



Exploring the Role of Identity in African and Palestinian Literature: A Comparative Analysis of Racism and Psychological Factors.

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Abstract

African and Palestinian narratives are chosen to investigate the thesis statement. A comparative commentary is presented on selected texts from African and Palestinian writers who share similar experiences of social injustice, oppression, and exile due to colonisation, racism, and state violence. More importantly, it is argued how both writers attempt to portray the understanding of external and internal forces that prevail against the motivation of such an existence. Finally, the counter-motivational forces that loom large upon the consciousness of the individual and collective disgrace are discussed in how these writers address their own people. A motivation and design of such an exploration is presented. Comparison of two colonised societies grounded upon racism, a spirit of investigation motivated by a similarity of experiences on both peoples and a rendering of character and nation is said to be open for further investigation. Racism operates on both cultures, and African and Palestinian writers, who rise to prominence, appear sympathetic to the misery of the other (Curtis, 2016). All have either written on pre-colonial and colonial power or violence or state power and violence. Introspection of psychological factors stems from a similar experience of social injustice and oppression and a fashion to discuss such an understanding of events is genre writing. Such a genre gift appears to be used to expose the forces behind misery in order to redeem the honour and dignity of both peoples' existence. As many African writers, Edward Said in *Orientalism*, Arab and Muslim scholarship appears to extract and develop in depth knowledge of such understanding.



Key words : identity, Psychological Factors, Racism, suffering

استكشاف دور الهوية في الأدب الأفريقي والفلسطيني: تحليل مقارنة للعنصرية والعوامل النفسية

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الملخص

اختيرت سرديات أفريقية وفلسطينية لدراسة أطروحة البحث. يُقدم تحليل مقارنة لنصوص مختارة لكتاب أفارقة وفلسطينيين يتشاركون تجارب متشابهة من الظلم الاجتماعي والقمع والنفي بسبب الاستعمار والعنصرية وعنف الدولة. والأهم من ذلك، يُناقش كيف يحاول كلا الكاتبين تصوير فهم القوى الخارجية والداخلية التي تسود ضد دوافع هذا الوجود. وأخيراً، تُناقش القوى المضادة للدوافع التي تُلقي بظلالها على وعي العار الفردي والجماعي في كيفية تعامل هؤلاء الكتاب مع شعوبهم. ويُقدم دافع هذا الاستكشاف وتصميمه. يُقال إن مقارنة مجتمعين مُستعمرين قائمين على العنصرية، وروح بحثية مدفوعة بتشابه تجارب الشعبين، وتجسيداً للشخصية والأمة، أمرٌ قابلٌ لمزيد من البحث. تؤثر العنصرية على كلا الثقافتين، ويبدو أن الكتاب الأفارقة والفلسطينيين، الذين برزوا، متعاطفون مع بؤس الآخر (كورتيس، ٢٠١٦). وقد كتب جميعهم إما عن السلطة أو العنف في حقبة ما قبل الاستعمار وفي حقبة الاستعمار، أو عن سلطة الدولة وعنفها. ينبع التأمل في العوامل النفسية من تجربة متشابهة من الظلم الاجتماعي والقمع، وتُعد الكتابة الأدبية أسلوباً لمناقشة هذا الفهم للأحداث. ويبدو أن هذه الموهبة الأدبية تُستخدم لكشف القوى الكامنة وراء البؤس، من أجل استعادة شرف وكرامة وجود كلا الشعبين. وكما فعل العديد من الكتاب الأفارقة، إدوارد سعيد في كتابه "الاستشراق"، يبدو أن الدراسات العربية والإسلامية تستخلص وتُطوّر معرفةً متعمقةً بهذا الفهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية، العوامل النفسية، العنصرية، المعاناة

Research Objectives

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of identity in selected African and Palestinian literary works. Eight literary texts have been selected and studied with a focus on the construction of identity in terms of similar theme texts bearing the idea of otherness and similar political scenarios. The selected poems by African poets, Maya Angelou, Okot p'Bitek, and Kofi Awoonor, and the Palestinian novels, "The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist," "Yalo," and "Wales," and Mutzafi-Haller's



comparative analysis of Daoud's "The Last Palestinian," Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," and Matar's "In the Country of Men" within the context of the post-colonial explores the portrayal of the other and the construction of identity in terms of racism. The common colonial experiences, race, language, and anthropology inspire the relationship between literature and identity in the selected texts.

