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The Dialectic of the Self and the Other Through the Theme of Migration in the Novel "Lost at Sea" by Hafnawi Zaghir

Abstract

This research aims to examine the manifestations of the self and the other in the narrative text. The study is based on the novel "*Lost at Sea"* by Hafnawi Zaghir as a subject of analysis, with the goal of uncovering the dialectic of the self and the other within the narrative and among its characters. The author employs alternating events between characters with Arabic and Western names to highlight the ongoing conflict between them, emphasizing the assertion of identity in the face of the other's dominance.

Keywords: *self, other, narrative text, character, dialectics*

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Həfnəvi Zagirin "Dənizdə itirilmiş" romanında köç mövzusu ilə özün və başqasının dialektikası

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat hekayə mətnində özünün və başqasının təzahürlərini araşdırmaq məqsədi daşıyır. Tədqiqat təhlil predmeti kimi Həfnəvi Zagirin "Dənizdə itirilmiş" romanı əsasında hazırlanıb və məqsədi povest daxilində və onun personajları arasında "mən"in və digərinin dialektikasını üzə çıxarmaqdır. Müəllif ərəb və Qərb adları ilə personajlar arasında dəyişən hadisələrdən istifadə edərək, onlar arasında davam edən münaqişəni vurğulayır, digərinin hökmranlığı qarşısında şəxsiyyətin təsdiqini önə çəkir.

Açar sözlər: *öz, başqa, hekayə mətni, xarakter, dialektika*

Introduction

The trajectory of the relationship between the self and the other in the Arabic novel is long, extending back to the civilizational shock that occurred when the self-encountered the other and discovered a bitter truth. Through its superior civilization, the other exposed the self to itself. Thus, Algerian literature, like Arabic literature in general, has been a pioneer in addressing this theme. Notably, at a certain period, the Algerian novel sought to feminize the other, portraying it as a deviant figure who compensates for this deficiency with tyranny and oppression.

The Algerian novel, particularly during a period of notable dynamism, largely focused on exposing the French other by addressing the theme of the revolution. However, due to social, political, and cultural changes in Algerian society, a new generation of young writers emerged, shifting their attention to exploring the new reality and raising questions in search of answers. Among the pressing issues that occupied a significant place in Algerian narrative discourse was migration to another land, where the confrontation with the other moved to his own territory rather than the self's homeland, which had historically been the primary setting for exposing the other due

to colonial legacies. This shift made the theme predominantly political. One of the works that exemplifies this transformation is *Lost at Sea* by Hafnawi Zaghir, which incorporates the theme of migration and the resulting intellectual and civilizational conflict, rooted in the dialectic of the self and the other. The protagonist, Sinan, an intellectual striving to serve his country, finds himself thwarted by self-serving individuals who suppress figures like him, leading him to flee to the West in search of freedom of expression and democracy. However, his suffering intensifies when he realizes he has fallen victim to the deception of the slogans championed by the other—ideals celebrated as hallmarks of a new civilization yet proving to be mere illusions.

Based on the above, our study, titled *The Dialectic of the Self and the Other Through the Theme of Migration in Lost at Sea* by Hafnawi Zaghir, aims to answer several key question, most notably:

Comment la migration, en tant qu'expérience transformatrice, redéfinit-elle la perception de l'autre par le protagoniste, et dans quelle mesure son statut d'intellectuel lui permet-il d'accéder à une compréhension plus nuancée de l'altérité?

This question will be addressed through an in-depth exploration of the novel, analyzing, discussing, and critiquing it by first defining key concepts such as the self and the other, as well as examining the defining factors of their relationship in *Lost at Sea* by the Algerian novelist Hafnawi Zaghir.

