

Mimesis among expressional Algerian writers Quest for identity between unease and belonging: Study of *L'Opium et le bâton* (Mammeri, 1965)

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RÉSUMÉ. L'étude de la psyché et la reproduction des mœurs (*éthopée*) ont de tout temps inspiré les écrivains. Ainsi, la représentation littéraire (*mimesis*), basée sur la description de lieux ou de personnages, permet une meilleure compréhension de l'être humain et de son environnement. À travers l'analyse de contenu d'extraits du roman *L'opium et le bâton* de Mammeri (1965), l'étude vise la quête identitaire individuelle et groupale, la quête d'appartenance et de malaise conjugués dans les revendications du peuple algérien. Les résultats montrent que la *mimesis* est utilisée pour interroger l'identité et permet de mieux comprendre la cruauté que l'algérien vit. En conclusion, à cause de leur ambition, les Algériens subissent les brimades des colons : retrouvés dans l'absurde ; face à l'opium qui déraisonne et le bâton qui châtie la volonté. Or, quand le meneur s'engage dans l'engrenage de deux comportements aberrants : la perversité « raisonne » et rend l'identité illusoire.

Mots-clés : *appartenance, malaise, mimesis, quête identitaire, représentation, roman algérien.*

ABSTRACT. The study of the psyche and the reproduction of customs (*ethopoeia*) have always inspired writers. Thus, literary representation (*mimesis*), based on the description of places or characters, allows a better understanding of the human being and his environment. Through the content analysis of excerpts from Mammeri's novel *L'opium et le bâton* (1965), the study focuses on the quest for individual and group identity, the quest for belonging and the unease combined in the claims of the Algerian people. The findings show that *mimesis* is used to interrogate identity and allows for a better understanding of the cruelty that the Algerian experiences. In conclusion, because of their ambition, the Algerians suffer the bullying of the colonists: found in the absurd; faced with the opium that derails and the stick that punishes the will. But when the leader engages in the spiral of two aberrant behaviours: perversity 'reasons' and makes identity illusory.

Keywords: *Algerian novel, belonging, identity quest, mimesis, representation, unease.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since their creation, psychology and literature have wanted to be mirrors of the world, its habits and customs, its subjects and its characters. In other words, the study of the psyche and the reproduction of mores (ethopeia) (Carnevali, 2010) have always inspired researchers in terms of the quest for the self and the Other. Thus, literary representation (mimesis), based on the rigorous description of places or characters, helps to better understand the human being. In other words, the novelist uses the description to show his readers (Ricoeur, 1983). Here, the description not only lets readers know what the characters look like, what they do and where they live, but also what they think. For this, we see that it is essential that the description manages to represent a living image in the mind of the reader (hypotyposis), whether the latter is real or imaginary. The description makes it possible to know different elements concerning the characters: physical identity (surname, first name, gender, age, height, color of eyes, hair, etc.), cognitive identity (way of thinking, values), social identity (interaction, function, social representations), affective identity (susceptibility, introversion, extraversion); places (city, countryside, landscapes); or actions (travel, war, etc.).

Our article, from an international symposium that took place at the University of May 8th 1945, Guelma (Behtane, 2020), questions the presence of mimesis within French-language Algerian writings, because they seem to us very specific. Indeed, from their appearance, they were built around the writing of "self by self" to respond to the different writings of the colonists. Our objective is to understand how the author questions Algerian identity through description and to question the notion of identity and the quest for identity at the heart of Algerian novel production. Also, the author raises the question of an identity unease between feeling of abandonment and dehumanization. This feeling of unease (Cambridge, 2020) is based on a form of loss of sense of identity and group: colonization

marginalizes the individual and disorganizes society.

