

## Folklore and Literary Motifs in Ben Hadouga's *Rih El Janoub* (The South Wind)

الفولكلور والموتيفات الأدبية في رواية «ريح الجنوب» لبن هدوقة

## Folklore et motifs littéraires dans *Rih El Janoub* de Ben Hadouga (Le Vent du Sud)

YOUSRA MAHI-SERIR

LLC LAB - UNIVERSITY ABOU BAKR BELKAID - TLEMCEM

### Introduction

It is clear that anyone who addresses the issue of discourse between classical and colloquial Arabic does so based on oral communicative justifications. A novelist may employ dialectal elements in their narrative or in the dialogue established between various characters. Consequently, the question that has been frequently raised is: Why does a writer, while composing in classical Arabic, resort to using popular dialectal structures? Is there something lacking in classical Arabic, or is it because the writer cannot fully control or restrain their narrators during the construction of the novel?

I believe that the use of these dialectal expressions by the novelist is sometimes driven by artistic techniques and, at other times, by the narrative's texture. This topic, as noted, is neither entirely new nor entirely old. It has been preceded by both theoretical and applied studies in folklore that have explored its aspects in detail. However, interest in new readings using this dialectical approach only emerged with the advent of modern linguistics, which led to the development of what later became known as dialectology at the end of the nineteenth century. This discipline quickly evolved and solidified its foundation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its novelty lies in the practical analysis of the Algerian novel, revealing various colloquial words and dialectal structures drawn from popular heritage, as well as their usage in narrative and dialogue sections. However, this is not the primary focus of my paper. Instead, I aim to examine the phenomenon of popularization within the standard novel, especially when folklore elements are integrated.

One of the reasons that prompted me to choose this topic is that I did not fully understand its essence or appreciate some of its intricacies until I concentrated my readings on popular culture in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, which I analyzed in my doctoral thesis. This exploration led me to delve deeper into the concepts of popular heritage and its interpretations

among both Arab and Western literary traditions. In this essay, I will identify and analyze the various popular elements found in Ben Hadouga's Rih El Janoub (The South Wind).

## **1. Folklore as a Reflection of Algerian Identity**

Folklore is a fundamental cornerstone for any successful and authentic Algerian novel. The novelist, naturally, remains in constant contact with various traditional images, preserving their simple, spontaneous language and expressions. Boudersa (2014) succinctly states that “the shift from oral performances and traditions to written texts was a result of the colonial discourse.” This is why Algerian writers find it essential to showcase typical dialectal and cultural forms to provide readers with an authentic depiction of society as it was experienced in real times. In this way, they aim to demonstrate that “national identity always involves narratives” (Edward, 2000). It is also evident that Algerian culture has been closely tied to patriotism and nationalism, given that “memory and its representations touch significantly upon questions of identity, nationalism, power, and authority” (Edward, 2000).

Croisy (2008) argues that the issue of identity and language in the context of Arabic literature reflects a fear of the traumatic repetition of the Western Oedipus Complex. This implies that the complexity of such a phenomenon is closely linked to an overemphasis on writing in Arabic as the sole means of embracing an authentic identity.

Since heritage is a record of past events that influence the present and shape the future, specialized historians are needed to document all historical, religious events, and the various transformations witnessed by societies. Thus, history plays a crucial role in assisting students of folklore in conducting scientific and accurate studies of heritage. It is impossible to ignore that the content and form of folklore reflect remnants of ancient cultures with their early social and economic structures. This idea is better illustrated by Mark Twain in *\*The Innocents Abroad\** (1869), where he notes, “Many a man has wished in his heart he could do without his guide, but, knowing he could not, has wished he could get some amusement out of him as a remuneration for the affliction of his society.” Here, popular culture is seen as a means of overcoming societal discomfort.

Popular culture echoes the past while simultaneously being the resounding voice of the present. To limit folklore to the past is a narrow-minded perspective. A nation cannot be detached from its past or its dreams

for the future; therefore, folklore loses its value unless its historical context, geographical origins, migrations, and the changes it has undergone over time and place are identified. Consequently, there is a close relationship between history and mythological as well as folkloric heritage. When heritage plays a positive role in identifying the cultural and historical essence of a nation, sociologists, particularly anthropologists, use it to trace the origins of the family and, by extension, the origins of entire peoples.