Research

1- The Concept of the Self (Al-Ana)

The "self" is one of the philosophical and intellectual inquiries that has occupied a significant place within human thought since ancient times. In fact, the question of the "self" is among the fundamental questions that have accompanied humanity since its awareness of existence, as it is intrinsically linked to a broader question—the question of "being." Alongside its relentless pursuit of understanding nature, humankind has been engaged in a continuous, both explicit and implicit, journey toward exploring the depths of the self. However, this journey has often encountered complexities and labyrinths where the intellect finds itself limited and incapable of fully grasping the absolute essence of the self.

Due to the complexities surrounding the concept of the "self" and the difficulty of defining it as a stable notion within the realm of thought, perspectives on it have varied. Religious thought, for instance, is ontologically grounded in what sacred texts dictate, whether in monotheistic or non-monotheistic religions. Ancient Eastern philosophy approached the "self" as both a source of evil and a wellspring of good, in line with the eternal duality governing existence—good and evil (Peter, 2001, pp. 85-87)—or, as expressed through the contrast between darkness and light. The notion of the "self" served as a foundational pillar in Eastern religions, which were built upon the principle of conflict between two opposing forces that control existence. As a result, these religions adopted a spiritual approach centered on contemplation and retreat into the "self" as both a refuge and a means of self-preservation

In monotheistic religions, the "self" becomes more active and dynamic, as it is responsible for human choices and orientations while still retaining its dual nature of encompassing both good and evil.

Meanwhile, human thought approaches the concept of the "self" from a different perspective, viewing it as both an inherent, static existence and a dynamic, ever-moving force. This duality has led to varying philosophical and intellectual interpretations of the "self," depending on differing perspectives and methodological approaches to the concept.

Accordingly, we will first explore the linguistic meaning of the term before defining both its conceptual and philosophical dimensions (Mustafa Sweif, 1978).

1-1 Linguistic Definition

The word *dhāt* carries multiple lexical meanings and linguistic usages, functioning as a grammatical element with a significant role in Arabic sentence structure. Its meaning varies depending on the context in which it is used, reflecting the distinctive nature of the Arabic language, which is rich in lexical and semantic nuances.

The term *dhāt* can signify the essence or intrinsic nature of something. For instance, in the phrase *dhāt yadhi* (literally, "the essence of his hand"), *dhāt* refers to what his right hand possesses. The plural form *dhawāt* is an incomplete derivation, with its full form being *dhawāt* (akin to *nawāt*, meaning "core" or "seed"). The letter *wāw* is omitted in singular form, but it is restored when forming the dual (*dhawātān*), similar to *nawātān* (dual of *nawāt*). In the plural, it reverts to *dhāt*, forming *dhawāt*. Grammatically, *dhāt* is the feminine form of *dhū* (meaning "possessor" or "owner"), with its dual being *dhawātā* and its plural *dhawāt* (Al-Tunji, 2003, p. 222).

Shihab al-Din Ahmad al-Khafaji al-Masri states: "Abu Zakariyya informed us and said that using *dhāti* and *dhawāti* in *al-Hādī* is incorrect—this is the well-known opinion. Al-Nawawi, in his *Tadhīb*, mentioned that this usage is a convention among theologians, but some linguists have rejected it, arguing that *dhāt* in Arabic does not mean 'essence' but rather 'possessor' or 'owner.' However, this rejection itself is unfounded, as what has been stated is indeed correct. Al-Wahidi, commenting on the Quranic verse *wa aṣliḥū dhāta baynikum* ('And make peace among yourselves'), cited Al-Zajjaj, who explained that *dhāt baynikum* means 'the essence of your relationship'" (Al-Khafaji, 1997, p. 194).

As for the concept of the "self," it has taken on multiple shades, much like a rainbow, and has undergone various interpretations and rituals. There is no language in the world, whether ancient or modern, across different civilizations, that does not employ words such as *I*, *myself*, and *mine*, all of which indicate the essence of the self. Thus, the roots and foundations of the concept of the self are deeply ancient, with sources tracing its origins to pre-Christian times. Some contemporary ideas about the self can be linked back to Homer, who distinguished between the physical human body and a non-material function, which was later referred to as the soul or spirit" (Qahtan, 2004, p. 15).

