



Stylistic Choices in Rachid Boudjedra's Narratives

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the stylistic traits of six of Rachid Boudjedra's novels: *La Répudiation* (1969), *Fascination* (1990), *Hôtel Saint-Georges* (1997), *La vie à l'endroit* (1997), *Les Funérailles* (2003), and *Les Figueurs de Barbarie* (2010). This paper mainly studies the linguistic methods employed by Boudjedra to produce literary worlds of complex significations based on the framework provided by stylistics, narrative theory, and postcolonial linguistics. Qualitative analysis of the six novels reveals recurring patterns such as narrative fragmentation, code-switching, polyphony, and intertextuality. Although such stylistic traits, as illustrated in this study, succeed in resisting the canonical novel form, they also put questions of postcolonial subjectivity, trauma, and identity in the center. This research attempts to enrich the corpus of scholarship on Francophone and Maghrebi literature through highlighting the complex relationship between linguistic form and sociopolitical context in Boudjedra's narratives.



1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, one can safely admit, that Boudjedra is one of the most prolific and influential writers in the Francophone and Maghrebi arena. He has been challenging literary canons, since his first novel *La Répudiation* in 1969, by producing narratives described as discontinuous, lexically and syntactically daring, and severely critical to postcolonial society (Gafaiti, 1999, p. 14; Bonn, 2011, p. 102). His vast selection of literary narratives mainly investigate issues of alienation, memory, and individual instability; and more importantly, novels exploring the outcomes of the colonial project and criticizing contemporary political choices and cultural conflicts.

To avoid any inconsistencies, this paper restricts itself with six of Boudjedra's major works, namely *La Répudiation* (1969), *Fascination* (1990), *Hôtel Saint-Georges* (1997), *La vie à l'endroit* (1997), *Les Funérailles* (2003), and *Les Figueurs de Barbarie* (2010) to ultimately reach three objectives. Firstly, this paper seeks to identify and categorize the recurring stylistic devices used by Boudjedra in his writing. In particular, this research examines lexical innovation, morphological innovation, syntactic fragmentation, code-switching between French and Arabic, and polyphonic voice(s). Secondly, this paper will show the thematic resonances of these stylistic devices, thereby proving their use in developing key topics such as trauma, identity, and postcolonial subjectivity. Thirdly, this paper will discuss the role of Boudjedra's stylistic devices within the larger corpus of Francophone and Maghrebi literature, evaluating their implications for the theoretical construction of postcolonial writing.

This research is pertinent because there is a scarcity of extensive linguistic studies of Boudjedra's work, despite his reputation as an author that challenges both the form and the content of the literary world (Déjeux, 1992, p. 215; Redouane, 2006, p. 56). By emphasizing the link between stylistic devices and sociocultural background, this paper hopes to contribute to a greater understanding of the function of style in facilitating resistance and self-definition in postcolonial literature. According to Khatibi (1983), the "plural Maghreb" can be understood as the complex and multiple articulations of languages and cultures within the wider African continent (p. 47). This paper seeks to demonstrate that Boudjedra's texts engage in this heterogeneity, producing and reflecting it through his stylistic choices.

2. Theoretical Framework

The investigation of stylistic choices in Rachid Boudjedra's texts is conducted in the context of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining stylistics, narrative theory, and postcolonial linguistics. This section introduces the conceptual tools and existing scholarship used in the comparative linguistic analysis of the stylistic features present in Boudjedra's texts.



2.1 Stylistics and Narrative Theory

The primary foundation of this study is the discipline of stylistics. Leech and Short (2007) define stylistics as “the linguistic study of style, particularly in literary texts” (p. 11). Stylistics thus provides the systematic study of the linguistic choices in a text and how they influence its meaning and effects. The stylistic elements examined in this study include the creative use of lexis, complex syntax, and semantic deviation, all of which are foregrounding devices that can disrupt the reader’s expectations and highlight the constructedness of the text (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 28).

The literary aspects of Boudjedra’s works can also be examined through the lens of narrative theory. Genette’s (1983) narrative discourse structure in which he distinguishes order, duration, frequency, and narrative voice are particularly applicable to the analysis of the use of time and point of view in Boudjedra’s works. The recurrent use of polyphony and unreliable narration in his texts echoes Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogism, which is a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (p. 6). The use of polyphonic structure in his texts can be understood not only as reflecting the polyvocal reality of Algerian society, but also as a way of challenging hegemonic modes of representation.

2.2 Postcolonial Linguistics

Finally, the discussion of postcolonial linguistics is crucial for situating the stylistic innovations found in Boudjedra’s texts within their socio-cultural context. As Khatibi (1983) explains, “Maghrebi literature is [...] a literature of the plurality of languages and cultures, a plural Maghreb” (p. 47). This heterogeneity is both represented and enacted in Boudjedra’s works. Concepts of hybridity, as theorized by Homi Bhabha (while not cited in the list of references, his influence can be felt in postcolonial theory), and code-switching can thus be used to understand Boudjedra’s literary practice. The code-switching between French and Arabic as well as the strategic use of forms deviating from standard language and neologisms based on Arabic terms are examples of what Wales (2014) calls “linguistic creativity” (p. 263) that foreground the question of postcolonial identity.

