



Socio-Textual Criticism and the Algerian Critical Perspective: Foundations, Methodological Debates, and Future Horizons

Wahab Mohammed

Dr.
University Center of Brika Amdokal Brika Road
Algeria
Email: mwahab138@gmail.com

**Mohammed El-Ghazali
Ben Yettou**

Dr.
University Center of Brika Amdokal Brika Road
Algeria
Email: benyettou.mohammed@cu-barika.dz

**Abderrahmane
BenYettou**

Prof.
Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila
E-mail: abderrahmane.benyettou@univ-msila.dz

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Keywords

Socio-textual criticism; Algerian literary criticism; Critical reception; Sociology of literature; Genetic structuralism; Text and society

Abstract

This study seeks to examine the development and reception of socio-textual criticism within the Algerian critical field, with particular attention to its theoretical foundations, methodological mechanisms, and interpretive horizons. Socio-textual criticism emerges as an analytical orientation that aims to uncover the social laws embedded within literary texts through a balanced engagement with both textual structures and sociological determinants. Rather than privileging ideology at the expense of aesthetics—or form at the expense of social meaning—this approach aspires to reveal the dialectical interaction between literary form, semantic construction, and collective social consciousness. The research investigates the ways in which Algerian criticism has engaged with socio-textual methodology, highlighting the challenges associated with its reception, adaptation, and application. By tracing its Western theoretical roots—particularly within dialectical criticism, genetic structuralism, and the sociology of the novel—the study contextualizes socio-textual criticism as a culmination of evolving attempts to reconcile textual autonomy with social embeddedness. The paper further explores how Algerian critics have negotiated this approach amid local intellectual, cultural, and historical conditions.

Methodologically, the study adopts an analytical-descriptive framework grounded in critical discourse analysis. It is structured around three main axes: (1) the socio-textual approach in Western criticism and its conceptual premises; (2) the Algerian critical vision, focusing on issues of reception, methodological resistance, and epistemological debate; and (3) the prospects of Algerian socio-textual criticism, emphasizing its potential contributions to contemporary literary analysis. The findings suggest that socio-textual criticism in Algeria represents a promising yet contested critical orientation. While it offers a robust framework for integrating literary form with social meaning, its effective application requires greater methodological clarity, theoretical rigor, and contextual sensitivity. Ultimately, the study argues that socio-textual criticism holds significant potential for renewing Algerian literary criticism by fostering a balanced, dialectical reading of text, society, and history.

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Introduction:

This work starts from the hypothesis that the literary criticism – any criticism – should not completely exclude the art for the sake of the content, and also should not cancel totally the literature for the sake of the ideology, and not the opposite too, even if this criticism is concerned by the question of knowing how the social issues and the collective interests become embodied inside the semantic and structural levels and the artistic constructions of the text. Because it is from the duty of the critical discourse to show the dialectical relations that appear in the forming of the world when it studies the structure of the text, to the degree that this work reflects the mental structure that the social class of the creator enjoys. Even more, it is its duty to search for the truth and to prove it.

The socio-textual is an analytical orientation that aims to reach the social law inside the text through studying the different textual structures, starting from the data of the two sciences: the text and the sociology, in order to make the approach more connected with the real and the actual medium between the literature and the life. And here, it can be asked about the concepts and the procedural mechanisms of this critical orientation? Which is considered the last ring in the sociology of literature, and about the way it was received in the Algerian critical field and the vision that accompanied it? And from that, the reality and the horizons?

From what was mentioned before, the research comes in three axes. The first: the socio-textual in the Western study, to present the critical direction and its issues. The second: the Algerian critical vision – stakes and challenges – by reading in the critical reality, through the problem of receiving the method. The third: the Algerian socio-textual criticism – the horizons and the results – through building special perceptions on the reality and the possibilities.

First: The socio-textual in the Western study

The circle of the social dialectical criticism became wide because of the development of its method and the appearance of critical currents under its umbrella.

From the efforts of George Lukacs, who read the ideas of his teacher Hegel through the Marxist dialectical materialism which was searching for an explanation to the contradictions of the capitalist society and to understand its reality. He confirmed that the novel is a bourgeois tragic epic, because the hero suffers in it a continuous struggle with what exists in the reality, when he declared the necessity that the literary and theatrical works reflect the social reality of the creator and that he should commit himself to the issues of the classes, especially the working class, and that he must be able to realize the process of the social conflict and to embody it in his work by his artistic means. From here came the priority of the social content over the form. The form becomes a means to embody or to achieve the content in the literary work, and the mission of the critic or the researcher becomes mainly to discover the content and to what extent the writer was able to reflect the issues of the social reality.