1.1. Representation

The representation of the word presentation, which means showing something, expressing a point of view or an opinion. It is also about spreading knowledge about something or someone. So representation is the act of re-presenting something or someone. It is to represent again. This term designates the fact of making an object or a concept perceptible by using images or signs. Essentially, we expose an idea that we have about the world and the way to communicate this idea. Representation designates that by which an object is present in the mind. On the psychosocial level, social representation refers to socially shared knowledge that participates in the development of a common reality. It is an observable datum that makes it possible to understand the interactions between the different groups. It is structured around more or less stable and negotiable organizing elements. In short, it is the subject's perception of the gaze of others on him. As a result, he remains an intra-psychosocial subject, hence the rise of representation remains almost intrapsychic. Regarding mimesis, it seems that it would image the psychic experience due to the entourage. (Cambridge, 2020)

1.2. Mimesis

Initially, mimesis mainly referred to dance, music and mime. Today, this term designates the relationship of art to reality. In fact, it is not really a question of imitating reality but rather of being inspired by it. Moreover, literature must contain aspects of reality (Barthes, 1968, 1975). Nowadays, mimesis is abandoned by writers who want to free themselves from the description of reality and rely instead on pure fiction.

The word mimesis is used in literature for the designation of reality by means of words. In this sense, Ricoeur (1984) proposes to replace the word by "fiction" and proposes three types of mimesis: lived time (prefiguration), narrative time (configuration) and post-narrative time (refiguration).

Mimesis is mainly based on description, that is to say the presentation of characters, places or events. Hypotyposis designates the description of a scene to which the author gives a pictorial representation. Ethopeia is a moral description of characters.. In summary, mimesis allows readers both to identify with the characters and to represent what they experience. For this, the authors use different processes, including description. Indeed, the latter allows readers to know who the characters are (identity), what they look like (physical description), what they think (psychic description), what they do, where they live, etc.

The mimetic is indispensable in a concern to "make it true" in order to show the world as it is, without embellishment. To do this, the author pays attention to detail in a desire for exhaustiveness: it is not only a question of relating reality but also of educating the reader. In order to be more truthful, the author conducts a real investigation. Everything is plausible and understandable: the characters, the actions, the places, the motivations, etc. At the same time, the birth of psychology and psychoanalysis fleshes out the novel: the author is interested in the description of different emotions (love, hate, revenge, sadness, etc.).

1.3. Identity quest

The quest for identity begins to define itself through the search for the self. It is about answering the questions: *Who am I? To which community and territory do I belong?* This questioning of the notion of belonging defines the feeling of being part of a group. This quest feeds the imagination of writers all over the world: whether it is theatre, poetry or the novel. Thus, all these authors illustrate protagonists evolving in a particular context.

1.4. Sense of belonging

The feeling of belonging defines the impression of being part of a group (social, territorial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, community, national). Thus, in order to be accepted, the individual will have to adapt to the group which becomes a model to follow.

This feeling is based on an affective investment which allows security and stability in a given space-time. It is because the individual feels linked to the group to which he belongs that he will be able to identify with it and make it his own. As things change, the individual will define himself in a particular way, and will feel that he belongs to a particular group or not.

As far as territory is concerned, belonging is often defined in relation to a space geographically delimited by borders and housing a nation and individuals. There are different types of territory: neighbourhoods, [cities], villages, towns, departments, regions, countries and continents. This geographical space becomes a place of symbolism and exchange between modes of being and ought to be.

The territory becomes a kind of crystallisation of representations and founding symbols, referring to the perpetuation of social links, culture and religion. At the same time, it can become a place of domination and power and occupation, as in Algeria, where the nature of 'citizen abnormality' is questioned.

1.5. Choice of writing

The choice of writing is different for each writer, some will do it to denounce, or to describe reality, others still to make apology. The literary character is a real or fictional individual whose story a writer tells. It is therefore a being who can relate to others, give his opinion, etc. As a result, books, despite their constraints, become the reproduction of the real world. In this sense, the characters have their own identity, they meet people, they cross countries, etc. They have a life like ours. Knowing that the vast majority of characters in French-language Algerian literature are people from the people who must fight for their survival and who often fight against the colonizer (Dib, 1960; Feraoun, 1953; Yacine, 1956). Most of the time it is a question of describing the discomfort of men, as well as for women and children. Thus, French-speaking Algerian writers are a somewhat special case, because they want to convey a message to Algerian and French

readers: they praise the fight against colonialism by emphasizing the feeling of belonging. At the same time, they also want to send a message to French readers about what is really going on.