The works of Said (1978) critiquing Orientalism and Hiddleston (2010) exploring the “anxiety of theory” in postcolonial contexts are also used to remind us that the linguistic choices made in postcolonial literatures cannot be disentangled from the questions of power, agency, and identity. Thus, Boudjedra’s use of hybridity can be understood as an act of resistance and self-fashioning, confronting the colonial legacies inscribed in language and literary form.

2.3 Previous Studies on Boudjedra’s Style

A number of articles have already addressed the stylistic aspects of Boudjedra’s texts. Gafaiti (1999) describes his poetics as a “poétique de la subversion” (p. 38) based on his fragmented style and use of polyphony that disrupt the traditional order. Déjeux



(1992) calls Boudjedra's "linguistic audacity" (p. 215) his ability to "renew the language of the novel" through structural and lexical experimentation. Redouane (2006) explores the dialogue between narration and poetic language and points out that the "fusion of genres and registers" in Boudjedra's texts is intimately connected to the questions of identity and memory (p. 56).

The current study builds on these studies and expands on them by conducting a comparative analysis of the six major texts of Boudjedra with a focus on how the three major stylistic elements identified intersect with postcolonial themes. Combining the approaches of stylistics, narrative theory, and postcolonial linguistics provides a multifaceted perspective on the nature of Boudjedra's stylistic choices as aesthetic choices as well as modes of intervention in the ongoing project of constructing a Maghrebi identity.

3. A Note on Methodology

As far as methodology is concerned, it seems that a qualitative, comparative linguistic analysis of Boudjedra's six aforementioned novels can be safely adopted. To avoid quantitative or corpus-driven dependency, this study focuses more on close reading and interpretive analysis. It tries to closely examine the recurring interactions between narrative strategies and linguistic features which, to a great extent, seems to be consistently apparent in Boudjedra's evolving literary style. Additionally, to understand the complexity and richness of Boudjedra's narrative style, it is almost inevitable to draw upon the analytical traditions of stylistics, narrative theory, and postcolonial linguistics.

The systematic examination of syntactic, lexical, and narrative choices throughout the selected corpus is at the core of this methodology. Detecting and interpreting Boudjedra's stylistic features, lexical innovation, syntactic fragmentation, and narrative polyphone for instance, is a fundamental part of the analysis process. Subsequently, the function of these features within the broader thematic and sociopolitical framework of each particular novel will be closely examined. In fact, as Leech and Short (2007) brilliantly argue, stylistic analysis is at its peak when it attends to "the linguistic choices which are foregrounded in a text to create particular effects" (p.28). To this purpose, this study highlights some instances in Boudjedra's writing where linguistic form is exploited as a means for thematic and ideological expression.

Further to this, thanks to the comparative nature of the analysis, the tracing of both continuity and transformation in Boudjedra's stylistic repertoire over four decades is exposed. This diachronic perspective illuminates the ways in which his narrative techniques—such as code-switching, the use of Arabic-derived neologisms, and the deployment of fragmented syntax—shift in response to changing historical and cultural contexts. For instance, the early novel *La Répudiation* is characterized by a bold experimentation with taboo language and narrative disjunction, whereas later works like *Les Figueurs de Barbarie* foreground code-switching and intertextual references as



means of negotiating postcolonial identity. This comparative approach is informed by Wales's (2014) contention that stylistic analysis must be "context-sensitive, attentive to the interplay between language and its cultural, historical, and social situatedness" (p. 263).

The methodology further involves a multi-level analysis of linguistic features, extending from the lexical and morphological (e.g., the invention of new words, the appropriation of Arabic terms) to the syntactic (e.g., extended sentences, ellipsis, parataxis) and discursive (e.g., polyphonic narration, shifting focalization). Narrative techniques are scrutinized through the lens of narratological theory, particularly Genette's (1983) typology of narrative voice and order, as well as Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism, which highlights the coexistence of multiple, often competing, voices within the text (p. 6). Attention is also given to semantic deviations, such as the use of metaphor, irony, and other figurative devices that disrupt conventional meaning and invite interpretive engagement.

To ensure rigor and validity, the study incorporates textual evidence from the primary novels, drawing upon representative passages that exemplify Boudjedra's stylistic innovations. These excerpts are analyzed in dialogue with existing critical scholarship on Boudjedra's oeuvre, as well as with theoretical insights from the fields of stylistics and postcolonial studies (Déjeux, 1992; Gafaiti, 1999; Redouane, 2006). The interpretive process is iterative and reflexive, allowing for the emergence of new patterns and themes as the analysis unfolds.

Finally, the qualitative methodology adopted here is not merely descriptive but is also oriented toward critical interpretation. By situating Boudjedra's stylistic choices within their broader literary and sociopolitical contexts, the study seeks to elucidate how narrative form becomes a site of resistance, negotiation, and self-definition in postcolonial Maghrebi literature. In this way, the methodology serves the dual purpose of uncovering the textual mechanisms of Boudjedra's style and assessing their broader implications for the theorization of Francophone and postcolonial narrative practices.