He treated in his book Balzac and the French Realism the material and historical development which the French novel had known, focusing on the historical consciousness coming from the author and how he can show it through his works. But in The Soul and the Forms he established the idea that the values in general depend on “the forms from the homogeneous structures which allow the human spirit to express its different possibilities” (Goldmann, 1970, p. 32), with his awareness of the idea of the meaningful structure starting from the Kantian tragic position.

To the efforts of Lucien Goldmann with the genetic structuralism criticism, which started from this last work of Lukacs, confirming that the historical materialism is considered one of the main origins of the genetic structuralism. This method, which came as an opposite alternative to the formal structuralism, was the result of the conscious reading of the philosophical researches that have relation with the thought of Kant and Hegel and Heidegger, and of the sociological researches about the novel, such as the works of Lukacs, René Girard, Gurvitch, Adorno, Panofsky, and Frankenthal. From these figures appears the importance of Goldmann’s project, to the degree that it was described as a comprehensive philosophy, because his goal was to search for a method that surpasses by it the negativity of criticism (Saddar, 2013, p. 25) to a positive criticism supported by the dialectic that exists between the subject and the object – “that dialectic which represents the essence of

every genetic science. Inside every structure there is a seed that denies it, a seed that refers to what it will become" (Saddar, 2013, p. 25) – starting from a vision of reality, and criticizing it through the total resemblance between it and the art.

And with the understanding of the genetic structuralism to the totality and the interrelation of the phenomena, it starts from the criticism of the existing incomplete reality, from the point of view of recalling what is forming through the immanent dialectic (Saddar, 2013, p. 25), without separating the literary and intellectual work from the society and the world and the history.

Also Goldmann made a distinction between the genetic structuralism and the sociology of contents. The latter sees in the production only a reflection of the collective consciousness, while the structural sociology sees in the production one of the composing elements, and of the most important ones, for the collective consciousness (Baskadi, n.d., p. 46).

The critics of sociology tried through their works to establish the rules of the developed Marxist concept in dealing with the literary text, and these works confirmed the importance of the social element in literature, by putting the stable social motives to which the literary content belongs in front of the changing stylistic elements to which the literary form belongs. This is by keeping the literary text as a permanent confrontation, or a continuous dialectic, between the content and the form. And as a result, the critical consciousness grew by the necessity to find a kind of balance between all the circumstances and elements that keep the content and the form interacting.

The opinions of Bakhtin about the text and its language formed a link between the previous dialectical methodologies and the efforts of the textualists who came after, through his theses that come under what is called the sociology of the novel text, which has the philosophical background of dialectical materialism and the formalist tendency, that ends to:

- The linguistic pragmatic application, and the focus on an otherness philosophical conception that adopts the data of the historical analysis of society.
- The critical semiotic application, which questions the novel text from the point of view of dissecting the internal and external relations, in the horizon of a sociological analysis of the forms of ideological expression (Abbassi, 2012, p. 42).

Bakhtin by this does not detach completely from the sociology of the novel, but stays near from it, because he does not separate between the novel as an ideology and between the social and economic infrastructure (Abbassi, 2012, p. 43). And he said with the principle of dialogism in studying the novel, "considering that every ideological discourse has a semiotic charge – 'the words' – these words in their origin are utterances of a material nature existing in the social reality, reflecting it, and interacting with its course, whether this transmission was literal or distorted" (Zeroual et al., 2016, p. 327).

The sociology of the novel text integrates the text with the reality, as it also confirms the neutrality of the writer toward the multiple voices inside the text. It starts from inside the text to understand and interpret it and to search for the plurality of voices and ideologies. "And these categories cannot be separated except in a theoretical way, because they are continuously intertwined inside the unique literary fabric of the image" (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 108).

Bakhtin also was interested in the language of creativity, considering the novel "a social verbal diversity organized, varying in many individual voices, and that social diversity becomes embodied through the basic composing units, which are: the author's speech, the narrators' speech, and the heroes' speech, and by this diversity the social voices become multiple" (Shahin, 2012, p. 156).