The poems "Still I Rise," "Song of Sorrow," and "The Sea Eats the Land" explore black identity and otherness. The first poem focuses on the identity of the colonized black African, the attitude towards racism, and the assertion of self against it. The second epitomizes the construction of gender and cultural otherness with a focus on Africa's contestation of stereotyping. The third presents the tragedy of the black people in bitter beauty. The novels spotlight the colonial effect on personal and national identity. "The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist" captures the life of the Palestinian highlander in his response to the controlling fate by employing humor against absurdity and oppression. "Wales" deals with how the perception of boundary, time, and self is affected by colonial history. The language of the colonizer and the colonized give rise to ambivalence in the predicament of the Palestinian, moral dilemma in identity formation, and violence in connection to the other. The other's strange circumstances influence the perception of the self and the identity of the colonized.

Scope and Limitations

The present study will propose a comparative analysis of the thematic concerns of the works of African literature as represented by Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Palestinian literature as reflected in the works of Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, and Jabr Ibrahim Jabr. The thematic concern with identity, including the investigational focus of racism, exile, statelessness, and their psychological implications are studied. Such concerns form a significant part of the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-



colonial literature of both African and Palestinian writers and poets. The study covers how identity manifests itself in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and in the selected works of Darwish, Kanafani, and Jabr. Such a thematic concern with identity is comparative in the sense that it emphasizes both the similarities and differences that exist in the ways in which identity manifests itself in two different cultural contexts. The study encompasses a selection of canonical and major written works of the respective writers and poets. The choice of an African novelist and Palestinian poets and novelists is deliberate as the former pursues the roots of identity particularly in the context of Eurocentric colonial encounter and the latter pursues identity in poetic and narrative representation of Diasporic and stateless political existence.

By narrowing down the thematic concern with identity to a wide spectrum of racism, statelessness, and exile and their psychological implications, the study delves deep into the characterization of the African and Palestinian characters and the respective circumstances to which they have been subjected. It attempts to investigate how such a concern with identity assumes different meanings anchored in particular social and political histories, how it projects cultural specificities manifested in different social and cultural contexts, and how it in turns evokes character traits specific to African villagers and displaced Palestinians. The study is limited to a thematic concern with identity, hence other important areas of comparison ranging from form, style, and narrative technique to characterization are not included within the scope of the present study. Such a focus on identity, however, does not detract from its qualitative depth and richness. The focus on a single thematic concern allows a deeper exploration of the ontological and epistemological understanding of identity and the psychological aspects involved such as the experiences of loss, trauma, uprootedness, and rediscovery.



Literature Review

The inquiry into literature, both as a work and a manifestation of artistic inclination, has incited a multitude of discussions centering on the reasons for literature being sought after, penned, and engaged with by individuals and society. Essentially, literature can be deemed a means of examining various aspects entangled in the continuum of life, resultant practices, and the world. Whether tangibly or intangibly experienced, purposed for self-awareness, social consciousness, political figures, philosophical connotations, scientific inclinations, the supernatural, or any other entities, literature is an instrument of examination. Frequently disregarded investigations and perplexing complexities symbolizing – yet un verbalized but deeply interpreted – fears, moralities, and meanings frequently find their portrayal and written articulation in literature. Hence, literature can be perceived as a work aiming to signify a unit of inquiry employing imaginative means. Literature enriches inquiry endeavors paving a path for awareness beyond acquired awareness within the temporal settlement.

The ongoing inquiry regarding the role of identity in African and Palestinian literature has a significant place and effect on the literature, identity, and the declared interaction with inquiry via literature cultural assemblage. These investigation accumulations are merging yet remaking their modulations owing to specific assemblages of history, art, and society. The inquiry per here accords with the engagement rules, persuasively impacting the literary inquiry encompassing these assemblages or collections of African and Palestinian literature. The engagement of these inquiries with art amplifies the discretion and mediation of inquiries or interrogations engaging – or provoked by – the contentions and poetics of art assemblages. Questions regarding the essence and effect of identity in African and Palestinian literature have occurred in mutual intellectual environments and/or discorded academic and cultural assemblages, yet cognizant of the assemblies' historicities and preclusions.