1-2 Terminologically

Anyone browsing the lexicon of Sufi terminology will notice the association of the term *dhāt* (self) with divinity. It is stated that *dhāt* refers to the pure existence of the Absolute Truth alone, for anything other than existence—as the existence of Truth itself—is nothing but absolute nonexistence. It is the pure entity, requiring no unity or distinction to differentiate itself from anything else, as there is no essence apart from it—its unity is its very essence" (Al-Khalidi, 1997, p. 21).

However, differences in meaning and terminology arise due to variations in civilizations and eras. As Qahtan notes, "Human beings have never understood the self as they do today, where it has become a psychological term with specific implications" (Qahtan, 2004, p. 21).

The concept of the *self* has fluctuated across multiple domains, including the soul, the psyche, and the ego.

Philosophers have differed in their perspectives on the *self*, depending on philosophical movements, intellectual schools, and varying references. As a result, philosophy has produced diverse definitions of the *self*, which were not merely born out of contemporary philosophical debates but trace back to the earliest recorded and documented eras of human philosophical thought.

"The concept of the *self* is not something inherited by humans; rather, it takes shape through interaction with the environment in which one lives, starting from childhood and continuing through various stages of growth. Awareness of the *self* begins narrowly at the start of life and expands as the individual's environment widens. This development occurs through partial experiences and situations encountered while attempting to adapt to the surrounding environment" (Hassadi, p.7).

Thus, the concept of the *self* is a comprehensive one, encompassing multiple aspects of its relational dynamics. From one perspective, "the influence is mutual among these poles (*self–self*, *self–other selves*, *self–world*), and the interaction between any pair of them weakens or strengthens, yet persists as long as its components remain" (Hassadi, p. 11).

As for the definition of the *ego*, it is the individual's sense of existence in this universe, along with the thoughts they recall during their daily activities. Descartes, when he began by denying the existence of the other—everything perceived through the senses—could not deny the existence of his own *ego*, expressing it through the well-known *cogito*: "I think, therefore I am." According to Lalande, the *ego* has two characteristics: "It is inherently oppressive, as it asserts itself against everything, and it is in conflict with others, as it seeks to exclude them. Every *ego* considers others as adversaries and desires to dominate them completely" (Lalande, 2001, p. 824).

The *self* is defined as "a construct assumed to exist as the foundation for achieving integration and continuity among all our experiences, meaning the basis that unites them into a coherent and connected whole" (Swaif, 1878, p. 277).

2- *The Concept of the Other*

The concept of the *Other* takes on linguistic, terminological, and philosophical dimensions, making it a richly diverse and multifaceted notion. This section aims to clarify these perspectives, starting with the linguistic aspect.

2-1 *Linguistically*

In *Lisan al-Arab*, *al-akhar* (the other) is a noun in the *af'al* form, with its feminine counterpart being *ukhra*. However, it carries an adjectival meaning, as the *af'al* form is typically used for adjectives. The diminutive form of *akhar* is *ukayhir*. In the Quranic verse: *"Then two others shall stand in their place" (Al-Ma'idah, p.107)*, Al-Farra interprets *akharan* as referring to two individuals from a different faith, specifically from among Christians or Jews. The plural forms include *akharun*, *ukhariyat*, and *ukhar*. Some expressions, such as *"May God remove the other"* or *"No welcome to the other"*, imply distance or exclusion (Ibn Manzur, 1988, p. 29). Additionally, *al-akhar* can mean *ghayr* (other), with plural forms *ukhar* and *ukhariyat*. The phrase *"May God remove the other"* is used metaphorically to refer to someone absent or not belonging to a group (Maalouf, 1991, p. 5).

2-2 *Terminologically*

The concept of the *Other* has been widely discussed by scholars in philosophy and other conceptual fields aiming to establish precise terminological frameworks. The term *Other* denotes anything that is not *Self*. The idea of the *Other* as distinct from the *Self* is an epistemological category, fundamentally recognizing the existence of an external reality beyond the knowing self, meaning objective entities (Al-Ruwayli & Al-Bazghi, 2005, p. 21).