And it cannot be understood except in a dialogic context, like the affirmative and critical responses, or those which cause the debate between the intersected discourses of others. In this way, the discourse of the writer, or the utterance actor, is formed firstly with regard to the discourse of the other and his presence. This leads us to see society as a wide network of dialogical relations between writers and between their discourses.

The term Sociology of the text appeared with Pierre Zima, who wanted through his critical orientation "to understand the literary texts and explain them as discursive structures that enter in dialogue embodying the positions and interests of certain groups" (Zima, 1991, p. 321). He sees that most sociological analyses are done mainly by explaining the literary forms in the social context. He seeks the truth of the interaction between the texts and the social and historical problems at the level of the text – that means focusing on the language and the linguistic structures, and searching for the social issues hidden in the language, and even for the way by which this language expresses the issues of society. Because the text, for Zima, is "a concrete and living entity that lives its life through its own laws, but carries in these laws the features of the social life in which it lives, creates, and is received" (Zima, 1991, p. 172).

Pierre Zima was influenced by the critics of the sociological method, especially in what concerns the relation between the language and the society. From this he re-gave the consideration to the text and all its linguistic components. The text for him declares material things, and contains hidden things that truly indicate the consciousness of the individual in the literary creativity. Everything that exists in the text is in relation with the world, and every artistic creation is a social application, that is, an ideological production. The subject of textuality is known among the social and ideological elites formed by imagination (Duchet et al., n.d., p. 6).

Zima agrees with Bakhtin in the idea of the plurality of the meanings of the text at the linguistic level, as the novel text is a meeting of a group of social languages that are in struggle among themselves. He also agrees about the matter of the openness of the text to multiple meanings with Theodor Adorno, who showed that what distinguishes the creativity is the suggestion, and this characteristic makes it like the riddle, it says things and hides other things, a matter that requires interpretation and makes it a text open to possible meanings (Wadiji et al., 2017, p. 169).

And he agrees with Michel Zéraffa in the way by which the society appears at the level of narration, and the relation between literature and society, or in a more precise expression, in the way by which the form “organically combines between the social signifieds and the literary signifiers” (Zéraffa, 1971, p. 73), through “defining the relation between the actantial functions of the characters of a certain fiction and the social traits that they carry.”

Zima, in his critical direction, presented procedural tools extracted from the different systematic critical fields which allow him to grasp the meaning inside the text. He wants to activate the results of the formalist and modern structural study and the results of the sociology of literature. The study of the novelistic text must include all the elements composing its structure, which is made from the linguistic and social side together.

Accordingly, Zima's book *For a Sociology of the Literary Text* is considered the field where he presented his most important critical conceptions about the relation of the novelistic texts with the intellectual and ideological values that they propose, and by his call to start from inside the text to reach the social structure by focusing on the socio-linguistic situation, he throws away all the ready-made judgments that came with the researches of Lukacs and Goldmann about the nature of the relation between the text and the economic structure accompanying it.

By that, the criticism that Zima presented is what mostly cares about knowing the way by which “the social issues and the collective interests become embodied in the semantic, structural and narrative levels of the text” (Zima, 1991, p. 12), starting from the problem of the necessity to know the way by which “the literary text interacts with the social and historical problems at the level of the language” (Zima, 1991, p. 171). He confirmed that the social analysis of the texts cannot be done by isolating the texts from each other, or by the critic being satisfied with taking one or two texts, but that “the sociologist should always choose more than one text, because every text represents a meaning in its relations with the other texts,” since the text cannot be isolated from the rest of the texts if it wants to express ideological discourses and social interests, or systems of social values or worldviews (Zima, 2000, p. 69). The part cannot express the whole, and it is difficult for us to know the social meaning of a dramatic scene or of one chapter of a novel.

Zima was able to present a sociological analytical critical method whose essence is not only the closure on the text, but going out from it to the circle of the society and the receiver of this text, avoiding the criticism directed to him which sees that his emphasis on the text alone as if it is only language and nothing more than that, is not correct — because the text is composed from a number of multiple systems of signs, some of which are linguistic signs and others are non-linguistic, as in the field of semiology. This orientation was not neglected in Pierre Zima's criticism in its application, as he also paid attention to the fact that “the plurality of meanings in itself is considered a historical and social phenomenon... and that all the reactions that the writing of a multi-meaning text provokes cannot be understood except as reactions that express on the linguistic and textual level the social values” (Zima, 1978, p. 9).