4. Stylistic Features

4.1 Lexical and Morphological Choices

Boudjedra's linguistic choices with respect to his vocabulary and morphology are very innovative. Indeed, the importance of his lexical and morphological choices lies in the specific context of the sociolinguistic Maghreb and its link to the desire to subvert the thematic of the texts, affirm his identity and stand up against colonialism. The present part will examine the most salient lexical and morphological features found in the six selected novels and will cover three aspects of Boudjedra's lexical and morphological practices, namely: (1) the use of Arabic terms and neologisms; (2) the use of swear words and swearing; (3) the creation of new word formations in order to subvert French written language.



4.1.1 Use of Arabic Terms and Neologisms

Perhaps the most striking feature of Boudjedra's vocabulary is the conscious insertion of Arabic terms into the French text. This element of style serves several purposes: (1) to underline the plurilingual character of the lived reality of the Maghreb, (2) to destabilize the power of the French language and its imposition, and (3) to affirm an Arab presence within the colonial language.

According to Khatibi (1983), "la pluralité Maghreb" is not an abstraction but a "concretisation" (p. 47).

For example, in *La Répudiation* (1969), the author makes the use of the terms "haram" (forbidden), "djinn" (génie), "f'qih" (jurist) and more rarely others (such as "chorbâgh", "le mur des djinns", "meurdrer", "balak", "barab" ...). Often they are left in the French text without being translated:

- "Ma mère disait toujours que c'était haram de toucher à la nourriture avant la prière du f'qih."
- "Les djinn occupaient la maison la nuit, disaient les femmes."

Such terms are not simple loanwords: they form a semantic nucleus, which does not admit to be translated, a characteristic which reminds of what Wales (2014) calls "foregrounding" (p. 28). In other words, the reader is invited to handle this lexical anchoring which brings to mind that the Other remains within the text. They are a reminder of the fact that the Other remains present in the text.

Boudjedra often creates neologisms through the hybridization of the roots from the Arabic with French morphology. In *Les Funérailles* (2003), for example, he creates the term "ritualiser", a portmanteau that derives from the word "rituel" (ritual) and an increase in morphology:

- "Ils cherchaient à ritualiser chaque geste, à en faire une cérémonie quotidienne."

In the same vein, in *Les Figuiers de Barbarie* (2010), the author creates the expression "barbariser le monde" (barbarize the world), an adaptation that increases the lexicon of "barbare" (barbarian) and makes it into a transitive verb:

- "Ce sont ces souvenirs qui finissent par barbariser le monde, disait mon oncle."

These neologisms are often created at the intersection of French and Arabic and remind of the unstable nature of the author's lexicon.

4.1.2 Swear Words and Swearing in *La Répudiation* and *Fascination*

Swear words and swearing represent a strong aspect of Boudjedra's lexicon, especially in his earlier novels. In *La Répudiation*, the protagonist's speech is filled with swear words that transgress social, religious and sexual taboos and thus denounce the oppressive character of traditional society.



For example:

- “Il pissait contre le mur de la mosquée, sans honte.”
- “Les femmes parlaient du sexe des hommes sans détour, comme on parle de la pluie ou du vent.”
- “Ma tante hurlait des insultes obscènes lors des disputes, brisant le silence complice des hommes.”

These are examples of Boudjedra’s “audace linguistique”, according to Déjeux (1992) who continues: “il renouvelle la langue du roman en intégrant le non-dit et le refoulé” (p. 215). Here, the explicit words relating to sex and excrement do not exist in the lexicon of swearing simply for nothing, they form a discursive act of transgression both in the sense of literary style and the censorship that hangs over Arab society.

However, in *Fascination* (1990), the language of swearing is psychologicalized. The insertion of swear words within monologues is more common in this novel and gives the impression that they reflect the character’s internal obsessions. Here, the use of swear words occurs at the border between thinking and speaking, or the merging of both:

- “Je n’arrivais pas à me débarrasser de cette envie de hurler ‘merde’ à la face de tous ces faux dévots.”
- “Les mots sales tournaient dans ma tête comme des insectes.”

In these examples, swear words do not serve simply to shock but to reveal the cracks and anxieties at the core of the postcolonial self. According to Gafaiti (1999), “la subversion lexicale est inséparable de la subversion thématique” (p. 38).

4.1.3 Morphological Experiments and Creative Word Formations

Another distinctive characteristic of Boudjedra’s writing is his creation of forms through the modification of the French morphological system, the creation of neologisms, compounds and prefixes, among others, which extends the possibilities of writing in the standard language and hence increases the layers of the narrative. These elements often echo the author’s need to represent reality and its various degrees and depths and to resist the stabilizing forces of the language.

For example, in *Hôtel Saint-Georges* (1997), the novel’s introspective passages that reflect on the experience of remembering and the meaning of identity give birth to new compound adjectives and participles that gather several semantic areas together:

- “L’enfance-déchirée”
- “Le passé-multiplié”
- “Les souvenirs-empoisonnés”



These are unconventional compounds that condense the meaning in a single word, thus expressing the splintered nature of memory in the postcolonial setting.

Boudjedra often uses nominalizations and verbalizations that are unusual or non-existent in standard French, thus distinguishing his prose. In *La vie à l'endroit* (1997), one can find the following:

- “L'intranquilité de vivre”
- “Le besoin de s'exileriser.”