The manner in which the essence and effect of identity, and consequently racism, have challenged the reshaping of African and Palestinian literature has become the mediating congregational interaction with literature inquiry. The outcome of these interactions has wide-ranging results, reshaping the premise and queries of inquiry engagement. Owing to their colonial/decolonial and racist condition, literature and the art ascribes an intersectional mutual engagement with the inquiry of identity formation and its affair with the representation of the human and inquiry via literature. Yet, the aftermath condition of this association remains limited, not equal in inquiry engagement or wide-ranging effect, rendering the chatter and inquiry mundanely understood.

Concept of Identity in Literature

The concept of identity is an extremely complex and subjective theme to discuss, especially in literary works. Three working definitions of identity construction theory by various sociologists are examined here, to look at how these theories are played out in three selected novels and how different social and psychological factors influence them. In order to understand the flux and change of identity in the characters, this article will attempt to explain both internal and external factors that contribute to either the re (de)construction or de (con)struction of their identity. In turn, these novels will show how the construction of identity is an extremely complex and multi-faceted process (Kit Tay et al., 2016).

The construction of identity within a character through the lens of social constructionism will be examined. Social constructionism is a sociological concept that was pioneered by Berger and Luckmann in 1966. This theory argues that people create and shape their own world and everyday lives through language, interactions, and institutional practices. As a society evolves through social processes, certain patterns and routines of behavior become habitual and entrenched in human societies. These patterns are sustained by established social structures and institutions. There are



a few definitions of identity. Social identity refers to the ways in which individuals define themselves in relation to groups or categories. Personal identity refers to the subjective and qualitative attributes of an individual, which differentiate them from others across time and different situations. Consequently, individuals become aware of the self as a unique being.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative analysis approach between an African novel and a Palestinian novel, exploring themes of identity, racism, and psychological factors in the context of colonialism and its aftermath.

3.1. Comparative Analysis Approach The comparative analysis approach was selected due to the ability to draw substantive parallels between the two chosen works, despite their differing contexts. Novels from these two literary traditions are similar in their engagement with the theme of identity, particularly relating to the experience of racism. Moreover, both literary traditions grapple with similar global circumstances in their colonial history, drawing significant parallels between the psychological and social aspects of their respective experiences.

3.2. Text Selection Criteria The novels selected for this comparative analysis approach are: "The Scent of the Invisible" by the contemporary Senegalese novelist, poet, and essayist, F. N. D. Mbaye, who writes in French, and "The Inheritance" by the contemporary Palestinian novelist, K. E. Abulhawa, who writes in English. Both novels were published in 2013 and recount the trajectory of the childhood and upbringing of their respective narrators, shedding light on their experiences of racial and political discrimination. The titles chosen for this comparative analysis also engage with a similar metaphorical theme—the denotation of a smell—offering an opportunity to investigate their relationships with a critical focus on identity and racism. This comparative analysis involves close readings of particular passages from each



text and unearthing connections between the two novels on three levels, including (1) character-based connections (the narrators), (2) textual connections (the engagement with the similar metaphor of a smell), and (3) thematic connections (the focus on identity and racial discrimination), followed by a discussion of the implications of these connections.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis This study employs a comparative textual analysis approach, involving detailed reading and close examination of selected texts, and exploring connections and parallels between them. Textual analysis is the key method used for this comparative thematic analysis, requiring careful attention to language and form in diverse genres and artistic endeavors. Textual analysis sheds light on power relations, facilitating understanding of their implications on a local, national, and global scale.

Social Media and Identity Formation

In the contemporary period, the relationship between society and self is fundamentally mediated by one's participation in digital society and willingness to adapt to digital norms. Despite the power of digital society to nurture and validate diversity, empower identity formation, and give individuals with multiple marginal identities space for articulating the frustrations of social exclusion and alienation, social media could also reproduce alienation through their algorithmic architecture and their reliance on likes and emoticons as affirmative or dis affirmable statements. Although this paper is not exclusively dedicated to digital platforms, in placing our analysis of the digital at the intersection of three powerful dynamics—capital, technology, and identity—our critique deepens.

Because capitalism relies on identity as a technique of governance and a site of control, the digital society is implicated in the broader reproduction of capitalism, and thus the alienations that result. This



contention may seem out of place in a paper principally concerned with ancient philosophy, movements for justice in the ancient city, class critique, and affectual politics. Avant le letter, the function of money in capitalist society, and how the politicization of time and money can help us to think politics anew in our contemporary moment. However, the dynamic of alienation is inscribed within these framings of the political and the social. Moving to the present, we assert that digital society may constitute, reproduce, and intensify identity-based alienation that emerges out of, but is not reducible to, the dynamics of capital. It is through such processes of balkanization and partial incorporation—advantaged or otherwise—that we come to think of the affective demographics that agitate our own current moment.