On this basis, the *Other*, in its simplest form, appears as either a counterpart or an antithesis to the *Self* or *Ego*. The term has been widely used in discourse studies, particularly in colonial and postcolonial discourse, as well as in fields that build on these frameworks, such as feminist criticism, cultural studies, and Orientalism. The concept gained prominence in contemporary French philosophy, especially in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas, and others (Al-Ruwayli & Al-Bazghi, 2005, p. 23).

Regarding the term *Other*, and as a reinforcement of the previous discussion, scholars argue that its meaning revolves around three main dimensions. In its most common sense, the *Other* refers to another person or a distinct group of people with a unified identity. By comparison with that individual or group, *I* or *we* can define our difference from them. This opposition often involves a process of diminishing the value of the *Other* while elevating the *Self* or identity. Such a perspective is particularly prevalent in cultural contrasts, which are commonly emphasized in colonial discourse (Al-Ruwayli & Al-Bazghi, 2005, p. 24).

2-* Determinants of the *Self* and the *Other

The factors defining the boundaries between the *Self* and the *Other* in Algerian narrative texts are shaped by the cultural, political, and historical contexts Algeria has experienced. In this regard, the issue of identity in Algerian society emerges prominently, directly linking to both past and present colonial dimensions. *"The civilized West followed the path of the theological West*

in adopting a culture of exclusion, denial, and eradication. The Western civilizational centrism, which portrayed the West as both the beginning and the end of civilization—starting with the Greeks and Romans and culminating in itself as the end of history—led to a denial of the world's diversity as a collection of multiple, distinct, and independent civilizations" (Amara, p. 135).

Since ancient times, colonial powers have operated in Algeria based on this racist ideology, seeking to erase the *Self* by obliterating its characteristics and distinct identity. The last major invasion of the Algerian coast occurred in 1830 with the French campaign, the most destructive and brutal of them all. France employed military, cultural, religious, and legislative measures to dissolve the national *Self* into the foreign *Other*. The French aimed to strip the Algerian mind of its identity and individuality. *"With all its might, France sought to drain the Algerian intellect of its identity and personality"* (Oumeqran, 2005, p. 11). From this emerged the idea of the French enemy, who humiliated the *Self*, subjecting it to oppression, torture, killing, humiliation, and cultural and religious obliteration. Marshal Bugeaud himself declared: *"The war France is waging in Africa is merely a continuation of the Crusades"* (Poujoulat, p. 288). This statement reflects the true colonialist perception of Algeria and its people.

In contrast to this idea, the oppressed national *Self* emerged, striving with all its strength to resist this act of *Self*-negation. This struggle fostered deep-seated hatred and resentment toward the *Other*, persisting even after independence, manifesting as heightened sensitivity and suspicion toward anything associated with it. Based on this, the determinants shaping the relationship between the *Self* and the *Other* become evident, echoing Tzvetan Todorov's classifications, in which he categorized the *Self-Other* dynamic into three types.

- A value judgment on the moral level: The *Other* is either good, something I like, or something I dislike.
- An act of either approaching or distancing oneself from the *Other* on a practical level: I accept the *Other's* values and integrate with them, I make the *Other* adopt my perspective, or I impose my own image upon them. Between submission to the *Other* and the *Other's* submission, there is also a third option—neutrality or indifference.
- Recognizing or ignoring the *Other's* identity, which occurs on a practical and research-based level. (Todorov, 1992, p. 223)

The novelist does not stray far from these classifications but rather operates within their framework, engaging with one of these types based on their ideology, the influence of the society they belong to, and the culture they carry.