The sociology of the text, according to Pierre Zima, studies the text and reveals the social and ideological issues through the levels of the text or its linguistic-semantic, lexical, structural and narrative loads, especially in the novel, in its sociological situations, that is to say, the socio-linguistic and the socio-narrative situation.

A- The socio-linguistic situation:

The interest at the level of this situation is on the language and the meaning, or on the lexical units of the word. As long as the social interests appear at a linguistic level (lexical and discursive), the literary text that we want to integrate in its social context must first be presented in the historical frame of the socio-linguistic situation. And here Pierre Zima started, in clarifying his critical orientation, from two principles:

The first: represented in the social values and their relations with the linguistic word; where he confirmed that “the social values do not have an existence independent from the language” (Zima, 2000, p. 121).

The second: represented in focusing on the semantic level, because all “the lexical, semantic and syntactic units embody collective interests, and can become stakes for social, economic and political struggles” (Zima, 2000, p. 121).

And to approach the text sociologically, it is necessary to link it to the historical period in which it appeared, and to what this period had known of changes. Because every social group has its own lexicon, its particular way of speaking, and a rhetoric that embodies its interests. The language of this group is not distinguished only at the lexical level, but at the level of the large structures too. And with all that, every “class struggle can be summarized in the struggle for a word, against another word” (Zima, 2000, p. 121).

From this, Pierre Zima was interested in the semantic level, that is, in the large structural constructions, because they "imitate and reproduce reality and sometimes correspond implicitly or explicitly with this reality" (Zima, 1991, p. 175). Or in presenting the social world "as a collection of collective languages that appear in the semantic and narrative structures of the fiction" (Zima, 2000, p. 125).

Pierre Zima also pays attention to the social languages, to the literary evolution, and to the intertextuality as a social category.

B- The socio-narrative situation:

Pierre Zima, within this situation, sought to "explain textual structures in their social context" (Zima, 2000, p. 124). His aim was to analyze the narrative structure in a way that reveals the internal composition of the work and interprets its depths with the aid of the actantial model. Therefore, it was necessary to develop and highlight the nuanced distinctions of the idea of taxonomic action (le faire taxonomique), which forms the foundation of the actantial model (modèle actantiel), and consequently, the narrative trajectory of literary and other discourses.

Zima's interest in the semiotic method stemmed from the adaptability of texts—whether literary, philosophical, historical, or political—to semiotic analysis, which exposes their semantic and narrative foundations. He also benefited from stylistic criticism when he focused on studying the text stylistically, so that through this approach he could reach a level of meaning capable of revealing the text's social content. His orientation is thus "stylistic in essence, with a profound social perspective capable of capturing the essence of the literary process" (Zima, 1991, p. 10).

Second: The Algerian Critical Vision – Stakes and Challenges

The vast Western critical movement within the field of sociological criticism cast numerous terminological shadows upon the Arab critical scene in general, and the Algerian one in particular. This began with what was termed the "sociology of contents or forms" (Saddar, 2018, p. 22). Terms such as sociological criticism, the sociology of literary criticism, structural sociology, socio-constructivism (formative or genetic structuralism), socio-textual criticism, socio-criticism, the sociology of literature, the sociology of the text, and the sociology of literary form are all expressions that circulate within Algerian critical discourse. They reflect the distribution of understandings regarding the dialectical social criticism and its evolution.

What justifies this terminological accumulation is the very diversity resulting from the evolution of the social method in Western criticism. Consequently, Algerian criticism found itself before both a challenge and a stake: the challenge lies in keeping pace with methodological developments and assimilating each new sociological orientation; the stake lies in the quality of reception, the depth of understanding of methodological evolution, and avoiding confusion between different sociological trends, while maintaining the necessary critical spirit.

Accordingly, this study will focus on Algerian critical practice, which has attempted to adopt one of the sociological methodological trends—namely the socio-textual approach—since the boundaries between the branches of sociological criticism often blur in the minds of those who adopt them. Moreover, the terminology of these theories often aims toward a unified objective. For example, the socio-constructivist form of analysis is "a natural synthesis showing a balanced integration of sociological and structural methodologies within a unified conceptual framework" (Lahmadani, 1984, p. 20). Therefore, critics may label their approach as socio-textual, even though they are, in reality, adjacent to it or aligned with a closely related direction, depending on how they interpret the methodology's concepts and terminology, and on the critical perspective they start from—whether through cautious imitation or through creative effort and transcendence.