## **2. Ben Hadouga's *Rih El Janoub* (The South Wind) and Popular Culture**

The Algerian novel written in Arabic has achieved the status of a literary phenomenon, fulfilling the artistic ambitions of writers and captivating both critics and readers. Algerian literature boasts a wealth of novelists whose creativity and literary prowess have secured a significant place in the landscape of artistic expression in Algeria. From its early days, the Algerian novel has consistently aspired to align itself with both Arab and international literary traditions, developing as a unique narrative form marked by distinct aesthetics. This progression reflects the novel's potential and the skill of its authors in exploring various historical, social, and cultural contexts experienced by Algerians.

The events of *Rih El Janoub* ("The South Wind") unfold in a village near the Jarjara Mountains, shortly after the region has gained independence. Despite newfound freedom, the village grapples with the material and psychological scars left by colonial rule. As the novel states, "The armed revolution liberated us from colonialism, but it did not free us from illusions. Another revolution must be undertaken" (*Rih El Janoub*, p.178). The author chose the title *Rih El Janoub* or *Qibli*, as it is commonly referred to by the local inhabitants, due to the season in which the story is set — summer. The region experiences a strong, dry wind that exacerbates the aridity of the land, fills the air with dust, and evokes a sense of isolation, fear, and sorrow. "The southern wind, which they call *Qibli*, resembles a sound of anger, but it does not signify a revolution; rather, it brings about sadness, isolation, fear, and death" (*Rih El Janoub*, p.101). This wind, with its intense buzzing, covers the sky with dust, raises the temperature, damages crops, and instills anxiety in the villagers. "The southern wind is the cause of the village's destruction. What the villagers gathered from their harvest is now lost in valleys and ravines" (*Rih El Janoub*, p.192).

Ben Hadouga delves into several significant socio-economic projects initiated in post-independence Algeria, such as the "Land for Those Who Serve It" initiative, the "Socialist System," the "Afforestation Campaign" to counter the damage caused by the southern wind, and the "Agrarian Reform." He depicts Algerian society as largely rural, simple, naive, and predominantly illiterate. This context allows for the proliferation of charlatans and the spread of superstitious beliefs about medicine, science, and religion. The depicted society engages in traditional crafts like pottery, sheep herding, and agriculture, highlighting the daily lives of its people.

The central characters in the novel include Nafisa, an educated and elegant young woman who spends her summer vacation with her family before returning to Algiers at the beginning of the school year. Her father, Abed Ibn Al-Qadi, is a wealthy, influential figure driven by materialistic philosophies. His decisions, such as arranging his daughter's marriage to the mayor Malik to safeguard his lands from the new regime's reforms, are calculated and self-serving.

Malik, the mayor, provides insight into the major projects that shaped Algeria after independence. His friend Taher, a cultured yet financially struggling teacher, contrasts with Rabah, an illiterate villager who initially worked as a shepherd for Ibn al-Qadi and later became a woodcutter. Rabah represents the generation of young Algerians eager to migrate to France in search of better economic opportunities. Another notable character is Rahma, an elderly woman known for her pottery and basket-making skills, who repeatedly declares, "I and pottery forever" (*Rih El Janoub*, p.16). She symbolizes the resilience of rural Bedouin women who strive for a dignified life, embodying the rich oral traditions of Algerian culture through her proverbs, anecdotes, and storytelling.

The text of *Rih El Janoub* is interwoven with the ancestral wisdom of the Algerian people, featuring proverbs, folk songs, and colloquial poetry. It includes popular sayings familiar to Algerian society and reflects local beliefs about spirits and jinn, traditional healing practices, and village customs. Through this vivid portrayal of Algerian popular culture, the novel serves as a literary record of the socio-cultural dynamics of post-independence Algeria.