2. METHOD

Before starting our analysis of *L'Opium et le bâton* of Mammeriⁱ (1965), we want to point out that we are putting ourselves in the shoes of someone who has not seen the movie (Rachedi, 1971). The choice of this novel is not arbitrary, as it is known to the scientific and cultural class, and has become more and more known thanks to its translation into film (1971) among the general population. The reason why we like to know more details about the identity that was doubted to be motivated in the contemporary Algerian population after the release of the film. One wonders if the author's mimesis has touched this existing cultural background. Again, the author's mimesis is based on the French language to defend the existence of identity, and he even sees it as the best way to fight colonialism.

The title being an integral part of an author's work, it seemed essential to us to dwell on its study, because in our opinion, it was not given by chance. The title depicts the Algerian in a two-faceted constraint: either to submit to the opium that erases reason, or to endure the torment under the cane. It is thought that this conflictual situation generates an identity crisis, which can only be resolved by revolt, it seems to us.

Opium is a drug of psychotropic origin which produces euphoria, drowsiness, hypnotic state and hallucination to its consumer. It has long been the drug of certain artists. Here, this term is used to represent the illusion of normality, equality and integration. Moreover, from a psychopathological point of view, on the side of opium, the question of the people falling asleep is strongly present. Knowing that when we sleep, we are in another world, another reality. As a result, in order to be able to control the natives, they have to be put to sleep with false promisesⁱⁱ in order to then be able to erase their identityⁱⁱⁱ. The reason why

we think of the perverse problematic that seeks to erase the other.

The stick is a piece of wood used by pilgrims and walkers to support themselves. It is a symbol of strength, command, authority, law and defence. The stick can become a weapon in case of need. In Algeria, it became the symbol of torture, when the French occupier wanted to make someone confess to belonging to the *NLF*^{iv}. The stick is also useful for the fighters who have practically only this to defend themselves against an army that has many more means (rifles, tanks, combat planes, etc.).

With this title, the author wanted to show the ambivalence of France during the war of independence, on the one hand contributing to the illusion and on the other hand striking with more than just a stick.

We can see the explanation of this title by the voice of Bachir Lazrak:

Depuis trois ans, nous sommes recherchés, emprisonnés, battus, torturés, accommodés à toutes les sauces, tués de toutes les manières, pour que nous nous rendions... à la force ou à la raison. Séduire ou réduire, mystifier ou punir, depuis que le monde est monde, aucun pouvoir n'a jamais su sortir de la glu du dilemme ; tous n'ont jamais eu à choisir qu'entre ces deux pauvres termes : l'opium ou le bâton. (p.12)

The author depicts the cruelty of the colonizer and colors it with perversity of all kinds. The latter, on the social level is described as the emblem of the colonizer; *chosification* as E. Césaire (1955) calls it, and on the psychic level according to some research (Behtane, 2019) is the erasure and *inferiorization* of the other.

This novel is a skilful mix between apology for the struggle for freedom and criticism of a colonial system that persists in erasing Algerian identity. It shows how men with the same story can have completely different destinies, like Bachir and Bélaïd who will both follow two opposite paths: the first wants to join the Mujahideen, while the second is part of the *harkis*^v. At the same time, this novel shows the different attitudes of the French soldiers towards the combatants. For example, Lieutenant Delécluze is hostile while Captain Laforest is quite friendly. In

this novel, set in the midst of the war of liberation, we follow the fate of Bachir Lazrak, a doctor living in Algiers who follows the struggle for freedom from afar but who, in his heart of hearts, would like to take part in it. His older brother, Bélaïd joined the French army even if he knows some members of the NLF and sometimes helps them. His youngest brother, Ali, chose to join the NLA^{vi} Bachir will finally go to Thala, a Kabyle village nestled at the top of the Djurdjura mountain. In this village, he will discover life in the fields and the struggle to survive. Most residents are fighting in secret. The French soldiers, meanwhile, want to destroy this village as they have destroyed others. This novel has a real documentary purpose since it tells us about the daily life of the inhabitants of a mountain village. During this period, the characters show their true face between passivity, courage, fear, sense of duty, patriotism, cowardice or even heroism. Even if the author clearly shows us his camp, neither character seems fairer than the other. He tries to understand them, even those who have chosen France.