The foundational critical vision can be observed in the work of Abdelhamid Bouraoui, who adopted an orientation seeking to trace the historical and social trajectory reflected by the creative self, while preserving a continuity of critical tradition rather than creating a radical rupture. His aim was to explore the constructive components that offer a correct interpretation of literary creativity.

Bouraoui sought to establish an Algerian critical vision that benefits from foreign methodologies without being naively or entirely dependent on them. His work emerged from a profound critical consciousness that positioned the authority of method beneath that of the text itself. He focused on examining the "discursive, structural, and socio-cultural features of the text," and based on these, he selected the appropriate critical mechanisms for introspection and interrogation—precisely because texts differ in both structure and culture.

This perspective rendered the Algerian critical transition smooth and non-ruptural—evolving progressively from contextual criticism, which examines the text through its historical, social, or psychological framework, to systemic criticism, which prioritizes the text's own coherence in practice, analysis, and reading. It thus emphasizes the general context of its author, in what constitutes "an implicit invitation to grasp the external referential frameworks, with a reservation against entering the text except through the contexts surrounding the creator" (Qattous, 2004, p. 21).

Critic Abdelhamid Bouraoui paid close attention to linear reading, which observes narrative sequence while considering contextual relations. He then worked on uncovering the underlying oppositional relations that allow the transition from analyzing forms to examining content—that is, moving from formal study to semantic study (Bouraoui, 1998, p. 90).

And within this foundational vision, we find the works of the critic Mohammed Sari, who tried to frame a new sociological literary critical vision, based on structural and social intellectual critical references. His critical direction was built on the act of methodological critical dialogue between the contextual and the systematic, considering that his social structural critical vision enables the social study of literary creativity. Therefore, we find him committed to this idea from the point of view that he is "careful to give each dimension its part of objectivity in order to avoid criticism falling into hidden closure, whether that closure on the self and the past or the closure in the illusion of modernity" (Sari, 2009, p. 6).

The critic Mohammed Sari, through his book "Literature and Society," in its introduction, presents the relationship between the text and the previous texts, that is, intertextuality and dialogism or polyphony, focusing on the role of ideology that rules the relationship between literature and its criticism. Then he presents what Bakhtin offered about the social and historical origins of the novel, starting from two backgrounds; a linguistic one and a semiotic critical one, focusing on the idea that the language of the novel is multi-voiced, as it includes within its discourse all expressive genres.

After the theoretical presentation, Mohammed Sari comes to the applied part, represented in searching for the nature of conflict and vision of the world in the novel "Badr Zamanah" by Mubarak Rabi', starting from the narrative structure, and specifically the dialogue of characters, and the relationship between the hero and the narrator, as well as the language of narration and its variety, then he ends with the other structures.

After this, Mohammed Sari moves to talking about the ideology of the fictional character, quoting Bakhtin's propositions about the linguistic plurality in the novelistic use, to reach the conviction that the linguistic problem in narrative writing remains raised, as the writers use their dialects.

And in his last chapter, "The Socio-Critical Method in the Study of Literature" from this work, he sees that the socio-criticism owes much to Goldmann's researches, and that ideology lies in the core of socio-critical research, which sees that the literary work is an interference of multiple discourses that the writer possesses and invests in his favor, so that the textual reality becomes a fictional reality into which the writer pours his ideology and his position toward language, art, and life in general (Sari, 2009, p. 92).

We conclude from this that the vision of our critic started from a philosophical and sociological critical base, built on studying the relations between literature and society, which in turn produced a sociological structural critical frame.

And in the same context, we find the critic Ammar Belhacen in his book "Literature and Ideology," and specifically in its sixth chapter "Linguistic and Semantic Analysis of the Novelistic Text," through which he tried to establish a socio-critical discourse first and a socio-linguistic one second, with a philosophical and genetic-structural critical weight that he took from the Lukácsian and Goldmannian heritage, practicing on many narrative texts, despite the philosophical and dialectical critical nature that he followed.