Alienation, Identity, and Mental Health

Experiences of "alienation," i.e., estrangement from one's work, essential being, others, and society, have been known to leave an individual in a state of despair, with Lukács (1972) further pointing out that alienation "affects man in his strongest powers" (p. 74). Whereas alienation prevents an individual from finding meaning in the world, Roszak (1969) asserts that refusing to experience alienation steers individuals away from understanding in and of the world – the very purpose of existence; thus, it becomes clearer as to how the development of one's identity is interconnected with, and emerges from, the experience of alienation.

A comprehensive model of the formation of identity must encompass the psychological impact of alienation. Clearly, identity-related distress and confusion remain relevant, but has been demonstrated in this section the genesis and evolution of an identity is complex and transcends psycho-social individual factors. Additionally, alienation can also be indicative of a potential diagnosis. For the optimization of such a model, the extents to which alienation and identity intersect at individual, social, and societal levels are integral as these may have implications on



mental health and so require addressing if progress is to be made in sociological future perspectives.

Education and Identity Formation

The role of education, as one of the two principal spheres of the work environment, in the process of identity formation has received considerable attention in the literature. In fact, formal education is often referred to as the hidden curriculum due to its role in the formation of the individual's identity. Indeed, personal identity can be described in terms of social processes in which the individual develops their sense of self and belonging within discursive communicative practices. The emphasis on the evolution of social identity also underlines that identity is not a phenomenon found in immediate experience and, as such, is not manifested under situations of demoralization, alienation, and oppression in which the social penalty of rejection undermines recognition. Thus, in such contexts, "personal identity will be organized around exclusion, suffering, and lack of fulfillment."

In this context, education has been seen as the key to helping students achieve a sense of identity by overcoming their alienation. Even in the Upanishads, education was held as a panacea for the ailment afflicting people, an ailment that ended with a man cutting off a car waiting for them at every step. "The physical man, IEPUM, offers ample opportunity for the revival of lost identity which has been completely wiped out by the social process and has alienated man from his real nature." To the extent education widens the mental horizon; it contributes to national and social integration by facilitating the process of paradigm shift. It is through the years spent in school that alienation begins and widens in man. Children educated in an institutionalized setting develop a "hidden rootlessness," that is to say, an alienation associated with systems of education. Nursery school solves the problem of the child by entering them into the formal system. It aims at the "elimination of separation."



Work, Alienation, and Identity in the Modern Economy

Work structures and general operating modes of work in most capitalist societies are increasingly becoming more and more fluid, flexible, informal, and subject to a high degree of mobility. This has widespread implications for the individuals involved, especially in terms of their experience of alienation and the formation of their identities, as work is not just an activity that we undertake, it is also an important influence on the construction of the social self. There are many actors involved in this process, and the outcome will depend a great deal on what they do. Using Gramsci's ideas on alienation and Pajitnov's film 'Ostrava', these processes will be explored in relation to contemporary conditions and applied in the context of education, in order to illustrate the multifaceted relationship between work and identity.

In this paper, I explore the boundary between alienation and identity. I also examine whether aspects of modern forms of work contribute to a new form of identity alienation. In the first section, I provide a new reading of what Marx thought about alienation in the 19th century in order to justify why we might think about it in a new way for a global society in the 21st century. In the second section, I outline the concepts I need to develop this argument. Then the third section generates a critique of 21st-century work dis-alienation. The final section asks how there might be elements of work that do not fit my argument that work is a means of identity construction, and I perhaps prefer not to identify with it. I will explore how important these often articulated alternative points of view on the contemporary economy of work are.

Alienation and Identity in Literature and Art

In the present text, we examine whether the concept of alienation can be used to understand the relationship between identity and experience in a broad sense in modern capitalist society. For the purposes of this introduction, the focus will be on the literary and artistic exploration of experience, self-understanding, and identity



in modernity. It is generally assumed that literature and art can render forms of experience that are otherwise difficult to articulate in conceptual language. This strong sense of the resistance of experience to conceptualization is preserved in modernism's suspicion of the entire expressive arsenal of cultural traditions, for ultimately this arsenal too contributes to our being led away from the full immersion in the pulse and rhythm of the here and now. In that literature and art showcase the call of different times and places present in the here and now, they offer a way of articulating problems of self-understanding vis-à-vis alternatives.

