

# The Duality of Place and Spirit in the Desert Space. Perusal in the Novel (*Aaoudo bi Allah*) by Saeed Boutagine. An Approach in Light of Cultural Criticism

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## Abstract

This study aims to present a cultural approach to the novel (*Aaoudo bi Allah*) by the Algerian writer Said Boutagine, the study takes two paths: A theoretical path through which we seek to present a strategy for reading the text in light of the cultural approach, and how the text is considered in light of this type of criticism as a cultural incident that came under the compelling insistence of the prevailing patterns. An applied path through which we seek to investigate the religious system - since it is the dominant system - through the duality of place and spirit in the desert space, where the novel insisted in all its paths on the link between religion and the desert space.

**Keywords:** *Criticism, Culture, Dominance, Speech, Religion.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, the novel has kept pace with all the political and social transformations in the world and even contributed to shaping the vision of public opinion, to the point that some thinkers considered that the French Revolution was a result of Rousseau's writings, and that the Bolshevik Revolution was a result of Maxim Gorky's novel (*The Mother*).

Like its occidental counterpart, the Algerian novel was not immune to the developments taking place in the country, starting with the writings of Muhammad Dib, Kateb Yassin, Maamari, and Pharaoh, which exposed colonial practices (Mohamed Elmhani, 1986, p 56), to the post-independence author who criticized the ideology of governance, such as Tahar Outar (*Fi arse baghal*) and Al-Habib Al-Sayyah (*Fi zaman elnamroud*), the novel that sparked great controversy (Alia Salim, 2000, p 338).

Since the bloody decade was the most dangerous stage, it was necessary for the Algerian writer to write about it explaining, introspection, and searching for the motives, aiming for solutions. The writings that dealt with the bloody decade came; Under the pressure of patterns produced by the theme of violence; Which penetrated into every detail of the Algerian's life, until this violence became the nature of things, and even though most of the Algerian novels approached the black decade in their urban space; The novel (*Aaoudo bi Allah*) was an exception when I approached it through the desert space, and if it is permissible to not consider this new, we cannot ignore that literalism, which we can term: (desert narrative), or the creation of (desert narrative), which makes the narrative in This geographical space is different from other types of narration. On the other hand, the novel demolished the theory that the narrator belongs to the desert community. Otherwise, the entire gender would be subject to question. If this is appropriate for the place, it does not necessarily apply to the narrator.

Is it also possible to ignore the literal connection that Saeed Boutagine envisioned between the desert and religion? Wasn't the sign of the desert, in most of its manifestations, synonymous with religion? Did Saeed Boutagine come out in all his descriptions? And his drawing of details about the insistence that the desert is the cradle of simple religiosity?

We would do well - first of all - to decide that the religious occupies an important part of Saeed Boutagine's works. Neither his collections of stories nor his novels - the subject of the study - nor his articles were without a reference to the topic of religiosity, because - through his belief that modernity is genius - he remained respectful of religion as a dimension that cannot be ignored in building a balanced society. Hence, what are the most important manifestations of religion in the novel (*Aaoudo bi Allah*)? Is there a way to conceal this pattern? Is it fertile enough to accept fission?

### **1. The text and the question of culture:**

It is important to acknowledge the merit of literary criticism in negotiating creative texts over many eras, but it is more important to acknowledge its shortcomings in achieving complete and easy reading, because the literary text - being a linguistic discourse based on signs - is also a cultural event that carries and a treasury full of disturbing and conflicting patterns. , which represents the culture of the stage.

Simply reading the signs is nothing but a naive reading, because these signs - in and of themselves, and in the pattern of their juxtaposition - provide the reader with referrals towards a certain implicit meaning. They are nothing but a rhetorical trick to pass an ancient implicit meaning into the subconscious.

From here came the cultural criticism as a procedural alternative after structuralism. It attempts to approach the text based on the type of patterns that it produces. It recognizes that the text is a recent occurrence, which came as a result of the insistence of the ancient patterns that prevailed in a striking way. This is similar to the emergence of shrines in the Abbasid era due to the spread of the phenomenon of begging and parasitism. Hence, the author of the text is not the writer, but it is the audiences, who are the recipients who read it.

