fraternity between colonizer and colonized:

It is never possible to put trust in a system whose battles we once shared in order to liberate Paris and all of Europe from the grip of Nazism and Fascism, which spread like a plague over the world, crushing every breath of individual, collective, political, social, and intellectual freedom, and then in the end, after the

ghost of Fascism waned, it takes its place and plays a role similar to it.(Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 102-103)

The return against history in order to draw inspiration from the issue of the marginalized's participation in the making of the revolutionary event makes us question the absence of the cultural resistance of the Association of Muslim Scholars. Why was the Islamic political and social reference absent from the event of making the revolution? Is it a process of stripping the Algerian being of its historical dimension? Especially since some historians say:

How can the Algerian self-cling to something while it is structurally fragmented, its personality dismantled? Where were the ruling classes burdened with the traditions of life and history? Where was the language of culture? Where were the lines of social and cultural power that cross the self and strengthen it? Islam alone stood alive in the heart of the people, as a feeling more than a religious practice. It is a vague force inherited from the ancestors and binding.(Djaït, 2008, p. 24)

Thus, the Arab-Islamic belonging of the Algerian people is not a stage of history to be folded and forgotten, but rather it is the spirit of the national identity.

3- The Case of Civilization and Integration Between the Natives and the Colonizers Under Colonial Rule

The novel portrays a state of integration and harmony between the colony of Oran and Tlemcen—the narrative space—and France, until Oran became no different from one of the metropole's cities. It painted for us “a civilized face” that accompanied the French colonization of Algeria: the children of the natives studied shoulder to shoulder with the children of France's generals, and they moved from village to village for study, with dropping out being an individual, not political, choice. There were buses for transport and cinemas that natives were not prohibited from attending, but rather invited to, even if the hierarchical order in seating after the generals and officials of the colonial administration was maintained(Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 42–46). Were it not for the news of the revolution heralding an earthquake that disturbed the people and the French army(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 191).

Yet, the text sometimes speaks against itself and says what it does not mean. Here is Apuleius seeing the impossibility of integration between the Muslim natives and the Europeans even when they were in the same trench: “I, who found myself crammed among youths of European origins, many of whom were raised on a culture of racism and exclusion. Every time I felt humiliation and marginalization, I thought of leaving the barracks.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 75)

The narrator makes the revolution the event that will turn the image of Oran upside down. Augustine says:

The image of Oran, which had seemed balanced, calm, and tolerant, disappeared, replaced by a city of grudges, contradictions, and violence. I looked at the statue of Lady Santa Cruz; I did not find it in its place. It had vanished in a thick cloud. The guardian of the city, Santa Cruz, was gone, as if God no longer heard her prayers.(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 203)

The revolution would disturb the state of integration and the politics of resemblance between France and Algeria.

Sandrine's father moved to the western region to confront "a movement being prepared by some peasants, workers, unemployed, and some politicians and unionists, which was manifested in the nationalist speeches hostile to France. And it had become, as they say and promote, a threat to the social fabric, stirring confusion and disturbing social peace"(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 43). It was as if the revolution arose only for social issues, and not for the cause of human destiny and dignity.

Madame Gomez said that what disgraced the colonization of Algeria was its unjust policies and social injustice against the crushed popular classes, without saying that colonization was a military barbarity that exterminated, killed, and displaced people. "France will lose this country, for the opponents of its unjust policies multiply day by day—Muslims, Jews, and Christians—and it will find itself one day not far off in a savage war that will inevitably end with the separation of this province from the metropole."(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 29)

Colonization had turned Oran into a great brothel under the application of the policy of resemblance with European cities. But on the eve of the revolution, Oran transformed from an open place into a network of barricades: "Oran, which was the first European city in Algeria, appeared as a big, big lie, an illusion."(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 188)

Within this counter-history narrative, even places did not escape the reversal. If the revolution historically began from Quranic schools, mosques, villages, hamlets, and farmers' homes, the narrator focuses on other marginal places, making them central in his narrative. Thus, the brothel/House of Tolerance (*la maison de tolérance*) (Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 98) on Rue Lac Duc occupied a share of this counter-history narrative, where the Christian arriving from France discovered in this brothel the magical world of brothels.(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 164)

Rue Lac Duc in the new city was a complete brothel: the House of Tolerance was a chain of Andalusian and Turkish houses and buildings dating back to the Spanish era of the city's history. This was the lively part of the district, and people reconciled among themselves within this brothel(Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 165-166), which brought together the religiously and ethnically different, the various races, in a horizon of tolerance. And surely the word *tolerance* is not innocent at all, carrying religious and political connotations, going back to Christian heritage, with tolerance being one of the slogans of the French Revolution. This house achieved coexistence in the fullest sense.

Yet the narrator, instead of questioning the heinous crime of women trading their bodies under colonial rule—since this would necessarily accuse the colonial system itself as responsible for the social, political, and cultural conditions that drove women to sell their bodies—describes them admiringly. This is the new city that stands against the "City of God"—as Augustine, the Amazigh priest(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 175), called it. But in this counter-narrative, (Al Zaoui, 2019, pp. 170-173)the brothel became a symbol of the coexistence of companions of different religions. The House of Tolerance was a space of joy, release, and dance, where harmony occurred only in the brothel.

Indeed, Augustine's Muslim mistress, Douja, brought the sacred teachings of Islam down into the brothel, where she practiced Islamic rituals within it, in an act of desecration of all that is sacred: she fasted Ramadan by day and practiced prostitution by night; her client would perform ablution(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 174) if he came to her; and she would give alms with her

body to the clients. The novel delves into narrating prostitution in a manner that provokes disgust. Yet what is observed here is that the narrator remains silent about the rituals of the Jewish and Christian mistresses in their sexual relations. But when it comes to Islam and Muslims, he highlights it, exposing its backwardness, flaws, desecration, and degradation. By contrast, the non-Muslim is either shown superior or left unspoken if not serving the ideology of the implicit author.

Not far from the House of Tolerance, we find another space suitable for coexistence, tolerance, and reconciliation among people: the tavern/Bar of the Sardine and its wondrous world. When the mind is absent, transparent beings appear—no assaults, no shouting, no quarrels. “The world of this tavern is wondrous, no assaults, no shouting(...) Here religions, languages, ideologies, and political and ethnic affiliations vanish, and the human being emerges with his sublime values.”(Al Zaoui, 2019, p. 96)

And we now wonder: does this mean we must make the homeland a brothel or a tavern so that coexistence and tolerance may be achieved, and these human values emerge? Does religion necessarily conflict with these values and their realization in the public sphere? Was it not the revolution that created harmony and cohesion among the people?

4- Conclusion

The study concludes by saying: there are many risks in confronting the writing against history without falling into the traps of the very ideology the writer claims to combat—for then the narrative discourse itself turns into a mined ideological discourse. Talking about a cultural identity does not necessarily mean denying the historical dimension of the self; on the contrary, it is necessary to celebrate all the dimensions that constitute the self, and not the extreme ideological inversion of all that is rejected from the perspective of a certain ideology, fighting extremism with counter-extremism, if we truly seek to found a homeland that embraces everyone without exclusion.

The existential wager the novel runs toward is the establishment of a cultural identity that celebrates difference and lays the foundations for the values of citizenship and secularism, which can only endure by distancing religion from the public sphere so that peaceful coexistence may be realized away from fanaticism and coercion. But this was not possible within the novel without an insistence and fanaticism for Enlightenment human values, which made the novel move from religious fanaticism to secular fanaticism.

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