### **3. The Belief in Supernatural Creatures Like Jinn**

It is known that a jinn is a spirit believed to take control of a person, especially someone lacking in religious conviction, causing them to suffer a seizure. Abdel Hamid Ben Hadouga addressed the issue of epilepsy in his

novel, demonstrating a deep understanding of the condition's symptoms and its treatment among the popular classes, especially the Bedouins. Psychological conditions such as depression, frustration, sadness, or despair often give the impression that the afflicted person is possessed by a specific jinn, most commonly the Red Jinn. The most skilled "healer," usually a reader or memorizer of the Qur'an known as "the Talib," is summoned to treat the possessed individual. Sacrifices and feasts are organized, and specific spells are recited to expel the jinn from the person's soul. This belief remains widespread in Algerian rural areas, particularly in deserts, villages, and the countryside, where knowledge of psychological sciences is limited. In such places, people believe that jinn live among them, influencing their daily lives and that they can only be repelled through the recitation of verses and incantations. Jinn are thought to inhabit dirty places and swamps, attacking people at sunset or night, especially when they are bathing or step into mud. However, the belief in jinn's existence is matched by the confidence in the power of old magicians who have memorized the Qur'an (Rih El Janoub, p. 214).

1. Strong Belief in Fate: "Inevitability," "determinism," and "fatalism" are complex topics that continue to interest philosophers and religious scholars. However, among the general population, there is a strong reliance on fate, even in trivial matters. The novel *Southern Wind* exemplifies this through the character of Rahma, who, upon failing to light a fire, resigns herself by saying, "This is what God has decreed; I will not drink coffee" (Rih El Janoub, p. 139). The popular belief in predestination is vividly portrayed in the novel, where human destiny is seen as pre-written, beyond one's control, whether one is noble or lowly, free or bound, oppressor or oppressed. Nafisa's mother, a submissive rural woman, follows her husband's orders and suffers the dominance of the judge's son, who disregards her existence, leading to her daughter's lack of respect. In her despair, she often mutters, "My Lord has decreed this, then my misfortune" (Rih El Janoub, p. 205).
2. Folk Medicine: In several instances, the novel presents folk remedies for various ailments. A common belief in the region is that a sick person will only recover if they consume chicken broth. When Umm Nafisa suspects her daughter has epilepsy, she prepares chicken broth in addition to the recipe given by Sheikh Hamouda, believing it necessary for her daughter's recovery. In another scene, after Nafisa

is bitten by a venomous snake, Rabeh, a shepherd, uses traditional first aid by making a small incision at the bite site and sucking out the blood. He then applies a specific herb known for its healing properties (Rih El Janoub, p. 244). His mother later enhances the treatment by adding garlic (Rih El Janoub, p. 252). Traditional herbal treatments are also noted when the old woman Rahma treats herself with a poultice of baker's thorns (Rih El Janoub, p. 124).

3. Oral Popular Tales: Many tales appear in *Southern Wind*, some rooted in reality, like the story of Rahma's muteness or Zuleikha's martyrdom during the revolution. Other tales, blending illusion and reality, include the story of the pilgrim who sold his head for rain. Through this tale, the reader learns about local customs for invoking rain during droughts (Rih El Janoub, p. 130-131).
4. Popular Songs: The novel references folk songs, often reflecting the social views of the Bedouin community, where men dominate opinions and decision-making. One such song criticizes women's deceit, as highlighted in the popular poetry of Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Majdoub (Rih El Janoub, p. 203). Folk poetry is also mentioned at funerals, with verses expressing grief (Rih El Janoub, p. 164-175).

## Conclusions

When discussing folklore, several questions arise: What is local heritage? Is it oral or unwritten? Is it colloquial or non-eloquent? Why is it termed folklore, and does it have both positive and negative aspects? The topic's importance lies in illustrating the presence of popular heritage in literary works, providing cultural depth and context. However, despite the abundance of theoretical studies on Algerian novels, practical analyses highlighting folk elements are scarce. Many Algerian novels incorporate popular heritage, making the study of folklore and dialects easier in Arabic than in English. This limits the global reach of Algerian literature. Ben Hadouga's inclusion of folklore adds cultural depth to his novel, appealing to a global audience and aiding in the understanding of Algerian society and literature.