Based on the content analysis of excerpts from the novel, we study how the author uses mimesis to describe the daily life of the war of national liberation and questions the unease between the quest for identity and the questioning of belonging.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1. Setting up mimesis

Mammeri focuses on mimesis to tell the story of reality and to instruct the reader. To do this, he uses all the elements at his disposal for the sake of mimesis: he makes sure that everything he describes is as realistic as possible by focusing on emotions, actions, places and characters. To do this, he pays attention to details in an effort to be complete.

For example, although most of the main characters are fictional, this novel is anchored in a very present reality. Indeed, it describes real places: Algiers, Tala Ouzrou, Tiguemounine, Blida, Paris, Tours, Diên Biên Phu, and Hanoi. Certain facts recounted, in particular with the support of *L'Écho d'Alger* or radio are based on real facts.

Pour lutter plus efficacement contre les hors-la-loi, le général Massu a reçu les pleins pouvoirs sur tout le territoire du grand Alger (p. 11)

Quarante-sept hors-la-loi ont été mis hors de combat. On déplore un blessé léger parmi les forces de l'ordre (p. 22)

Some occupying characters like General Massu (p. 11), or Mujahideen like Colonel Amirouche (p. 37) or even the name of certain operations like the "opération jumelles" ^{vii} (p. 97) are also real. *Le Manuel d'action psychologique* (pp. 91-92) was published by the French army with a view to leading the counter-revolution and justifying certain military actions, in particular torture, with young conscripts.

3.2. Identity

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Depending on the point of view approached, the identity of the other is transcribed differently. The French present in Algeria are called "Europeans" (p. 27), "Christians" (p. 49), "Iroumiens" ^{ix} (p. 53) or even "pieds noirs" (p. 28). Algerians, for their part, are stigmatized, reduced to a religious or linguistic affiliation: "Muslims" (p. 23) "Arabs". The fighters are called: "fellaghas" / "Fel"^x / "fellouze" or "rebel". In the minds of the settlers, it appears that the two are linked: an Arab will necessarily be a fellagha. Bachir's reflection on the letter from Claude's aunt is also very edifying on the representation that some conveyed:

Il fallait réfléchir avant, ces unions avec des gens si différents de nous, ça ne donne jamais rien qui vaille (p. 20)

3.3. Palpable unease between identity quest and question on belonging

Unease, the opposite of well-being, refers to an indisposition, a discomfort, a

difficulty. We speak of unease when someone does not feel well. In Algeria, the unease is situated at different levels: individuals can no longer bear the misdeeds and outrageousness of the colonists (theft, raiding, denigration, etc.). Indeed, freedom is on a quest to establish justice.

Talking about identity (individual and societal) or citizenship presupposes the adherence of each individual to a shared consciousness. At the same time, several groups of individuals, each of which has its own identity, can inhabit the same territory without having the same relationships with it in terms of identity, nationality, appropriation or claims. Some have spoken of identity unease to describe the fact that some individuals do not want to identify with the model of society which finds it difficult to integrate individualities.

In Algeria, the construction of identity has been made at the cost of the exclusion of the other who will always be referred either to his race, his origin, his religion or his community for the benefit of his territory. This negation of the other was done in a desire for homogenization, that is to say a desire to eliminate differences. One of the main demands and reasons for the revolution was freedom, and the safeguarding of identity.

For Mammeri, the feeling of unease goes through the description of people's living conditions, in particular the main character Bachir who questions his Algerian identity and his belonging to a colonizing country that rejects him. So the heroes are often poor people struggling to make ends meet. On top of that, they have to deal with the sweeps, the denigration and the denial of the French settlers.

Comment veux-tu qu'on paye pour les autres ? Ce n'est pas juste.

Et eux ? Tu crois qu'il est juste qu'ils payent depuis cent trente ans des crimes qu'ils ignorent.

Oh ! Avec toi, on ne sait jamais. Tu es contre eux un jour passionnément et le lendemain avec eux avec frénésie (p.24)

Bachir feels more and more uncomfortable and asks himself various questions. Nevertheless, he sometimes manages to

forget his worries, especially when listening to music.

