



AKADEMİK EĞİTİM VE SOSYAL BİLİMLER DERGİSİ (AJESS Journal)

The Controversy of Identity Connection and Disconnection in ‘the Felucca Play’: A Cultural Interpretative Reading

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Article History

Received: 21/04/2026; Accepted: 28/08/2026; Published: 12/09/2026

Abstract:

In its study of the play ‘The Felucca’, this research paper will focus on two main themes: The overt aspect: relating to the linguistic-phonetic (dialogue) and visual (semiotics of the event) dimensions, with the aim of addressing the issues raised and their relationship to the construction of a sense of belonging to Algerian identity, whilst presenting the strategy of theatrical discourse in its attempt to ground this sense of identity and enumerate its various manifestations derived from these dimensions. The implicit axis: This relates to the possible interpretative dimensions of the dramatic event and of linguistic discourse, which will draw our attention to the importance of the recipient’s interaction and their role in grasping the meanings concealed behind the current main theme concerning illegal immigration.

On this basis, this study will address the research topics raised by the questioning of identity, such as the question of identity and otherness, the question of white centrality and the fragmentation of belonging, the symbolism of the theatrical event and the rooting of value-based belonging, and the specificity of Algerian culture, amongst others.

Key words: Identity, otherness, belonging, centre, periphery, language.

Introduction:

Today, the questions of otherness, identity and the dialectic of belonging are raised within a post-colonial context that heralds potential shifts in artistic discourse more broadly, which in turn is keeping pace with other transformations brought about by interaction with the Western ‘other’, and, in light of the development of means of communication, cultural acculturation can no longer be avoided. This calls for a discussion of identity within a contemporary and current context that defines the crises of the self, torn between connecting with its own identity and submitting to the identity of the other, who is desperate to impose their beliefs and culture and establish their centrality, operating on our subconscious more than our conscious mind.

Within this context, this research paper has sought to answer questions raised by the theme of the play *Al-Falouka* concerning irregular migration, the most important of which are: what causes the self to lose its sense of belonging and to abandon its identity? How did the culture of the ‘other’ captivate and construct its image of superiority in the Algerian psyche in Seif al-Din Bouha’s play *Al-Falouka*? Did the encounter with the ‘other’ necessitate the abandonment of the self and the values of national identity in this theatrical discourse? How did the play preserve the distinctiveness of Algerian identity? What is the underlying strategy—the exploration of which reveals the play’s attempt to entrench a sense of belonging and resist the dystopia of a painful reality?

In order to provide an analytical overview of all the elements discussed above, this study is structured around two main themes: The first concerns the discourse of identity separation, with which we began, as the dramatic narrative stems from an identity crisis; the second concerns the axis of identity connection, in which we summarise the most important strategies of the theatrical discourse in its attempt to establish Algerian identity and foster a sense of belonging to it. In doing so, we have combined an analysis of the overt and the implicit using an interpretative socio-cultural approach.

Firstly: Identity Disconnection and the Fragmentation of the Sense of Belonging:

1. The current situation and the collapse of national consciousness:

National identity is founded on a cognitive framework characterised by personal traits, political orientation, social perspectives and collective memory.

On this basis, an individual develops a shared perspective with other members of society, through which popular culture creates the founding myth—a set of beliefs that individuals hold and reproduce— It derives its existence from historical references—whether real but exaggerated by the imagination, or religious references mixed with worldly motives—or from false and illusory sources such as the idea of racial superiority¹. Referring to this idea is essential to understanding what the husband said to his wife after the boat set sail: “We were dreaming of crossing the river; we were dreaming of reaching the other bank to see the colours,”² and the singer had begun singing as soon as they set off: “The boat, oh mon amour, has taken me out of Lamizir.”³

These two accounts appear, on the face of it, to contradict the notion that Algerians live in abject poverty, given that the couple managed to raise enough money to buy the boat (it was most likely purchased because there was no one to accompany them to reclaim it), yet this discourse reflects a deeply rooted mindset that sees the other shore as a place of potential success and excellence – an idea instilled in our perceptions by the West – despite the fact that the couple had actually managed to raise the money in Algeria and could have realised any project with what they had gathered.

The dream of having children was not a necessary motive for risking their lives had they drawn upon the religious dimension of Algerian identity and the notion that God Almighty provides for one’s livelihood and determines the number of sons and daughters, —an idea that was deeply rooted in Algerian popular culture before having children came to be viewed as a new economic circumstance imposing a financial burden on parents: ‘A son-in-law and a son—that’s how you can provide for them’⁴ This is how the contemporary Algerian mother thinks, unaware that she is linking sustenance to the father rather than to God Almighty. We do not mean by this to promote a discourse of passivity, but rather to highlight the infiltration of new ideas that are shattering the old Algerian beliefs which were once part of our collective imagination and popular culture—a culture that did not view childbearing as a circumstance affecting the family’s finances.