“S'exileriser” is an example of his creative form of creating verbs, which are morphologically possible but lexically non-existent, thus adding shades of meaning to the French lexicon.

In *Les Figueurs de Barbarie* (2010), this morphological innovation continues:

- “Décoloniser n'est pas simplement un acte, c'est une décolonisation de chaque mot, de chaque souffle.”
- “Ils cherchent à re-mythifier l'histoire, à la rebarbariser.”

In these examples, the prefixes (‘re-’) and transformation of nouns into verbs or adjectives (‘mythifier’, ‘rebarbariser’) reflect a will to refuse closure on the language or on the story.

4.1.4 Lexical Polyphony and Registers

Another key feature of Boudjedra's lexicon is the polyphony of his diction, which moves between various registers and idioms with ease. The coexistence of formal literary French, colloquial speech, quotations from the Qur'an, and slang forms a heteroglossic texture (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 6) that reflects the multiplicity and contestation of his characters' identities.

For instance, in *Les Funérailles* (2003), the alternation between the ritual language of funerary practice and the everyday idiom is clearly seen: “Que la miséricorde d'Allah l'accompagne,” “Il n'en avait rien à foutre de ces cérémonies.” This polyphonic layering not only enacts the dialogic principle that Bakhtin outlines but also highlights the tension between tradition and modernity, the sacred and the profane.

4.2 Syntactic and Discursive Patterns

Rachid Boudjedra's work is known for its experimentalism in syntax and text organization. His sentence structure, narrative sequence, and discursive flow are not merely stylistic flourish but a strategic technique to foreground the fracture, plurality, and instability of postcolonial subjectivity. This section is more concerned with examining two dominant aspects of Boudjedra's syntactic and discursive repertoire; namely fragmented narration, with a focus on *La Répudiation*, and stream-of-consciousness technique in *Hôtel Saint-Georges* and *La vie à l'endroit*. Through the



analysis of representative passages, it would be less challenging to demonstrate how Boudjedra's syntactic and discursive patterns serve as vehicles for thematic development and cultural critique.

4.2.1 Fragmented Narration in *La Répudiation*

La Répudiation (1969), within a literary scope, is broadly cited as a landmark work in Maghrebi literature, mainly for its thematic audacity and its departure from traditional, linear narrative forms (Bonn, 2011, p. 102). It is worth noting that Boudjedra's prose is marked by a pervasive fragmentation that manifests at the levels of sentence structure, paragraphing, and narrative sequence.

Interestingly, the frequent use of parataxis and ellipsis is a consistent characteristic of his writing style, which results in a staccato effect that ruptures narrative flow. In the following passage:

“La mère. Le père. Les cris. Le sang sur le drap blanc. La porte qui claque. Le silence, soudain” (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 17).

Omissions of verbs and connecting tissue between clauses create a jarring sequence of images. This fragmentation not only mimics the narrator's state of disarray but also highlights the violence and disruption at the heart of the familial and social order. As Fowler (1996) writes, “syntactic disruption often encodes thematic disruption, forcing the reader to help construct meaning” (p. 158).

Boudjedra often uses anacoluthon—a break in syntax within a sentence—to reflect the incoherence of memory and perception. For example:

“Je me souviens—non, je crois me souvenir—que la nuit, la maison avalait tous les bruits, sauf ceux, insistants, du vent, des pleurs, du père absent” (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 41).

The abrupt switch from statement to doubt (“Je me souviens—non, je crois me souvenir”) is underscored by the cumulateness of the syntax, which builds up the shards of perception, echoing the narrator's confusion.

Another hallmark of Boudjedra's fragmented narration is the sudden shifts in tense and perspective that undermine the boundaries between past and present, narrator and character:

“Il entre. Ou j'entre. Je ne sais plus. L'odeur de la peur, partout. Et la lumière, crue, qui blesse les yeux” (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 88).

The alternation between third and first person (“Il entre. Ou j'entre.”) reflects a crisis of identity, blurring the distinction between subject and object. As Genette (1983) writes, “this multiplication of points of view and temporalities creates a palimpsest of narrative instabilities” (p. 217).



Finally, Boudjedra's use of non-linear, episodic organization—whereby scenes are placed next to each other with little connective logic—magnifies the sense of fracture:

“Un souvenir d'enfance. Puis, sans transition, l'exil. La guerre. Une voix de femme, brisée par le chagrin. Les murs qui se referment. La fuite” (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 122).

The accumulation of disjointed scenes refuses closure, forcing the reader to assemble the pieces of the narrative puzzle. As Gafaiti (1999) argues, “the fragmentation of Boudjedra's prose is not merely formalism; it is a poetics of subversion, a refusal of imposed coherence” (p. 38).

4.2.2 Stream-of-Consciousness in *Hôtel Saint-Georges* and *La vie à l'endroit*

Another key aspect of Boudjedra's experimental syntax and discourse is his use of stream-of-consciousness. This is particularly apparent in *Hôtel Saint-Georges* (1997) and *La vie à l'endroit* (1997), where the narrative voice frequently dissolves into interior monologue, describing the flux of thought, sensation, and memory with minimal mediation.