## Bibliography

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426085>

- Benhadouga, A. (1975). *Rih El Janoub* [Le Vent du Sud]. Algiers: Office des Publications Universitaires (OPU).
- Boudersa, H. (2014). The Algerian literature (elite novel/folk poetry) and the post-colonial discourse: Witnessing an intellectual liberation. *Arab World English Journal*, 5(2), 250-260.
- Croisy, S. (2008). Algerian history, Algerian literature, and critical theories: An interdisciplinary perspective on linguistic trauma and identity reformation in postcolonial Algeria. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 10(1), 84-106. <https://doi.org/10.5325/intelitestud.10.1.0084>
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology*. (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Harlow, B. (1987). *Resistance literature*. Methuen.
- Said, E. W. (2000). Invention, memory, and place. *Critical Inquiry*, 26(2), 175-192. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448963>
- Twain, M. (1869). *The innocents abroad*. Retrieved from [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Innocents\\_Aboard](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Innocents_Aboard)

---

## Abstract

---

This study explores the use of cultural extravaganza and popular expressions in Algerian novels, particularly the alternation between standard Arabic and local dialects. Upon examining a range of Algerian literary works, I observed that many creative Arab writers, especially Algerian novelists, often incorporate colloquial structures and popular imagery to diversify and contrast with the standard narrative language. This stylistic choice aims to enhance the narrative by infusing humor and integrating elements of popular culture, thereby enriching the portrayal of Algerian identity. To understand the extent of this phenomenon, the paper delves into Ben Hadouga's *Rih El Janoub* (The South Wind), a novel that exemplifies the interplay of cultural, linguistic, and mnemonic elements, illustrating the uniqueness of the Algerian novel.

---

## Keywords

---

Algerian novel, popular culture, dialect, standard Arabic, narrative structures

---



---

## مستخلص

---

ملخص: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف استخدام الثقافة الشعبية والتعبيرات العامية في الرواية الجزائرية، خاصةً فيما يتعلق بالتناوب بين اللغة العربية الفصحى واللهجات المحلية. من خلال فحص مجموعة من الأعمال الأدبية الجزائرية، لاحظت أن العديد من الكتاب العرب المبدعين، وخاصة الروائيين الجزائريين، يميلون إلى استخدام الهياكل العامية والصور الشعبية لإضفاء تنوع ومخالفة على اللغة السردية الفصحى. يسعى هذا الأسلوب إلى

تعزیز السرد من خلال إضافة الفكاهة ودمج عناصر الثقافة الشعبية، مما يعزز من تصوير الهوية الجزائرية. لفهم مدى انتشار هذه الظاهرة، تتناول الدراسة رواية بن هدوقة «ريح الجنوب» كمثال يعكس التفاعل بين العناصر الثقافية واللغوية والذاكرة، مما يبرز تفرد الرواية الجزائرية.

---

#### كلمات مفتاحية

---

الرواية الجزائرية، الثقافة الشعبية، اللهجة، اللغة العربية الفصحى، الهياكل السردية

---

#### Résumé

---

Cette étude explore l'utilisation de l'extravagance culturelle et des expressions populaires dans les romans algériens, notamment l'alternance entre l'arabe standard et les dialectes locaux. En examinant une série d'œuvres littéraires algériennes, j'ai observé que de nombreux écrivains arabes créatifs, en particulier les romanciers algériens, intègrent souvent des structures colloquiales et des images populaires pour diversifier et contraster avec la langue narrative standard. Ce choix stylistique vise à enrichir le récit en y apportant de l'humour et en intégrant des éléments de la culture populaire, renforçant ainsi la représentation de l'identité algérienne. Pour comprendre l'ampleur de ce phénomène, l'étude se penche sur la *Rih El Janoub* (Le Vent du Sud) de Ben Hadouga, un roman qui illustre l'interaction entre les éléments culturels, linguistiques et mémoriels, et montre l'originalité de la littérature algérienne.

---

#### Mots-clés

---

roman algérien, culture populaire, dialecte, arabe standard, structures narratives