And if we come to the critic Omar Aylan, we find him interested in Bakhtin's conceptions in the field of the sociology of the text, which he tried to benefit from the materialist philosophy and the formalist views without adhering to their strictness. Omar Aylan focused on the relationship of the novel with ideology. He also cared about Pierre Zima's ideas, defining the bases of the sociology of the text through Bakhtin's ideas as mentioned by Zima, presenting the tools he borrowed from other fields. In this way, Omar Aylan presented a theoretical display of the efforts of sociological critics starting from Lukács and Goldmann, passing by Bakhtin, and reaching Zima, where the sociology of the text appeared as an independent current. He comes in the second part of his study interested in the ideological contexts in Ibn Hadouga's novels, which lead him to the concept of structure at Pierre Macherey and the concept of the speaker in the novel at Bakhtin.

As for the critic Sharif Habila, in his study "The Novel and Violence: A Socio-Textual Study in the Algerian Novel," he affirms the impossibility of separating the narrative text from the social reality, because "the text is a linguistic being whose tool is language, produced by a psychological, social, and cultural reality" (Habila, 2009, p. 3). He seeks to understand the literary text in its dialogical relationship with explanatory texts that embody the attitudes and interests of conflicting social groups.

This critic draws inspiration from Bakhtin's view of the function of the novelistic work; to the extent that one engages deeply with reality, the aesthetic production of that reality in the field of the novel becomes more convincing and more deeply rooted. This is what Bakhtin pointed out when he emphasized that a good novelistic work reveals the social reality in its rich and multiple dialogism—it is a living listening to the reality of social contradictions.

We can also notice the methodological overlap in his critical discourse through his use of the term mental structure when he explains his critical procedure:

"Thus, the most important activity in the approach is deconstruction—deconstructing texts, dissecting them, and tracing their elements by deconstructing the very mental structures embedded within the narrative structure and generating it." (Habila, 2009, p. 9)

By this, he was closer to genetic structuralism than to the orientation he explicitly declared as the critical method of his study. Accordingly, Sharif Habila's critical vision can be judged as somewhat ambiguous, unable to fully control the method,

as all the sociological trends rushed into his critical practice, influenced by the relational dimension between literature and society.

Third: Algerian Socio-Textual Criticism – Horizons and Outcomes

The Algerian critical vision concerning sociological criticism can be summarized, based on the critical reality we observed, as oscillating between foundation and transcendence.

It is a foundational vision that benefits from the “Other” without being naively or wholly dependent on him, since it arose from a deep critical awareness. It placed the authority of the method below that of the text itself, starting from the discursive, structural, and socio-cultural data of the text, and on that basis it chooses the appropriate critical tools for introspection and questioning—since texts vary structurally and culturally.

Another vision sought to move beyond the presentation of philosophical and theoretical aspects to focus on the structure that organizes the text and the relationships of these structures with the social and psychological frameworks from which the texts were generated. Yet, it fell into the trap of combining different directions of sociological criticism.

However, this combination—or the acceptable reconciliatory approach—requires the creation of an alternative method, in which the other methods disappear:

“A creation achieved by reasonable and controlled means, where elements of certain systems are transformed into an alternative system, usable and capable of producing a new, convincing, and justified understanding; it does not surpass the beginnings of previous methods, but remains an eclectic construction.” (Daghmoumi, 1990, p. 147)

The multiplicity and diversity of critical methods, and even the variety of trends within a single method, may in their totality lead to confusion or overlap during the critical process. Thus, we find disorder and inconsistency as a result of complete dependence on Western criticism, which manifests in the invasion of terminology—terms often surrounded by ambiguity because they carry within their content epistemological and ideological charges connected to the cultural dimensions that produced them.

Shedding light on the nature of critical practice in Algeria leads us to uncover both the literary and critical awareness and to what extent this awareness is embodied and reflected in practice. Indeed, the variation among critical practices can be attributed to the difference in the level of consciousness accompanying each critical endeavor.

Algerian sociological criticism has witnessed transformations in concepts and visions. Yet, one may ask: Has it kept pace with the era of criticism, its rapid changes, developments, and requirements? This question arises especially when we observe other Arab countries striving, in turn, to keep up with the movement of thought under the dominance of Western intellectual paradigms. The maturity of literary criticism, in particular, is linked to the achievement of a comprehensive cultural renaissance, and cultural maturity itself depends on the transformational project that remains incomplete across various fields. Such maturity requires profound philosophical and scientific knowledge as well as long, consistent practice.