3- The Manifestations of *Self* and *Other* in the Novel Through the Theme of Migration

Observing the relationship between the *Self* and the *Other* from a distance—beyond the novel under study—reveals that the intellectual cannot perceive identity as mere self-enclosure. Likewise, they cannot reject openness to the *Other* in the name of preserving identity, as such a stance leads to stagnation, weakness, and decline—contradicting the very essence of culture, which thrives on evolution and the recognition of new knowledge. For this reason, the intellectual—whether a thinker, novelist, or scholar—begins to resist the suppression of the will to change and the obstruction of any attempt to transcend ideological and racial barriers imposed by the *Self*. A *Self* that fears erasure tends to withdraw further into itself, rejecting the *Other*, yet a true intellectual moves beyond this closed-off perspective. Individual identity is a form of uniqueness that enables a person to be universal (Harb, 1998, p. 219)

The novel, as a literary genre, possesses the ability to encompass various literary forms and human themes. It is among the most capable arts in embodying the complex relationship between the self and the other, as it provides a space for the voice of the "self" to express its inner fears, pains, and thoughts, engaging in a critique of both itself and the other. The novel at hand addresses this eternal intellectual and cultural conflict between the self and the other within the context of migration. It explores deeply rooted ideological notions in collective memory, such as fascination

with the other and subsequent disappointment, the clash of identities and the occurrence of cultural confrontation, as well as the role of culture in shaping self-awareness in contrast to the other. This is the focus of our analysis in *Lost at Sea*.

The new Algerian novel, particularly youth literature, heavily relies on the theme of migration. Among these works is *Lost at Sea*, which grants its main characters the freedom to narrate their experiences. This approach is rooted in a keen awareness, as it seeks to reveal the full reality of the other within their own domain. Initially, the novelistic portrayal of the other stemmed from confrontation, but gradually, the focus shifted toward relocating to another land in an attempt to explore its civilization and gain a clearer understanding of its stance toward the self. Previously, the perception of the other was shaped through historical confrontation—colonialism—which painted an image of the other as an aggressor, a barbarian, and a criminal. However, this perception remained partial. Although this image dominated much of the pre-1990s literary works, where the other was often depicted as a mere enemy due to the historical scars left by colonial aggression in the national memory, the contemporary generation faces a different reality (Hamid Al-Hamadani).

They are compelled to interact with the other, engage with them, and discover them more easily—especially in the age of digital revolution, technological advancements, and the emergence of social media, which facilitate seamless communication and the exchange of information in both voice and image. Therefore, the best way to truly understand the other is by venturing into their world and engaging with them firsthand. Thus, the Maghrebi novelist searches for their own existence within the other, a quest often accompanied by a lingering sense of vengeance against the other who had once dominated them during the colonial era.

Our focus in this study has been drawn to a novelist who captured our attention—Hafnaoui Zagher—due to the prolific and diverse nature of his writings. He does not belong to the younger generation, and much of his work follows a structured, gradual approach, aiming to present ideas in the simplest and most accessible way without burdening the reader. After a long hiatus from writing that lasted about fifteen years, he made a strong comeback with seven novels and two short story collections, spanning the entire decade of the 1990s and early 2000s. His works tackle a variety of themes, yet what stands out is the complete absence of the theme of terrorism, neither directly nor indirectly, despite it being one of the dominant subjects in Algerian literature during that period. Instead, his focus seems to be on major issues concerning his homeland and the broader Arab-Islamic world, framed within a universal humanistic vision. His use of symbolism expands the interpretive horizons of his work, allowing for multiple readings from the perspective of contemporary literary criticism.

We will examine some of the characters that represent the conflict between the self and the other in Hafnaoui Zagher's novel.