If we initially acknowledge the shortcomings of literary criticism in conducting an ideal dialogue with texts, this does not mean that we should kill it and replace it with cultural criticism, because the ideal cultural dialogue is only correct based on linguistic signs, and then interpreting them, if the system is satisfied with it, then it must be interrogated by language, this is first.

Secondly, the contemporary cultural approach is not concerned with the format alone; rather, it must be added to this note of the aesthetics of the text, and the aesthetics of the pattern itself, such as the opposition, reproduction, multiplicity, and coexistence of the patterns.

### **2. The practical aspect - the religious manner:**

Man is the only being who embraces religious beliefs and practices rites and rituals that regulate his relationship with God and the universe and guarantee him peace and bliss.

The Arab land is the cradle of religions, and religion occupies a large part of the attention of the Eastern and Arab family, especially since time immemorial, because it has provided satisfactory answers that the mind that believes in tangible things did not reach at the beginning of its formation, such as God, Paradise, angels, destiny, and other unseen concepts. Religion is also responsible for controlling the behavior of the individual as a law. Ethically, it is an

important stage that follows primitive and mythological thinking, and a preliminary stage for scientific thinking.

People's perceptions of religion differ, so whoever denies it in favor of materialism and whoever affirms it with a special interpretation, then there is agreement on the essence and the deities differ, so religions vary according to the diversity of the deities.

Perhaps the most famous definition of religion is what was stated by Tahawani in his saying: "A divine position that leads people of reason to choose it to reform in the present and the future, and this includes beliefs and deeds and applies to the religion of every prophet, and it is added to God that it emanates from Him." (Tahawani, p 541).

And Durkheim who believes that "religion is an integrated and unified system that includes a set of beliefs and practices related to the sacred things of those beliefs and practices, and is practiced in a small, moral community called the Church." (Durkheim, 2005, p 169).

The novel "*Aaoudo bi Allah*" included many religious references, as the narrator sought to give us two discordant images of religious practice, the religious text was part of the solution, just as it was - when it was interpreted arbitrarily - an incitement to crime and extremism, and the religious pattern in the novel was linked to the place of practice, Negatively and positively, and in some detail we can monitor the following:

### **2.1. Positive place manner as an added event:**

Saeed Boutagine presents to us through concepts such as the saintship - the devotees - the shrine - the rosary - references that are closely related to the place of the "Zawiya". Asaad fled from the north and its cement and hostility towards the south, towards the desert, where the soul found its peace and practiced its meditation, to later establish this scientific and spiritual forum, the one who invests in people, in the disciples, and takes over his sheikhdom. These disciples will be the solution, the bright tomorrow, and the water that will extinguish the strife in the Sultanate of Beni Aryan, Asaad taught them knowledge, faith, abandonment of the body, and many of the concepts of Sufism that are striking in Eastern mystical history.

The hero Asaad, then, wanted from this spiritual forum to restore respect to the zawiya, which has always replaced the state in governance and conflict resolution, the psychological clinic that grants peace and tranquility, and the solid core of all resistance against tyranny and occupation. History has told that most of the popular resistance was led by the leaders and sheikhs of the Zawiya. (Karim Mhana, 1976, p 315).

The narrator does not content himself with this scene to suggest to us the authenticity of this place - Zawiya - and its positivity in the Algerian conscience, but rather makes the Tariqa religion the only solution to strife and the fighting of brothers through exceptionally mystical expressions:

Speaking about his grandfather, the narrator says: "He was as strict as a dead person, and if he laughed wrongly, he asked God for forgiveness and prayed two rak'ahs." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 67).

He says: "What bitter struggle did he wage against himself? And what divine power honored him with that patience that made him great in my eyes? I did not know that until I knew the meaning of the tarnished streets. I almost got dirty if it were not for his teachings that went with me wherever I went like a summer cloud." (Saeed Boutagine, p 66).

“A person must purify his tongue, perhaps he needs it if he wants to keep it for testimony... Beware of injustice, do not assault anyone.” (Saeed Boutagine, p 125).

“I was saying in secret, trying to reach the limits of radiance with my body.” (Saeed Boutagine, p 131).