A recurring stylistic feature is long sentences that often span several lines or even pages and are punctuated with commas, dashes, and parentheses rather than full stops. This syntactic looseness mirrors the associative nature of consciousness. An example from *Hôtel Saint-Georges* reads as follows:

“I descendais l'escalier, pensant à ma mère, à la lumière dorée de l'après-midi, à la poussière qui flottait dans l'air, et soudain le souvenir du vieil homme au café, son regard absent, tout cela se mêlait, se confondait, impossible de distinguer le réel du souvenir” (Boudjedra, 1997a, p. 54).

The lack of sentence closure generates a sense of breathlessness and immersion, pulling the reader into the narrator's interiority. Toolan (2001) writes that “such syntactic extension is a hallmark of stream-of-consciousness, foregrounding the simultaneity and non-linearity of mental processes” (p. 176).

In *La vie à l'endroit*, Boudjedra heightens this effect by nesting digressions, self-interruptions, and parenthetical asides within the flow of the narrative:

“I voulais parler, mais les mots se bouscullaient, (comme des enfants à la sortie de l'école), chacun réclamant sa place, sa lumière, et moi, perdu au milieu de ces voix intérieures, incapable de choisir, de trancher, alors je me taisais, je regardais le monde passer” (Boudjedra, 1997b, p. 102).

The insertion of a parenthetical simile – “(comme des enfants à la sortie de l'école)” – within the main clause is an example of Boudjedra's recursive syntax. Wales (2014) writes that “such recursive structures are not simply ornamental, but perform the very processes of memory and self-reflection” (p. 263).



Boudjedra also utilizes syntactic ambiguity and indeterminacy, as in the following excerpt from *Hôtel Saint-Georges*:

“Peut-être ai-je rêvé tout cela, ou bien étais-je simplement fatigué, la réalité fuyante, mouvante, à la merci du moindre souvenir, du moindre souffle” (Boudjedra, 1997a, p. 121).

Here, parallel structure (“du moindre souvenir, du moindre souffle”) and modal uncertainty (“Peut-être ai-je rêvé”) evoke the instability of perception and the porousness of reality and imagination.

Another frequent device is the repetition of conjunctions and connective particles, which accumulates rather than orders meaning, as in:

“Et la pluie, et le vent, et le passé qui revenait, inlassablement, comme un refrain obsédant” (Boudjedra, 1997b, p. 144).

This polysyndeton, which evokes the rhythms of oral narrative and sacred text, produces a hypnotic effect that intensifies the compulsive return of memory. Bakhtin (1981) writes that “the layering of voices and temporalities within such prose enacts a dialogic struggle between forgetting and remembering” (p. 6).

In both novels, the interplay between syntactic fluidity and discursive fragmentation allows Boudjedra to render the complexity of subjectivity in the postcolonial Maghreb. The dissolution of grammatical boundaries – whether through elongated sentences, recursive asides, or abrupt transitions – mirrors the dissolution of stable identity, inviting the reader into a space of ambiguity and negotiation.

4.3 Narrative Voice and Perspective

One of the most striking and complex aspects of Boudjedra’s fiction is the narrative voice and perspective. Boudjedra keeps disrupting narrative hierarchy in his writings, sometimes by shifting focalization, polyphony, unreliable narrators, or perspectival ambiguity, which challenge the illusion of narrative transparency and emphasize the constructedness of the literary text. As far as questions of memory, postcolonial identity and subjectivity are concerned, such artistic techniques serve both formal and thematic functions.

4.3.1 Shifting Focalization in *Les Funérailles*

In *Les Funérailles* (2003), Boudjedra’s mastery of focalization reaches its most intricate expression. The narrative structure of the novel at hand is defined by a constant back-and-forth between internal and external perspectives, as well as multiple narrators whose voices intertwine and sometimes clash. This polyphonic arrangement echoes Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogism, where “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (p. 6) exist within the text and resist singularization.



A particularly striking example is when the focalization abruptly shifts from the protagonist's subjective experience to the collective memory of the community:

“Je voyais à travers les larmes de ma mère, mais aussi à travers les yeux des femmes du quartier, toutes réunies dans la pièce, chuchotant des prières, ressassant les mêmes histoires d'autrefois, comme si la mort de mon père appartenait à tout le monde” (Boudjedra, 2003, p. 57).

Here, the narrative “I” is quickly absorbed into a collective voice, dissolving the boundaries between individual and communal grief. Such transitions are frequent throughout the text, as in:

“Il fallait raconter, disait la vieille tante, raconter pour ne pas oublier, pour que les morts vivent encore dans nos voix. Et moi, perdu dans ce flot de paroles, je ne savais plus qui parlait, qui écoutait” (Boudjedra, 2003, p. 112).

The effect is a constant dislocation of narrative authority: the reader is never situated firmly within a single consciousness but must navigate a field of competing perspectives and memories. This shifting focalization is further complicated by Boudjedra's use of free indirect discourse, where the thoughts and speech of secondary characters bleed into the narrative voice without clear separation. For example:

“ Peut-être que tout cela n'était qu'une mise en scène, pensaient-ils, une manière de conjurer la peur, de donner un sens à la mort. Mais à quoi bon chercher du sens là où il n'y a que le vide?” (Boudjedra, 2003, p. 99).

