

Received date: 27.12.2024  
Accepted date: 14.02.2025  
Publication date: 17.03.2025



Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems

International Academic Journal

ISSN: 2790-0169; E-ISSN 2790-0177; OCLC Number 1322801874

## Folklore and Narration: A Language of Affirmation and a Space for Continuity

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### Abstract

This study, entitled "*Popular Heritage and Narrative as a Language of Affirmation and Continuity*," seeks to explore the presence of popular heritage in contemporary Algerian narrative discourse through various novelistic expressions. This heritage carries different meanings that transform it from merely being an act tied to the past into a present cultural phenomenon through which self-identity and national identity are affirmed amid the intermingling of popular and civilizational cultures.

**Keywords:** Heritage; Narrative; Manifestation; Patterns; Literature.

### Introduction

Popular literature represents the voice and conscience of the people, expressing their identity, aspirations, hopes, and pains, which are stored in the collective consciousness and manifested through various forms of popular expression, whether in poetry or prose. Popular literature is the creative

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product of multiple generations of humanity; it is not exclusive to one society over another but belongs to all of humanity. It is closely linked to daily human life, emerging in moments of joy and sorrow, wealth and poverty, as well as in both individual and collective experiences.

### 1- Popular Heritage: A Conceptual and Referential Analysis

Definitions and interpretations of the term *heritage* are numerous. It has been defined as “*an accumulation over time of traditions, customs, experiences, skills, arts, and sciences within a given people, forming an essential part of their social, human, political, historical, and moral fabric. It documents their connections with successive generations that contributed to the formation and enrichment of this heritage.*”

As researcher Tarek Ziadeh asserts, heritage signifies the presence of the origin—represented by the father (the past/ancestor)—in the son (the present/descendant). It carries two main interpretations: one focuses on its material aspect, such as books and libraries, while the other sees it in a moral sense, embodied in values that influence the present and the behaviors shaped by those values.

This perspective raises the fundamental question of whether heritage, with its deep-rooted authenticity, can adapt to modernity without undergoing transformation, alteration, or even distortion. Alternatively, can it remain firmly rooted, resisting all changes imposed by nature and society? As Adonis puts it, “*Heritage affirms forms or manifestations of thought, while the creator constantly returns to the pre-formation stage, to the original source in its purest eruptions. The former extends the duration of completeness, while the latter creates a new completeness.*”

In its artistic form, heritage manifests in “*the works of writers and artists, where these works become the result of a fusion between heritage elements and personal creative influences.*” In general, heritage encompasses everything connected to our identities and firmly rooted in our consciousness. It is both a symbol of our identity and a pathway to our future.

The researcher exploring the realm of popular culture will find that it represents both the people and the broader popular society. It is characterized by its adherence to heritage and fundamental organizational structures. European anthropologists argue that popular culture in Europe has an ancient character. However, popular culture is not merely the culture produced by the people; rather, it is the culture that the people accept, adopt, and carry forward. The focus on popular culture has therefore been directed at the reservoir of tales, myths, epics, and poetic and narrative arts, considering them as a cultural repository of social identity throughout historical periods.

Accordingly, popular heritage is the culture passed down from generation to generation, granting it continuity and permanence. In some aspects, it becomes an act and a behavior that the community upholds, reinforcing and instilling it in others. Nabihah Ibrahim asserts that “*popular heritage, in all its forms and manifestations, constitutes the essential component of a nation’s civilization. If civilization is a localized concept, then popular heritage can only demonstrate its value and*

*effectiveness when it accompanies the civilizational expansion of a given nation.*" She emphasizes the necessity of reviving and rejuvenating heritage.

The objective of returning to popular heritage is to overcome Western challenges or the process of Western acculturation, which has stripped Arabs of their authenticity and roots. As Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri affirms, *"heritage is not only sought to serve as a foundation for leaping into the future but also, and primarily, to reinforce the present, affirm existence, and establish identity."* This has made the language of heritage in narrative discourse a distinct creative feature that expresses reality in a simple literary style, shaped by diverse perspectives and producing a narrative discourse linked to heritage both semantically, artistically, and aesthetically.