Il mit un Bartok^{xi} sur le tourne-disque [...] Morte la terre et morts ses soucis ! Où les hommes lançaient-ils des bombes et des balles ? Où mouraient-ils sous la torture et les coups ? Où leurs nuits étaient-elles hantées par la peur et leurs jours par le désespoir ? [...] Le temps ne coule pas, il n'y a plus de temps, ni un avant avec ses remords, ses souvenirs, ni un après avec l'Affre^{xii} des projets et des interrogations, un plan sans histoire, un présent sans fissure, oublieux du plus récent, du plus proche, une durée sans tranche et dont la plénitude ne souffre pas le morcellement. (p.26)

It is only a moment of release, as soon as the music is over, Bachir resumes his questions, he cannot think of anything other than this struggle.

Pour quatre-vingt-dix pour cent des pieds noirs qui sont pauvres [...] l'Algérien est une justification d'existence. Car de voir comme ils sont méprisés et vils, misérables et inexistants, d'éprouver comme eux peuvent les avilir et les mépriser, faire leur misère et leur inexistence, donner un sens à leur vie. [...] Un Arabe sur cent promeneurs au bois c'est le grain de sel, la manne céleste [...] Un arabe sur cent, ils le haïssent cordialement, jusqu'à la mort s'il le faut, mais comme c'est bon quand on n'a rien, d'avoir quelqu'un à haïr et à mépriser ! (p.28) Ces hommes qui courent se parquer d'eux-mêmes et prendre place dans le troupeau ! Ils ont une carte avec une couleur et un numéro, des cachets et des signatures, et des dates. Comme cela ils ne risquent pas de s'échapper, ils sont fichés, cartés, étiquetés, numérotés, parqués et encadrés. Ils n'ont pas à porter le poids d'une encombrante liberté. (pp. 29-30)

Bachir finds it increasingly difficult to pretend, he wants to fight but cannot really make a clear decision: he is in doubt and uncertainty. Even music (which he calls his "detox cures") can no longer really calm him down.

Bachir se disait que c'était la voix de la raison. Mais le filet en devenait plus ténu chaque jour. La simple lecture du journal chaque matin communiquait à son cœur des élans fous, éveillait en lui de vieux rêves qu'il croyait morts. Au point qu'il devait de plus en plus souvent faire ce qu'il appelait des cures de désintoxication. (p.33)

Bachir will finally make a decision or rather he is forced to flee following the visit of a rebel named Arezki.

[Bachir] était étonné que tout se fût si simplement passé. Il n'avait jamais cru qu'il pût si aisément quitter Claude, Ramdane, la baie d'Alger et par-dessus toutes les chaînes des petites habitudes quotidiennes, le confort lâche d'une vie facile. [...] au fond de lui-même il savait bien qu'un jour cela se terminerait ainsi. À bien y réfléchir, Bachir portait prête en lui cette solution depuis longtemps... depuis toujours. C'était la seule qui dénouât ses contradictions, accorât ses élans, réconciliât enfin sa vie avec son cœur. (p.47)

Mimesis is used by Mammeri to draw inspiration from reality (Barthes, 1968, 1975; Ricœur, 1983, 1984). For this, he uses description (Cambridge, 2020). Mammeri's aim is to allow readers to identify with the characters and to imagine what they experience. As a result, mimesis appears to be the ideal way of depicting a brutal reality.

The unease affects more specifically the character of Bachir who does not really manage to live in a normal way in the face of the events taking place. He is somewhat in the "as if"^{xiii} mode (Deutsch, 1942), i.e. he pretends to be someone else, he is in the representation, as if he were wearing a mask. It is as if he wants to escape from reality but cannot really do so because all the events remind him that he is not what he claims to be. At the same time, he no longer wants to pretend, he wants to show his true identity. For him, the gap between his true self and his false self^{xiv} (Winnicott, 1948) is too big, he has to do something if he doesn't want to fall into madness.

Bachir no longer knows who he is, or rather he does, but he doesn't want to admit it to himself. He would like to remain in denial, but his reference figure (represented by the character Ramdane) is there to remind him of reality. His attachment figure (Holmes, 1993) (represented by the character of Claude) is there to challenge him on his ambiguities.

After a while, the thread becomes more and more tenuous, Bachir feels that he cannot continue to remain in denial, he must do something: he must act. But he remains passive; it is only when he is forced to flee that he becomes active and takes part in events.