3-1 The Self

- **Sinaan**: The name Sinaan means "spearhead" (*Nasr Al-Hayy, 2003,* p. 44), aligning with the character's role in the novel. Sinaan is a rebellious and determined journalist with strong principles and high moral values. He worked for a daily newspaper in his homeland, where his diligence and perseverance earned him a prestigious position. However, his sharp and confrontational writing style, aimed at exposing corruption and correcting societal flaws, brought him numerous problems. He faced continuous threats and warnings, ultimately forcing him to leave his country in search of greater freedom abroad. *"I had reached a prestigious position in my profession, which made me admired by some... but in the eyes of others, I appeared as a rebellious agitator… and to yet others, a source of concern and fear. As the pressure, threats, warnings, and censorship of my articles intensified, I found myself compelled to emigrate."* (*The Novel,* p. 10). Despite being offered various jobs in sensationalist newspapers abroad, he rejected them all, refusing to compromise his principles. Instead, he moved from one job to another, ultimately ending up as a newspaper vendor in a small kiosk.

- **Zeena:** The name Zeena comes from *zayna*, meaning "adornment" or "that which beautifies" (Nasr Al-Hayy, 2003, p. 85). Zeena is a young woman of Arab origin who accompanies Sinaan throughout his journey on the ship returning home. She possesses a striking Arab beauty: *"A tanned*

complexion tinged with a rosy hue, her eyes like two deep lakes, her hair a cascading black waterfall flowing freely, untouched by the sea breeze. Her voice reached me like a melody from the unseen, whispered by the moon into the still night." (Nasr Al-Hayy, 2003, p.4 9).

- **Diana:** A Latin name meaning "goddess" in Roman mythology (Nasr Al-Hayy, 2003, p. 125), which aligns with how Sinaan perceives her. He is mesmerized by her extraordinary beauty, considering her a divine marvel: *"As time passed, I saw in her a celestial sign, a divine miracle—enough for the earth to take pride in being the ground she walked upon, and for beauty to revel in itself, knowing it was the ultimate expression of divine creativity."* (The Novel, p. 145). When Diana asks Sinaan about love, he responds: *"It is complete awe before the supreme being."* (The Novel, p. 61), referring to her as the embodiment of that supreme being, elevating her to a godlike
- **Mansour:** The name Mansour means "victorious" (Nasr Al-Hayy, 2003 p. 63), and *Muntasir*, another variation, means "conqueror, triumphant" (Nasr Al-Hayy, 2003, p. 63), aligning with the character's role in the novel. Mansour is a singer who struggled to find success in his homeland, leading him to migrate abroad, where his circumstances improved, and he gained recognition. He and Sinaan reunite aboard the ship heading home, as they share an old acquaintance. After the murder of the ship's captain, his assistants, and Mary, Mansour takes control of the food storage and begins distributing provisions to the passengers in an arbitrary and unregulated manner. *"We found Mansour furious, foaming with rage, shouting and cursing: 'People are chaotic; discipline is the exception! Only the stick can teach them order.' He said this while handing out canned food and bread to a restless, impatient crowd of passengers, pushing and shoving as they anxiously awaited whatever Mansour and his assistants would offer."* (The Novel, p. 117). Then, Mansour suddenly stops the distribution and orders the crowd to leave, threatening: *"Withdraw immediately, or I will throw the remaining supplies into the sea!"* Silence falls, and the passengers retreat in humiliation and defeat, most of them having received nothing. The distribution had been arbitrary, with no consideration for fairness or the actual number of passengers. *"What remained was not enough for the vast number of people still waiting for their share… What would he do next?"* (The Novel, p. 118).
- **Abd Al-Mawla**: The name is a compound of *Abd* and *Al-Mawla*. *Abd* means "a human being, whether free or enslaved, as he is believed to be subservient to his Creator, the Almighty," and it can also mean "lord" or "master." *Al-Mawla* refers to "anyone who assumes authority or responsibility." Thus, the name aligns with the character's role, as Abd Al-Mawla appears to be responsible for quelling conflicts and purging the Arab world of disputes. However, in reality, he is merely a subordinate who follows external orders and directives. When Mansour confronted him about the ineffectiveness of his mediation efforts in Lebanon and the Gulf, as well as the sluggishness of his communications and actions, he responded: *"If the conflicts are deeply rooted, involving multiple parties, and manipulated by external forces, how do you expect me to rush in and be consumed by them? No, no… The operation itself, regardless of its nature, requires massive armies armed to the teeth, backed by wealth, fortified with expertise and competence… because these conflicts are imposed on us from the outside… and that is a fact."* (*The Novel*, p. 37).