## 2- Experimentation and Intersections with Heritage

One of the most distinguishing features of contemporary novelistic production is its transcendence of previous literary phases. The novel has become *"an artistic structure that engages in creative construction through semantic deviation, paradoxes, and imagination while addressing social issues within a marvelous context."* In this regard, Said Yaktine, in his book *Reading and Experimentation*, describes this transcendence, stating:

*"The excessive engagement in transcendence is what is usually referred to as 'experimentation.' This term became widely discussed in the mid-1970s in debates surrounding the short stories of Tazi and Madani, as well as in symposiums held on the sidelines of some visual art exhibitions or theatrical performances, particularly within the experimental works of Mohamed Tamed."*

Experimentation utilizes language as an artistic tool that goes beyond mere communication and transmission of meaning; instead, it infiltrates the inner selves of characters and their diverse inclinations, rendering them more lifelike than merely being figures on paper. In this sense, *"language in experimental literature is more than just a medium of expression and communication; it is an entity that contributes to character formation, a full-fledged participant in the narrative, representing a fundamental issue. It can even become a prison from which a person seeks to break free, dismantling its bars to escape its overwhelming power—for language itself is a stance."*

The Algerian novel has been rich in the language of popular heritage to construct a narrative with integrated spaces and various representations to deliver its message to the reader in multiple dialects. This is due to the techniques, structures, verbal and syntactic forms it possesses, intricately woven with heritage references that have deeply penetrated the narrative fabric and become an inseparable part of it. It has drawn from and interacted with various traditional forms, such as proverbial language, popular heritage language, colloquial dialect, the sacred text language, historical language, and everyday spoken language. Given this immense knowledge embodied in the heritage language, the Algerian novel has employed this heritage in service of the narrative text, breathing new life into the past. Thus, the novel has abundantly blended heritage themes with contemporary narrative text, with Algerian novelists furnishing their works with heritage elements that integrate

with the text just as elite life integrates with the rest of society. This renders the novel more realistic in the reader's mind, making them experience its details as if they were one of its characters. Consequently, the narrative language dissolves into the reader's spirit, ensuring the documentation of heritage interrelations with a high degree of harmony and cohesion.

### 3- Representations of the Heritage Language in Contemporary Algerian Novels:

The word "representation" in language means "to conceptualize an example of something," and it is said: "to represent something to oneself." In the Holy Quran, it is stated: "*Then We sent to her Our Spirit, and he appeared to her as a well-proportioned man*" (Surah Maryam, verse 16). It is also said: "*He set forth a parable.*" This concept has been reflected in literary works where novelists such as **Azeddine Jlaouji** in *Houba and the Quest for the Mahdi*, **Mohammed El-Amin Ben Rabia** in *May God Sanctify My Secret*, and **Waciny Laredj** in *The Jasmine Collar*, have drawn from the products of heritage (tradition) in its popular language and colloquial expressions. This creates a form of deviation in meaning between the authority of the absent text (heritage) and the present text (contemporary reality), forming a semantic harmony between the past and the present, granting the narrative scene a passage to explore the hidden heritage spaces conveyed through language.

#### - The Folk Song: A Space for Emphasis and Interaction:

The folk song is one of the most genuine artistic forms expressing the emotions, feelings, and experiences of the people, as it is deeply connected to their environment, social occasions, religious seasons, and celebrations. It is characterized by its simple form, free from complexity, performed in colloquial dialect, where grammatical and morphological rules are not strictly followed. It is sung in an improvised melody that becomes ingrained in the collective memory of the people, passed down and repeated from generation to generation. Folk poetry, in its lyrical form—words, melody, and music—occupies a prominent place in the popular heritage, spanning three dimensions:

- **Temporal:** It extends across historical epochs and continues into the present and future, serving as a poetic form that connects generations.

- **Spatial:** It spreads continuously, unrestricted by boundaries, from the shores of the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic coast.

- **Anthropological:** Through its improvised or inherited melodies, it expresses the deep emotions of Arabs and their need for creative freedom. Its words and celebratory performances reflect human behavior, emotions, philosophy, thoughts, and attitudes toward life's concerns.

Aware of the significance of folk poetry and its impact on literary texts, **Jlaouji** ensured that his writings incorporated examples of folk poetry. In *Houba*, folk songs genuinely express the characters' emotions and psychological states, ranging from love, sorrow, and longing. For example, one of the novel's characters, *Al-Arabi*, expresses his love for his French wife *Suzanne* by saying:

*"O people, fear God, do not blame me,*

*For my love for the foreigner, forgive me,*

*Is she not an angel who descended from paradise?*

*Even the angels understand me!"*

Another character, overwhelmed by yearning and longing, resonates with the following lines:

*"O night, tell me by God, how strong I am,*

*How did I leave my family and neighbors?*

*My sorrowful heart weeps, never comforting me."*

*"I cannot bear my exile, I cannot endure my humiliation."*

The novelist also integrates the poem *Hayzia* by **Mohammed Ben Qitoun** to express sorrow and lamentation, as seen in the following excerpt:

*"Console me, O noble ones, for the leader of the girls,*

*She now rests beneath the graves, my fire has subsided.*

*Alas, for the past days, when we were together,*

*The treasures of longing have now been destroyed."*

Similarly, **Waciny Laredj**, in his novel *The Jasmine Collar*, incorporates this folk song that emerges from the heart of Algerian reality. It carries memories of longing and nostalgia for youthful days, enriched with aesthetic language laden with colloquial expressions that deeply resonate with ordinary readers. This ensures the novel's accessibility to a broad audience. He writes:

*"O clouds, pour down, pour down,*

*But do not pour upon me,*

*Until my brother Hamou arrives,*

*And covers me with a carpet.*

*O clouds... O clouds... pour down... pour down..."*

The use of folk songs contributes to a spontaneous and unpretentious narrative style, allowing events to unfold naturally. Folk songs manage to encapsulate a heritage reference, carrying psychological and social dimensions with artistic flair and a unique aesthetic sense. This enhances the flow and progression of events, making them a key to interpreting and understanding the text. The beauty of the language in the lyrical passage stems from its ability to convey a wide range of emotions.

### **The Popular Proverb: A Cultural and Civilizational Value**

Definitions of proverbs vary, but they all agree that a proverb is a short, traditional phrase or sentence used in specific situations, often leaving a profound psychological impact on individuals. **Al-Farabi** defines a proverb as:

*"It is what both the common and the elite approve of in wording and meaning until it becomes a widely used expression, relied upon in both prosperity and adversity, and serves as a means to*

*achieve distant goals. It is the most eloquent form of wisdom, for people do not unanimously adopt something deficient.”*

From Al-Farabi’s perspective, a proverb stands out due to its brevity and eloquence, which facilitate its easy circulation within society. Furthermore, its symbolic nature should not be overlooked:

*“Proverbs are the embellishment of speech, the essence of expression, and the adornment of meanings. The Arabs selected them, and the non-Arabs embraced them. They have been spoken in every era and on every tongue, outlasting poetry and surpassing oratory. Nothing has spread as widely as they have, nor achieved their universality.”*

Regarding the term *popular*, its meaning differs across fields, but broadly speaking:

*“The term ‘popular’ is distinct from ‘populist.’ The former refers to anything closely connected to the people, whether in form or content. Any practice described as ‘popular’ means it is either produced by the people or belongs to them.”*

Thus, like other oral narratives, the popular proverb is closely tied to the people. This applies to various folk traditions, such as folk tales, folk songs, and other artistic and literary forms created by the collective imagination of the local community, commonly referred to as *the people*.

We must draw attention to the fact that there is a difference between (the proverb, the saying, and wisdom). Wisdom, in general, comes from sages, philosophers, or preachers, who are the elite and noble of society. It has been mentioned in the Holy Quran in several instances, including, but not limited to, the verse in Surah Al-Baqarah:

*“He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.”* (Al-Baqarah, 269)

And in Surah Luqman, it is mentioned in describing Luqman, peace be upon him: *“And We certainly gave Luqman wisdom, [and said], ‘Be grateful to Allah.’ And whoever is grateful is grateful for himself, and whoever denies [His favor] – then indeed, Allah is Free of need and Praiseworthy.”* (Luqman, 12)

Wisdom carries within it the duality of good and evil, which is the philosophy of life. Its content is intellectual and moral, reaching a level of comprehensiveness. In contrast, the folk proverb originates from the people and daily experiences, conveyed in a direct manner with simple expressions and easy vocabulary. Therefore, the proverb is more widespread among illiterate people due to its simplicity.

As for the relationship between the proverb and the saying, “A saying is not linked to a specific incident, but the precision of its wording and its harmony make it resemble ordinary speech on one hand, and on the other, it contains concise and focused information in sentences that are almost like proverbs. Moreover, the lifespan of a saying is longer than that of a proverb.”

Abdelhamid Ben Hadouga addressed this in the introduction to his collection of Algerian proverbs:

*"A saying affirms a reality, such as the expression 'We and death are companions'... whereas a proverb may or may not include this. Consequently, well-known sayings generally affirm a certain reality and do not carry an implicit meaning."*

A saying is often the product of a momentary inspiration by individuals who have the ability to generate it through sudden insight. It is usually a reaction to a witnessed reality, which sparks the inspiration to utter it. Meanwhile, a proverb consists of short phrases whose author is unknown.

The Algerian novel interacted with some colloquial expressions that reflect specific situations and contexts, such as the interaction of characters with folk proverbs. For example, Azeddine Djlaouji incorporated the sayings of the Moroccan Sufi poet **Abderrahman El-Jadoub**, who said:

*"Travel and you will know people,  
The elder of the people, obey him.  
The glutton, sell him for half a coin."*

This proverb, with its colloquial dialect, simple language, and condensed structure, conveys a social value, urging acquaintance, respect for elders, and rejection of greed.