Indeed, it is only when the character of Arezki, who we learn is looking for a doctor for Wilaya III, is arrested after going to his house that Bachir must leave.

4. CONCLUSION

During the war, the Algerians had to suffer the bullying of the settlers: they found themselves without landmarks, without identity, isolated and almost without resources. Despite everything, they faced this dehumanization of the Other by fighting at the risk of their lives. Mammeri uses some aspects of reality to describe the life of Algerians during the war of liberation. For him, it is a question of accounting for the various difficulties encountered by the people, in particular with regard to illiteracy, the deprivation of food, seeing being robbed, and putting identity in crisis. For us, this work is between realism and naturalism since the author is as interested in the description of the facts as in the daily life of the Algerian people between misery, dehumanization and omnipresent war.

At the same time, it is part of the era of time because of its commitment to the national liberation struggle and its realistic description of the daily life of Algerians during the latter. Thus, descriptions are mostly used for places and events, practically nothing is known about the main character apart from his thoughts. One can wonder if this form of ethopeia is not a way for the author to ensure that everyone can identify with this character. Of course, Bachir Lazrak has an identity of his own, but he asks himself many questions about his choice of life: was he right to stay in Algiers instead of joining the maquis? This question torments him until he has to flee and has no choice but to join the NLA under the command of Amirouche. He represents the oppressed population. He feels cowardly for having chosen a rather idle and easy life. Even when he has to go to Morocco following an injury and he meets another woman, he does not hesitate for a second: he chooses to continue the fight.

The characters surrounding Bachir are struggling to make ends meet: rationing does not allow everyone to feed themselves. It is

sometimes necessary to insist with the colonists to have a little food. The only ones who have privileges are those who have chosen the "colonizer" (destructor), like Tayeb. The reader feels the unease and unease of the Algerian people represented in Bachir and the other characters. We can even come to understand the choice of the harki Tayeb who wants revenge for the humiliations he experienced when he was younger. This choice remains unique, and which in no way justifies the betrayal against the people, the nation and the identity of the Shuhadas (Martyrs).

We see that French-speaking Algerian writers have made it their mission to realistically describe the struggle for independence and the survival of individuals. Here, the French language is used as a weapon against the colonial regime. Mammeri falls into this category of authors, because he depicts well the daily life of families during the war and how the French manage to keep them under their control by using torture by deprivation alongside fear and terror. His novel is an opportunity to dwell on different characters whether they are part of the NLF, whether they have become harkis or even soldiers sent into the field and who are quickly disillusioned (example of Georges Chaudier known as "lynx eye who will desert). Even the harki Tayeb will feel remorse in the face of emptiness and nothingness, especially when the military will destroy everything. The quest for identity is found at the level of the character of Bachir who questions himself about his present as a city doctor: he feels cowardly in relation to those who suffer in silence. This novel is an opportunity for the author to reaffirm the desire for freedom and a desire to reclaim his history and his identity.

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ⁱ Algerian writer (1917- 1989), among his most famous works: *La Colline oubliée* [*The Forgotten Hill*] (1952); *Le Sommeil du juste* [*The just's Sleep*] (1955); *L'Opium et le bâton*[*the Opium and the Stick*] (1965); *La Traversée* [*The Crossing*] (1982).

ⁱⁱ Despite the promises, the rights of the Algerian population have been violated.

ⁱⁱⁱ Native Code, torture, imposition of the French language.

^{iv} National Liberation Front.

^v Algerians serving in the French army.

^{vi} National Liberation Army.

^{vii} The “opération jumelles”, carried out against wilaya III (Kabylia), deployed 60,000 men with the support of planes and helicopters. It was a question of eradicating the members of the national army from the interior by continuous fire.

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^{ix} Kabyle word that designated French soldiers.

^x There is a certain ambiguity between fellah (farmer) and fellag (exploding).

^{xi} (1881-1945) Austro-Hungarian composer and pianist. He notably composed many folk musics.

^{xii} Anguish, fear, torment which go with death throes.

^{xiii} The 'as if' refers to a way of behaving according to situations.

^{xiv} In psychology, the false-self designs a form of camouflage to meet social demands