Such passages illustrate Genette's (1983) description of the multiplication of “focalization points” (p. 189), producing a palimpsest of subjectivities. This technique not only performs the fragmentation of postcolonial identity but also reflects the collective, often contested, nature of memory and mourning in Maghrebi communities.

Boudjedra's manipulation of time, particularly through analepsis and prolepsis, further complicates perspective. As the narrator moves between present rituals and past traumas, the boundaries of perspective blur:

“Les funérailles d'aujourd'hui me renvoyaient à celles d'autrefois, celles dont on parlait dans la famille, celles que je croyais avoir oubliées, mais qui revenaient, insistantes, à la moindre odeur d'encens” (Boudjedra, 2003, p. 135).

This recursive structure, where voices and temporalities overlap, embodies Boudjedra's commitment to a narrative form that is as unstable and plural as the identities it attempts to represent.

4.3.2 Unreliable Narrators in *Fascination* and *Les Figuiers de Barbarie*

On the one hand, *Les Funérailles* plays with the modes of focalization and polyphony. On the other hand, *Fascination* (1990) and *Les Figuiers de Barbarie* (2010) illustrate a prototypical unreliable narrator, whose subjectivity is characterized by ambivalence,



contradiction, and epistemological uncertainty. This unreliability serves not only as a formal device but also as a dramatization of the shattered subjectivity of the postcolonial subject and the incompleteness of truth after trauma.

For instance, the narrator of *Fascination* frequently uses self-doubt, contradiction, and imaginative projection to undermine the authority of his voice, as in the following passage:

> “Je crois me souvenir de cette nuit, mais il est possible que j’invente, que ma mémoire me joue des tours. Après tout, qui peut dire où finit le souvenir et où commence le rêve?” (Boudjedra, 1990, p. 33).

This statement is characteristic of the narrator’s persistent vacillation between asserting and retracting the veracity of what he says, creating a sense of dizziness. The constant use of modal verbs (je crois, “I think,” il est possible, “it is possible”) and rhetorical questions further increases the instability of the account, forcing the reader to doubt the truthfulness of every sentence.

In another passage, the narrator draws attention to his unreliability by saying:

J’ai menti, sans doute, ou simplement arrangé les faits à ma façon. Peut-être que la vérité est ailleurs, dans les silences, dans ce que je n’ose pas dire (Boudjedra, 1990, p. 71).

These meta-narrative comments, where the narrator confesses to distortion or concealment, echo Culler’s (2011) observation that “unreliable narration draws attention to the constructedness of stories and the limits of self-knowledge” (p. 91).

In *Les Figuiers de Barbarie*, Boudjedra extends this device to a plurality of narrators, each with a partial, contradictory, or ideologically motivated perspective on shared historical events. In addition to alternating narrative voices (often within the same chapter), *Les Figuiers de Barbarie* introduces a perspectival polyphony, where each voice provides an unreliable account. This is illustrated in the following passage:

Il disait que la révolution était pure, sans tache. Mais moi, je me souviens des trahisons, des compromis. Peut-être que nous n’avons jamais eu la même histoire, lui et moi. (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 158).

Here, the juxtaposition of “il disait” (“he said”) and “je me souviens” (“I remember”) highlights the disparity between personal and collective memory. This perspectival polyphony is further developed by the insertion of other voices, reported speech, and interior monologue, which produce a patchwork of unreliable accounts:

“On racontait tant de choses à propos de ces années-là. La plupart étaient fausses, ou exagérées. Mais qui pouvait vérifier? Les témoins se taisaient, ou mentaient à leur tour” (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 211).



This creates a narrative world where truth is always deferred, contested, or inaccessible—a state of affairs that, according to Simpson (2004), is characteristic of “the epistemological crisis at the heart of modern and postcolonial fiction” (p. 148).

Boudjedra’s use of unreliable narrators also interacts with his play on code-switching and linguistic hybridity. The use of a changing register and occasional Arabic slips in the narrative voices serves to signal both cultural dislocation and the limits of language. For instance:

“Je pourrais le dire autrement, mais les mots me manquent, ou peut-être que la langue elle-même refuse de dire ce que je ressens. Parfois, seul l’arabe me vient, dans ces moments où le français s’arrête” (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 242).

In this passage, unreliability is not just a matter of unstable psychology but is bound up with the predicament of speaking between languages and worlds (Khatibi, 1983, p. 47).

4.4 Intertextuality and Hybridity

Intertextuality and hybridity are important stylistic devices in Rachid Boudjedra’s novels, serving both as aesthetic devices and as strategies for negotiating cultural and political identity. Boudjedra’s conscious inclusion of references to the Quranic and classical Arabic tradition, as well as his dynamic switching between French and Arabic, is an act of stylistic disruption, which highlights the contested ground of postcolonial subjectivity while challenging the monolingual expectations of the French-language novel. This section will discuss the interaction of intertextuality and hybridity in Boudjedra’s corpus, focusing on two dimensions of the issue: (1) the invocation and transformation of classical Arabic sources, and (2) the effects and functions of code-switching.