3-2 The Other

James: The name *James* means "replace," signifying a substitute, which aligns with the character's role as a symbol of Western powers. He represents Western corporations and is portrayed as *"the representative of global companies and the wealthy expert in everything."* (*The Novel*, p. 37).

Mary: A feminine given name, the English form of *Mariam*, which is of Hebrew origin meaning "exalted" or "lady of the sea" (*Nasr Al-Hay*, 2003, p. 99). This name aligns with the character's role, as Mary, nicknamed "Bride of the Sea," is a beautiful young woman loved by both Shaaban, the ship's captain, and Armano, the lawyer. *"When she appeared, she seemed like a mermaid from the jinn gliding across the horizon on a wave."* (*The Novel*, p. 70). *"This lady, Mary, the daughter and bride of the sea, was born aboard a ship sailing to some Asian islands."* (*The Novel*, p. 70).

Armano: Derived from *Aram*, son of Shem, ancestor of the Arameans. *Aram* means "calm, rest, and tranquility" (Almaany.com/ar/name/Aram), which superficially corresponds to the character's persona. Armano, Mary's lawyer, appears as a responsible and composed man, acting as her guardian. However, after Mary is murdered, his true nature is revealed: *"A fierce battle broke out between the so-called Armano, the lawyer, and two foreigners..."* (The Novel, p. 124). *"Armano is a prominent member of the gang, assisted by two others..."* (The Novel, p. 161).

Louis: A French masculine name, derived from *Louise*, which means "noble fighter" (Nasr Al-Hay, 2003, p. 126). However, this meaning starkly contrasts with the character's nature. Louis is a young expatriate, not yet thirty, married to a woman over forty. Unemployed, he relies on his wife's earnings for sustenance: *"She is the one who works; I do nothing but sleep, eat… and drink… I have a half-wrecked car that I drive around when I feel like it… Sometimes I gamble with some friends, winning and losing… And what else is life about?"* (The Novel, p. 131). Louis possesses none of the qualities of a noble fighter.

The novel's characters are deeply conflicted, portraying a stark contrast between *the self*—representing the Arab individual—and *the other*, depicted as the oppressive and deceitful Western figure.

Notably, Zagher's writing style makes full use of the page, employing a horizontal format that extends from the far right to the far left (Al-Hamadani, 1998, p. 56). This technique, leaving no blank spaces, creates an impression of crowded thoughts and events in the protagonist's mind. *"He wants to say many things, but the narrative structure only allows what aligns with the unfolding events, the novelist's stance, and the broader environment in which the characters move."* (Al-Hamadani, 1998, p. 56).

Conclusion

In a moment where black and white intertwine, where isolation and confinement take hold, Hafnawi Zagher managed to draft the blueprint for his envisioned project. The arduous labor began with the intersection of personal and collective anxieties. He sought to write, believing it to be an easy endeavor, but the burdens of his thoughts outweighed his dream, and the constraints proved stronger than his will. Resisting them was harder than personal freedom itself. The writer then feels a moment of eruption—an explosion of emotions transcribed into letters etched onto paper, yearning to break free all at once. This eruption takes form in the novel as an identity struggle between *the self* and *the other*, embodied by the characters in *Lost in the Open Sea*. Yet, the writer unconsciously suppresses himself, restraining his own freedom. He realizes that destruction is impossible without first dismantling himself as a writer. Thus, the narrative imposes its own logic upon him—he seeks to articulate the unspoken, to voice the irrational that defies imagination. He aims to reveal the depths of the self, to express its profound and distant recesses. And he accomplishes all of this with a language that seems as if it never lay dormant in dictionaries like lifeless relics, as if it were a rebirth of language itself.

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