Likewise, the novelist **Waciny Laredj** begins his novel *The Jasmine Collar* with the folk proverb:

*"He lived by what he earned, and when he died, he left nothing behind."*

This, too, reflects profound social circumstances. Through this proverb, one can sense the struggles of the Algerian individual due to the material hardships left by colonialism. Generally, this proverb refers to a person who lived in poverty and died without leaving anything for their children.

### **The Abundance of Cultural Patterns and Their Significance in Algerian Narrative**

Culture is the spiritual nourishment of the individual; it is the path that leads a person toward goodness, beauty, and guidance. It is not merely slogans to boast about, but rather a civilized behavior that we practice in our lives, in our interactions, in our daily affairs, and in our institutions. It directly affects human beings, generating a flood of concepts, such as the idea that culture is a social product that distinguishes one society from another. It represents the ethical, moral, and behavioral framework adopted by an institution in its dealings with various parties.

There is a deep-rooted relationship between humans and the land—an ancient bond that dates back to the dawn of humanity. We can trace its evolution from one era to another throughout history and its various phases. This leads us to conclude that culture has undergone different periods contributing to its development over time, making its concept more tangible in our present era to establish solid foundations within a society composed of people.

This prompts us to explore the concept of *popularity* and its attachment to culture as a term. Popularity is the subject of numerous anthropological studies, which generally agree on its concept and the various connotations it implies. Popularity is an attribute derived from the term *people*, who inspire it in both material and spiritual dimensions, in terms of linguistic, formal, semantic, and symbolic aspects. Popularity characterizes anything that originates from the people—whether in speech, practice, behavior, or perception of life and things. Within this conceptual framework, popularity includes everything intended for public consumption, whether material or moral.

The Algerian novel embodied the richness of diverse folk heritage in its vocabulary and forms, as Algerians were influenced by everything surrounding their society. They attempted to blend this traditional language with modern linguistic techniques that meet contemporary demands in an artistic and refined manner. The heritage language contributed to shaping events, driving characters, and transforming the novel from a singular to a pluralistic form by incorporating multiple dialects and various interferences. Thus, "he integrated these heritage structures within his narrative to establish a parallel between the past and the present and successfully employed most of them throughout the novel, aiming to bring the reader closer to its content and deliver his message without noise or slogans."

Based on this, the Algerian novelist **Mohammed El-Amin Ben Rabie** employed the language of folk furniture in his novel *Qaddas Allah Sirri* in its various forms and contents. It is strongly tied to linguistic elements with folk heritage references, which adds a unique flavor to the narrative structure and a distinct artistic formulation aimed at reinforcing the Algerian spirit and breaking away from conventional novel writing in pursuit of renewal. Given the vast amount of folk representations in the novel, we focused on one aspect of folk heritage: **the vocabulary of folk furniture**, including:

1. **The sieve (ghirbal):** The novelist masterfully depicted the rhythmic movements of the sieve in the hands of the protagonist's mother as she sifted flour, saying:  
*"I turned towards my mother, who was sifting wheat flour. Its dust rose slightly before settling down again. She moved her hands, gripping the sieve in a semi-circular motion, with both delicacy and firmness."*

2. **The Kanqi:** The writer illustrates an even more traditional lighting tool, the handheld oil lamp, stating:  
*"How they seemed to rush in, gazing at us with eyes that appeared hollow due to the dim light emitted by the Kanqi."*

3. **The Sa'fa:** A traditional basket made from palm fronds, essential for shopping and carrying food in Algerian households. He writes:  
*"I was the one carrying the food—pieces of bread, chakhchoukha, or anything else that Al-Aarem's wife would place for me in the Sa'fa."*

All these elements carried a series of transformations aimed at creating a new form of culture, previously marginalized in contemporary life, and seeking a fresh step toward centralization and reconstruction.

### Conclusion

In this brief overview, we could only present glimpses of folk heritage language as an intellectual and spiritual encyclopedia. The primary goal of this research is to highlight and clarify the significance of folk heritage language in affirming identity, fostering belonging, and reinforcing cultural and civilizational values. Language has been the sturdy wall preserving this heritage in all its details and contexts, giving the novel a distinctive semantic character that blends authenticity with modernity.

The past can be leveraged to build the present, adding a local essence to the novel that elevates it to a global level. The reader engages in a dynamic interaction cycle between stimulus and response, thanks to these heritage realms that align with their perspectives and aspirations, stemming from a shared collective consciousness. Folk heritage also aids in understanding customs, traditions, values, arts, crafts, and skills.

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[Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems - ISSN: 2790-0169 / 2790-0177](https://doi.org/10.56334/sei)



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DOI prefix

[10.56334/sei](https://doi.org/10.56334/sei)

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