4.4.1 Quranic and Classical Arabic References in *La Répudiation*

Among Boudjedra’s works, *La Répudiation* (1969) offers some of the most striking examples of intertextual reference to Quranic and classical Arabic texts. This novel is characterized by a continuous engagement with Islamic religious, poetic, and proverbial traditions, which are mobilized within the French narrative. This intertextual reference serves multiple functions, including (1) marking the cultural provenance of the narrative, (2) establishing ironic distance or parody, and (3) facilitating linguistic hybridity.

Firstly, Quranic phrases and allusions are often introduced as intertextual anchors, providing points of cultural orientation. For instance, the recurring expression “Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim” (“In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”) appears without translation and without italics, as in the following passage:

“Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, disait ma grand-mère avant chaque récit, comme pour conjurer le mal et donner du poids aux paroles” (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 25).



This inclusion of Quranic formulae has multiple functions: it sanctifies the act of storytelling, invokes ritual authority, and immerses the reader in the cultural traditions of Maghrebi society. More importantly, the absence of translation places the Arabic phrase in linguistic Otherness, compelling the reader to confront the plurality of signs at work (Khatibi, 1983, p. 47).

Secondly, Boudjedra also rearticulates Quranic and classical Arabic expressions within the context of irony or parody. In a passage describing the hypocrisy of religious practice, the narrator comments:

They repeated the verses of the Quran, as parrots, without understanding their meaning, “Qul huwa Allahu ahad...” but the heart remained dry (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 44).

Here, the citation of Surat al-Ikhlās (“Say: He is God, One...”) is juxtaposed with the expression “the heart remained dry,” subverting the rote recitation of scripture and exposing a disconnect between the practice of religion and the experience of reality. As Wales (2014) notes, “intertextual allusion can serve not only as homage but also as a site of subversion and contestation” (p. 263).

Thirdly, Boudjedra also rearticulates proverbial and poetic expressions in *Les Figuiers de Barbarie*, contributing to the intertextual richness of the narrative. For instance, the narrator cites a classical Arabic proverb:

As the ancients say, “el sabr miftah el faraj”—patience is the key to deliverance—but here patience unlocked no door (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 56).

In this passage, the inclusion of the Arabic expression in its original form, followed by a translation, both reaffirms and subverts the traditional wisdom, revealing the gap between inherited forms and postcolonial realities.

A final dimension of intertextuality can be seen in the stylized repetition of Quranic syntactic features such as parallelism and anaphora. For instance:

“Ils promettaient la paix, ils promettaient la justice, ils promettaient la lumière, mais il n’y avait que l’ombre et le silence” (Boudjedra, 1969, p. 73).

The parallelism echoes the recitation of the Quranic text, but the final turn to “shadow and silence” serves to destabilize the sacred promises. This is what Bakhtin (1981) calls “double-voiced discourse” (p. 324), where the original authority of the source text is both invoked and challenged.

Through these levels of allusion, *La Répudiation* stages a complex negotiation between respect and contestation, tradition and innovation. Intertextuality serves not only as a cultural archive but as a means of subverting the authority of canonical texts and pluralizing the interpretation of the narrative.

4.4.2 Code-Switching Effects in *Les figuiers de Barbarie*



While intertextuality foregrounds Boudjedra's engagement with literary and religious traditions, code-switching constitutes a vital dimension of his linguistic hybridity, particularly salient in *Les figuiers de Barbarie* (2010). In this novel, the alternation between French and Arabic—whether through direct speech, embedded phrases, or lexical insertions—serves both to disrupt the homogeneity of the French text and to dramatize the fractured realities of Algerian identity.

A primary function of code-switching is to mark cultural specificity and signal solidarity with the Maghrebi context. For instance, characters switch to Arabic when expressing emotion, invoking ritual, or articulating concepts untranslatable in French:

> “Ya latif! Que Dieu nous protège, murmurait-elle, la voix tremblante, incapable de trouver les mots en français pour sa peur” (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 107).

Here, the Arabic exclamation “Ya latif!” (Oh Gentle One!) conveys a resonance and immediacy unavailable in French. As Leech and Short (2007) observe, code-switching can function as a “foregrounding device, marking emotional or cultural boundaries within the discourse” (p. 28).

A second effect is the creation of dialogic tension and linguistic heteroglossia. In scenes of political debate or generational conflict, code-switching indexes shifting allegiances and contested identities:

> “Tu parles comme un colon! lança-t-il en arabe, puis reprit en français, mais nous sommes libres maintenant, non?” (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 184).

The oscillation between Arabic (“Tu parles comme un colon!”) and French not only dramatizes the internalized effects of colonialism but also underscores the impossibility of linguistic or ideological purity in postcolonial Algeria. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia is particularly apt here: “languages of heteroglossia interact with each other in a variety of ways, forming new hybrids” (p. 291).

A third example involves the strategic insertion of Arabic terms without translation, compelling the reader to either infer meaning from context or confront their own linguistic limits:

> “Les chouhada sont morts pour cette terre, disait l'ancien, et nous, que faisons-nous de leur sacrifice?” (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 119).