This has changed the authentic teachings of the mystical culture, which view human beings’ problems as a result of a spiritual defect, and that the temptations that afflict them arise from the burdens weighing on the soul. In this case, he must find a sheikh who will take him by the hand towards peace, as the sheikh will work to restore the glow to the soul. When he succeeds in linking it to its original place from which it descended, the soul, according to the Sufis, is a luminous thing that descended into the physical sphere from its higher place, and it cannot get rid of diseases and afflictions except with a luminous antidote.

Then the narration in the novel progresses towards forming an image of the hero Asaad that completely matches the image of the sheikh of the Zawiya who is at the forefront of preaching, and whose prestige is surrounded by signs such as: the shrine, the shrine, the dome of the disciple... and these are authentic signs that enjoy sanctity in the Algerian conscience.

He says: “(The saint) Asaad stayed in his small dome for several years, seeing nothing but the morning light peeking through a narrow skylight, at the top of the (dome) that he had built for himself.” (Saeed Boutagine, p 10).

He says: “None of his disciples survived, they were slaughtered one by one.” (Saeed Boutagine, p 10).

He says: “When the saint, Asaad, was attacked during Tarawih prayers, his head was torn off.” (Saeed Boutagine, p 25).

And other soufi orders par excellence.

Saeed Boutagine’s summoning of the place of the Zawiya is “a summoning of a culture rooted in Eastern religious memory, which has always celebrated the lessons of knowledge, and saw salvation in restoring respect to the spirit at the expense of matter and to the sect at the expense of the masses that caused human crises.”(Karim Mhana, 1976, p 200), for centuries, the Zawiya was the sole preserver, the identity of the homelands against forms of obliteration, and the preservation of the religion from the dangers of distortion. Indeed, the Zawiya was a state in its own right, and its sheikh had the power and prestige equivalent to the power of the ruler. This is explained by the rulers resorting to seeking the Zawiya’s favor in order to adjust the balance of the opponents, which is what President Abdelaziz Bouteflika did when he came. By obtaining the support of the Zawiya, his advantage was outweighed, and he was able to refute extremism and extremism, and pass reconciliation projects.

We are also interested in the narrator’s invocation of the place (Zawiya) within the public space (the desert) in an implicit reference to the relationship of the desert community with the Zawiya. The desert society is known to be a tribal society par excellence, and it remained throughout its life far from successive centers of government, and from there these tribes established their laws that... It organizes its life, and represents the first reference in judging behavior. After the advent of Islam, these tribal laws were replaced by laws that result from the Zawiya’s understanding of the religious text, all manifestations of life, from disputes, marriage, divorce, and celebrations, the Zawiya had the highest say in them, until the Zawiya came to represent the shadow state, perhaps the authorities - of all kinds, whether French or national -

noticed this and worked to get closer to the Zawiya, establishing a kind of informal cooperation in many fields.

## 2.2. Negative place manner:

In his text, Saeed Boutagine tried to give us another model of a place characterized by negativity, this place represents the symbol of terror in Algeria, and it is the manner of the mountain and the strife, extremism, and blood it refers to, from the beginning, he called it “the mountain of slimes” in reference to the types of ugliness that prevailed, mountains at that time.

The sign of the mountain represents a terrifying icon for Algerians in the 1990s, “after it was a symbol of nobility, pride, and resistance to French colonialism, where extremism took up residence in the mountains, declaring jihad in a country that completely owes Islam, and a place for the blood of innocents, declaring money and honor in the name of God.” (Azeddine Djelaoudji. p 112). This crisis - and after twenty years - its consequences are still a curse on the people, casting a shadow. For the first time, signs such as: the red decade - the black decade - victims of terrorism - the missing - forced kidnapping - sons of the mountain... are included in the dictionary of Algerian society, which the authorities have tried to Confronting them (the signs) with counter signs, such as: national reconciliation - the law of mercy - the law of civil harmony...

It was clever of the narrator to complete the image of the mountain for the reader when he linked it to authentic heritage signs at the level of the discourse of the mountain's characters, a discourse characterized by rhyming rhymes in the style of the heritage, albeit in terms of sarcastic names with a heritage structure and often a nickname such as: Abu Sufyan ibn Murrah, Abu Misran, Abu Lahab...