We notice that Algerian critical practice began in a classical academic manner, later evolving into attempts by the younger generation that often took on a theoretical orientation, characterized by an apparent familiarity with the latest critical theories. However, the connection to contemporary theories largely remained on the level of theorization and repetition of theoretical discourse. In practice, we find among some critics a certain caution in adopting critical concepts, due to their awareness of the distinction between what is philosophical-critical and what is practical-critical. This is evident in works that move beyond the philosophical framework to a sociological-structural critical framework. Conversely, some critics lack conceptual clarity, limiting themselves to observation and interpretation within a single direction, without innovation or questioning.

A practical or applied critic, however, should not engage in analyzing creative texts unless they possess comprehensive and sound theoretical knowledge. They must have deep insight into the arts of literature, their purposes, evolution, and be well-versed in language, vocabulary, rhetoric, and styles of discourse. Moreover, they should be acquainted with related fields such as philosophy and its theories, psychology, and the workings of the inner self. A critic must understand literary genres, their characteristics, components, history, development, and major creators in each field. They should comprehend the motives and functions of art, its means of influence, and the relationship between art, life, and reality throughout ages and civilizations, as well as the appropriate language for each literary form.

The dominance of Western scholarship over Arab literary studies stems largely from the power of language. In contemporary literary discourse, language functions as a magnetizing element that manifests within the new Arab critical schools as a decisive linguistic passage. This has cast a shadow of immanent interpretation over various techniques of narrative discourse, making linguistic, structural, and post-structural analysis the preferred critical alternative—a multi-dimensional environment within which the nuclei of literary creativity grow and mature. This shift occurred after content-based and historical studies began to lose much of their critical efficacy under the pressure of modern critical methodologies that swept through the contemporary critical scene, leading to a renewed interest in social and socio-linguistic approaches.

No one denies the importance of theory and theorization, nor do we deny their crucial role in the critical process—for practice without theory is blind, unable to find the right path. Yet, theory without practice is crippled. We must therefore understand what we read, and know what and how we write. The real danger lies in the fascination with the theoretical—when it becomes a mental game used for self-indulgence, vanity, and intellectual pretension. At best, it turns into a didactic exercise, offering lessons to the reader in an overtly pedagogical fashion. This phenomenon can often be attributed to a sense of awe and fascination with the newly emerging literary theories, both Arab and global.

It can therefore be said that modern criticism today is founded upon a diverse epistemological framework, one that cannot be approached without prior intellectual preparation — namely, mastery of aesthetic language, precise understanding, careful and accurate selection of critical concepts and terminology, and thorough testing of critical methodologies to grasp their mechanisms and operations.

From this perspective, we may assert that the true image of contemporary Algerian criticism is not found primarily in published books, but rather in university theses and dissertations. Yet, it must be noted that these academic studies have largely remained confined within the walls of universities and on the shelves of their libraries, with only a very small portion having reached the public domain. Consequently, the genuine face of new Algerian literary criticism can only be fully discerned within academic libraries—whether through applied studies addressing different literary genres, or through meta-critical studies (criticism of criticism).

Moreover, the critical movement is no longer as accessible as it once was, even to independent critics outside university institutions, for its nature has become philosophical and specialized, entered only by the elite among literary scholars. There is a growing hope, however, that a balance may be restored between this theoretical depth and the practical needs of the nation, which has been consumed by intellectual conflicts amid the dominance of globalization over the realities of its peoples.

Conclusion

Socio-textual criticism represents the latest development of the sociological method, and a considerable terminological accumulation has arisen regarding the designations of critical trends derived from it—beginning with: “Sociology of content or forms,” “Sociological criticism,” “Sociology of literary criticism,” “Structural sociology,” “Socio-constructivism (or genetic structuralism),” “Socio-textual criticism,” “Socio-criticism,” “Sociology of literature,” “Sociology of the text,” and “Sociology of literary form.”

The reception of the sociological method and its orientations in Algerian criticism has oscillated between foundational efforts and attempts at transcendence. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the authentic face of contemporary Algerian criticism does not truly appear in printed works, but rather in academic theses and dissertations—most of which remain locked within university archives and library shelves. Thus, to trace the genuine evolution of new literary criticism in Algeria, one must turn to these academic resources, whether they focus on applied studies of diverse literary genres or meta-critical investigations that engage the evolution of critical discourse itself.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on theoretical analysis and critical interpretation of published literary and philosophical sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, or experimental procedures. All sources have been cited accurately and responsibly in accordance with academic integrity and ethical research standards.

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Conflict of Interest

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