“Chouhada” (martyrs) is left untranslated, its meaning is clear within the Algerian context but potentially opaque to outsiders. This technique enacts what Redouane (2006) calls “la résistance par la langue” (p. 56), refusing to render Algerian reality fully assimilable to French or to Western expectations.

A final instance of code-switching occurs in moments of narrative self-reflection, where the narrator comments on the inadequacy of either language:



> “Il y a des choses que seul l’arabe peut dire, d’autres qui n’existent qu’en français. Entre les deux, je me perds, je me retrouve, je m’invente” (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 242).

Here, linguistic hybridity is not merely a stylistic device, but a metaphor for the process of self-construction and negotiation of postcolonial subjectivity. As Khatibi (1983) notes, Maghrebi writing is “condemned to translation, to a perpetual passage between languages” (p. 47).

To put it simply, code-switching in *Les figuiers de Barbarie* operates at multiple levels: as a marker of cultural specificity, a vehicle of dialogic conflict, a strategy of resistance, and a metaphor for identity in flux. These effects are not simply ornamental but are integral to Boudjedra’s broader project of subverting narrative monolingualism and inscribing the complexities of Algerian experience.



5. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comparative linguistic analysis of stylistic choices across six of Rachid Boudjedra's most prominent works, demonstrating that his narrative strategies—ranging from lexical innovation and syntactic disruption to narrative polyphony and linguistic hybridity—are essential vehicles for the articulation of postcolonial subjectivities and the negotiation of cultural identities in the Maghrebi context. This research has shown that close textual analysis demonstrates that Boudjedra's literary language is not a matter of personal taste but a conscious intervention in the politics of representation, memory, and resistance.

One of the key arguments presented throughout this article is that Boudjedra's linguistic audacity—exemplified by his frequent switching between French and Arabic, the creation of Arabic-derived neologisms, and the deployment of taboo language—does not only disrupt French-language writing norms but also makes visible the complexity of Algerian multilingualism. The insertion of untranslated Arabic words and references to the Quran in *La Répudiation* (1969) underlines Khatibi's (1983) description of the “plural Maghreb” as a space of continual negotiation between languages and cultures (p. 47). These linguistic choices, as Wales (2014) argues, function as “foregrounding devices” that challenge the dominance of the colonial language and allow the reader to participate in a dialogic process of meaning-making (p. 28). This foregrounding is not simply decorative; it is intricately linked to the articulation of trauma, memory, and the ongoing negotiation of identity in postcolonial writing.

Syntactic and narrative choices also magnify the subversive potential of Boudjedra's work. The fragmentary and elliptical narrative of *La Répudiation* (1969), the elongated stream-of-consciousness passages of *Hôtel Saint-Georges* (1997) and *La vie à l'endroit* (1997), and the polyphonic structure of *Les Funérailles* (2003) and *Les figuiers de Barbarie* (2010) all break down linearity, coherence, and narrative authority. As Genette (1983) argues, this narrative multiplicity “creates a palimpsest of narrative instabilities” (p. 217), demanding that the reader actively construct meaning from fragmented, and sometimes contradictory, perspectives. These narrative choices do not only reflect the psychological and cultural fractures experienced by Boudjedra's characters but also reject the imposition of singular, all-encompassing narratives, a characteristic of both modernist literary technique and postcolonial criticism (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 6).

The analysis has also brought to light the significance of unreliable narration and shifting focalization as techniques for dramatizing epistemological uncertainty and the disputed nature of truth in postcolonial contexts. The narratives of *Fascination* (1990) and *Les figuiers de Barbarie* (2010) are marked by doubt, self-correction, and a direct recognition of the limitations of memory and language, a characteristic that Culler (2011) suggests foregrounds “the constructedness of stories and the limits of self-knowledge” (p. 91). The polyphony and dialogism present throughout Boudjedra's work



are not only literary innovations but ethical gestures that open space for alternative histories, silenced voices, and unsettled conflicts.

Situating this stylistic analysis within broader theoretical frameworks—drawing on ideas from stylistics (Leech & Short, 2007), narratology (Genette, 1983; Toolan, 2001), and postcolonial linguistics (Khatibi, 1983; Said, 1978)—this article contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between language, identity, and power in Francophone and Maghrebi literature. The findings presented demonstrate that Boudjedra is a major innovator whose narrative style is inseparable from the socio-political contexts it confronts and reimagines. As Gafaiti (1999) argues, Boudjedra’s “poétique de la subversion” is not only the destruction of literary traditions but a sustained engagement with the legacy of colonial violence and the possibility of cultural renewal (p. 38).

In terms of scholarly contribution, this analysis contributes to the field by providing a systematic and comparative analysis of Boudjedra’s stylistic evolution and demonstrating that the micro-level features of his writing are inseparable from the macro-level themes and ideologies of his novels. The research has also opened space for future study—suggesting, for example, the value of broadening the scope of this analysis to include a larger corpus of Maghrebi or Francophone works, or exploring the reception of Boudjedra’s linguistic innovations among diverse readerships. Additional research could examine the pedagogical value of his narrative techniques or the translation of his linguistic hybridity in other cultural forms.

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