Through some of these speeches and an examination, we notice the strangeness of these names and speeches to the Algerian cultural community, which is what the narrator wanted to convey. After the return of the Mujahideen from Afghanistan, Wahhabi thought expanded in a striking way, and its followers introduced types of behavior and speeches that were not compatible with the moderate religious orientation of Algerian society, and then they met, the religious enthusiasm of the youth combined with the corruption of governance in the absence of a religious authority that was immune to foreign thought, so Takfirists spread and chaos reigned.

The theme of the desert - which we mentioned is synonymous with the concept of religiosity in many of its manifestations - worked to invert and understand the sign of the mountain, which meant revolution and peace, and when the right of the desert was usurped, it came to mean violence and extremism, on the other hand, there is a hidden reference by the narrator in this context to the view of the other, for the desert man, who throughout the eras of history has only lived as a cowardly person with no connection to civilization and this is the perspective that (*Aaoudo bi Allah*) to overturn, when it proved that the solution is in the sand and not in the cement, through the character of the hero (Assaad), the desert has become a source of teachings that glorify Coexistence among the inhabitants of one country, and the desert has become the source of moderate religiosity that the city boasts about in its official institutions.

### 2.3. The manner of the saint and the soul's inquiry:

Belief in saints is one of the most important phenomena of belief in Eastern society. What is meant by saint is the pious believer whose acts of obedience are frequent, and whom the Almighty God protects and guards at all times, from all kinds of sins and grants him success in obedience, as it is stated in The Quran: "Unquestionably, [for] the allies of Allah there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve, Those who believed and were fearing Allah"(Surah Yunus, verse 62-63).

While the concept of saint in popular culture means "dervishes, marabouts, and masters who are blessed by them and their dignity."(Mouhab Aouadh, 1977, p 368).

According to these two concepts, we are obliged to recall some cultural signs that accompany the concept of saintship, such as:

#### a. Hadra:

It is: "a large gathering in a large circle with a fire in the middle to heat up the drums, where the listeners chant whether a remembrance, or a prophetic praise, or a praise of the saint, and this is done with the aim of renewing the pledge of allegiance, seeking sustenance, and attracting offspring, and this is accompanied by the accompanying absence of consciousness and fainting due to attraction and astonishment." (Mouhab Aouadh, 1977, p 162).

#### b. Karama:

It is "a miraculous act by which God honors his saint to strengthening and supporting him, and it is matched by the concept of a miracle among the prophets, in which miracles are narrated such as walking on water, remaining in one ablution for months, and meeting the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, while awake." (Mouhab Aouadh, 1977, p 46).

#### c. Ziara:

It is a visit "either seasonal for the purpose of renewing the covenant or an emergency following a calamity that befell the visitor." (Mouhab Aouadh, 1977, p 55).

#### d. Makam:

It is "the building that surrounds the shrine or the grave of the saint. Because of the holiness of the saint in the cultural conscience of the parish, it was decided that his grave should be distinguished from the graves of other human beings so that he would be immortalized and become a shrine." (Mouhab Aouadh, 1977, p 58).

#### ✓ People's need for the concept of a saint:

The concept of the saint is one of the sacred concepts in the collective conscience, when a person is unable to understand something, he resorts to metaphysics and the unseen, such as God and the blessing of the saint, on the basis that when humans are unable to explain something, he sanctifies and masters it.

Hence, the Eastern person's resort to the saint is a request for protection and seeking divine compassion, so we found for each region its own saint:

- Algiers — Sidi Abderahmane.
- Tlemcen — Sidi Abou Chouib Boumedienne.
- Constantine — Sidi Rached.
- Relizane — Sidi Amhamed ben ouda.

The saint is the safety way for the region and the first and last deterrent in times of distress.

This phenomenon was met with fierce opposition from the religious establishment with a Salafist orientation, which considered it to promote polytheism, this phenomenon was also met with the approval of the occupation of all kinds when its interests coincide with its rituals.

According to these concepts, Saeed Butajin wrote his novel, where he gave his hero Asaad the character of saintship, through specific behaviors carried out by the people of Al-Ain, including:

Establishing the shrine: He says: "If the shrine is wrapped in an unusual black cloth, this is a clear matter." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 47).