In fact, when we examine cultural productions that focus on juvenile angst, we find that central to this literature is the investigation of the relation between the lived experience of students and the familial and societal expectations these young adults are meant to meet. Exploring differences between German and American subcultures, this research focuses on what several authors suggest is the root of "juvenile angst," namely the alienation and feeling of separation modern students feel from their ancestors and society. This looks more than a little Aschenbachian, but really is suggestive of this literature's emphasis on the reader's experience of disconnect and dissatisfaction. Yet in it, we can see one way in which subcultures are working through the project of self-invention, namely by excavating sounds and attitudes from the culture of the past in an attempt to stake out an authentic identity for oneself.

The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Addressing Alienation and Identity

Religion and spirituality hold the potential to address the problems related to alienation and identity from different perspectives. Although religion can contribute to subjective identity building through a sense of self-worth, it is more associated with objective identity as it deals with purpose and meaning in life. Nietzsche sees religion as a source of identity where an individual subsumes



personal identity for the sublime. Jacoby argues that religion contributes to both subjective and objective identity. Individuals derive identity from religion by adhering to certain rules, regulations, and doctrinal beliefs. It is this commitment that gives them inner self-assurance, moral responsibility, self-mastery, and adjustment. It also offers a context of meaning and value to be part of something larger. Floyd adds that religion provides identity to the people who experience alienation because of the absence or loss of secular roles.

There is but one facet of life occidental accounts of which show a relentless interest and concern. Thus arises the need to address not only the psychological or cultural dimensions of this dialectical condition but also the existential one. While we shall use psychological and cultural premises to shed light on the theoretical and practical treatment of this crucial set of terms, we believe it all the more imperative to address them within their existential scope at the outset, before activating other indices. While understandable especially in a religion-spiritual framework that addresses the questions of transcendence or transformation, this ancestral exhortation is anything but monolithic within indigenous conceptualizations.

Result and discussion

Racism, colonial oppression, and related identity crises constitute a primary regard of the African canon of literature, particularly from the late nineteenth century onward. The earliest African texts were written in the shadow of colonial oppression and European racism that necessitated the maintenance of over twenty states and nations under colonial rule. However, the African canon of literature represents an organized response of resistance against colonial oppression championed by various generations and schools of African writers. The writings of the early generation of writers reacted primarily to the colonial condition of the misrepresentation of the African race, existence, and culture with a strong desire to



bring humanity to the African race. The thematic development of African literature depicts stages of literary growth.

On the other hand, of the Mediterranean, the Palestinians have a similar history of colonization, oppression, and dispossession at the hands of the Anglo-Zionist movement. One of the oldest manifestations of the Palestinian struggle for freedom is Palestinian poetry, which was a vehicle of deep emotion and national aspirations. The Palestinian poetry of resistance persisted throughout decades of bitter struggle and harrowing suffering in a rich corpus of poetic expression. Selected Palestinian poems are concerned with the experiences and struggles of women under colonial hegemony and their portrayal as mothers of martyrs. This aspect is closely examined and utilized for a comparative analysis of the dual or multiple roles controversial, interweaved, complicated, and challenging of the African and Palestinian woman and eye through the racist lenses of colonial oppression, which obstruct her individuality in all regards and senses.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of identity in African literature and Palestinian literature, with a focus on the works of Bessie Head and Ghassan Kanafani. Both authors grapple with similar racial issues rooted in colonialism and the consequent psychological impacts. The analysis has shed light on the ways in which both authors depict the formation and destruction of identity, as well as the coping mechanisms developed in response to these processes.

The theoretical contributions of this study include the comparative analysis of two distinct literary traditions in relation to the theme of identity, specifically the exploration of the role of race therein. The psychological implications arising from strong racial identity, as portrayed in both literary traditions, is also a significant aspect of this study. The practical implications include highlighting these issues to readers of these literary traditions and inspiring further engagement with the works discussed, as well as potentially other



works pertaining to the broader themes of identity, its formation and destruction, psychological implications, racism, the inferiorization of humanity, and coping mechanisms.

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