Zardah: Where Zardah is held annually in the Al-Ain area, and speeches are delivered that remind of Asaad and his virtues, the narrator excelled at this particular point, as his Bedouin and Sufi background together enabled him to depict all the details of Zardah, in the Water Wedding demonstration, the reader does not find himself except when the fourth wall has fallen, and lo and behold, he In Zarda, among the followers they sing praises in honor of the saint.

The ululations: He says: "As for the women, they drowned in a ululation that surrounded them from all sides and reached the top of their heads." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 55).

Samaa: These are the glorifying praises of Zardah and her saint, In (*Aaoudo bi Allah*), the topics of Samaa come close to the Iraqi Maqam, which the Shiites repeat in lamentation of the family of the Prophet and their plight, and from the Samaa:

- Even dead people have opinions.
- Wise people with wisdom.
- Taratir Qalabq.
- Long live the sand.
- The unemployed write a book of shame (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 68).

This is in addition to the horses and ritual dances that glorify the saint and imitate many of the immortal Zardah in the Algerian popular conscience.

Regarding the saint's self, the narrator gives the impression that Asaad is from a special kind supported by heaven to carry out the act of salvation, so much so that he implicitly invokes the concept of the savior, which is widespread in Christian culture.

The hero Asaad's decision to leave - forcibly - from north to south also refers to the story of our master Noah and his escape from disbelief on board a ship that he ordered to be built to save the believers.

It is impossible - as we study the manner of the saint in the novel - to ignore the terrible presence of Al-Khidr, peace be upon him, the immortal saint throughout the ages, throughout the novel, the narrator tried to instill doubt in the reader about the part of the death of the hero Asaad:

He says: "This letter is the reason for his amputation...if he was actually killed." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 181).

And he says: "A letter signed by the one whom you wonder if he is alive or dead... He wrote it this night before the dawn prayer." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 253).

At the level of discourse, the narrator strives to consecrate the image of the saint and his linguistic performance through overflowing poetry that imbues his speech with light, like the light of the words of the prophets. We find among the best examples of this:

"...I went to the Al-Ain in search of an ancient image for the time to come." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 65).

"...We need to produce legends our size...the desert in the head." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 51).

"...What you do not see does not mean that it does not exist, which also exists in absence." (Saeed Boutagine, 2007, p 74).

This changed the teachings and speeches that his disciples told, memorized and followed.

We conclude from the above:

The narrator succeeded in summoning a belief phenomenon that has a presence in the Algerian collective conscience according to details steeped in realism.

When the narrator focused on the phenomenon of the guardian, he implicitly presented a solution to the national crisis by respecting belief, whatever its background, in an atmosphere of tolerance and coexistence, because the doctrine of exclusion left nothing but more darkness and blood.

The narrator established the theory of Eastern society's sentimentality and innate religiosity, and that religion is a sensitive string that should not be played with because it brings spiritual peace and in return is an incentive to kill.

When the narrator presented phenomena different from Tariqa and Sufism, he sided with Tariqa that glorifies science away from superstitions that are exploited for more tyranny and tyranny, and that the idea of moderate religiosity that combines reason and emotion can be a path to a specific civilized nation, and this was known to the nation in its golden age.

Through the concept of the Saint in his novel, the narrator tried to indicate the desire of the desert dwellers for identity and their unwillingness to exchange it under any pretext, the Saint in the novel represents that tight fence that protects the inherited pattern among the inhabitants, so they preserve the purity that nature has given them since their existence, and perhaps The most prominent symbolization of this is when the narrator draws his hero that miraculous drawing, which keeps him alive despite his death, alive, representing a superficial



authority and reference for the behavior of individuals that prevents them from deviating whenever they are stranded.

## CONCLUSION

The novel (*Aaoudo bi Allah*) represents a unique model of the desert narrative through its attention to many details of the desert space, spatial and spiritual, it is ironic that the desert continues to represent the margin in all fields, politics, economics and society, at a time when it represents the lifeline in the financial and economic aspect. It came the novel (*Aaoudo bi Allah*) restores respect to this margin, and makes it a solution maker, unlike the lame modernist perspective that continued to consider desert man unfit for civilization.

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