Such ideas are primarily linked to a persistent belief in powerlessness, and to economic globalisation dominated by materialism and pragmatism; but the problem lies in the self-perception that idealism is to be found in what others produce, and, more dangerously, in what is promoted under the guise of scientific progress and the portrayal of knowledge as sanctioning a deviation from human nature – which does not merely mean a deviation from national and patriotic identity, but, worse still, a deviation from one’s innate identity through the pursuit of illicit procreation (with a partner other than one’s spouse), and if we accept that a sense of identity entails a sense of confidence built upon the will to exist⁵, then this sense is lacking in the husband – particularly in the play; He is the embodiment of a self suffering from an identity crisis, with no concept of asserting his own distinct and unique existence within his environment and surroundings, so as to be able to convince others of his existence.

2-/ The White Centre and the Inferiority Complex / represent the identity of the Other:

‘Identity is the result of comparing what we believe ourselves to be with the normative standards of behaviour; it is also the result of comparing ourselves with others.’⁶Because the ‘other’ West has managed to impose the illusion of its superiority and promote its centrality—epistemologically, historically and ideologically—it has succeeded in constructing an idealised image of itself in the Arab consciousness, both consciously and unconsciously. However much the Arab self has tried to compare itself with the Western self, it has failed to break free from the stereotypical image (promoted through marketing and the media) that has been constructed of it, plunging the Arab individual into an identity crisis between a desired identity that does not resemble their own and a current reality that cannot compete with Western progress.

This is what led the couple – in the play **Al-Falouka** — to speak of one another only with such admiration that the husband was content to abandon even Islamic moral values by allowing his wife to conceive through artificial insemination by a stranger; this led him into a dispute with his wife, who remained true to her identity in terms of dialect, values and behaviour, and with himself when he was forced to reconsider his decision.

¹ - See: Taybi Ghamari, ‘The Identity of the Crisis or the Crisis of Identity’, *Journal of Social and Human Sciences*, Vol. 15, December 2006, pp. 56–57. Link to the article: <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/50247>

² - Al-Sarkha Association for Skikda Theatre, the play **Al-Falouka**, starring Sabirina Qureshi and Ezzedine Bouha, written by Ezzedine Bouha, directed by Ahmed Al-Aqoun, produced in 2021, 32 minutes, watch here: <https://youtu.be/3pF5SgXGQRA>.

³ - The play, at 6:32.

⁴ -The play, at 19:38.

⁵ - See: Alex Micheleili, **Identity**, translated by Ali Watfa, Dar al-Waseem Printing Services, 1st ed., Damascus, Syria, 1993, p. 15.

⁶ - Ibid., p. 85.

‘If every individual, with their own convictions and beliefs, must confront their own view of the world with that of others—whether those closest to them and most like them, “strangers” to them, or those “furthest removed” from them’⁷ So what of someone who espouses the convictions of others and promotes values that are not his own, and principles that are not even part of his identity? By observing how the husband – despite living in Algeria – has assimilated into Western culture to the point of excess, we can see the severity of the crisis imposed on us by Western-centrism, to the extent that we are losing the most fundamental elements of our national identity, namely religion. This is the meaning conveyed in this dialogue:⁸

- That’s it, Those couples are just like that—they want to have kids, Medio and Walo.
- Mediro and Walo □ □ (in utter amazement)
- Walo.
- Walo, that’s it then??

- That’s it.
- They’ll go and find their own partners, and they’ll serve them as they please. (Confidently)
- Here we are with all this wailing and crying, and in the end, no children, no ‘Walo’. (With regret).
- They’ll find their own partners; they’ve got a short one, a tall one—they’ve got a catalogue, and you just pick whichever you like. (Certainly, and with admiration).

The danger lies not only in the individual’s abandonment of the most important value of identity (the Islamic faith), but also in the introduction of beliefs regarding other identities and the West’s portrayal of them as direct and practical solutions for which there are no alternatives; and what is most dangerous is their integration into minds in the form of convictions and their entrenchment, and therefore, hegemony does not arise through scientific and technological superiority, but through the ability to manipulate the unconscious using new contemporary methods and to ideologise knowledge in order to shatter all principles of identity. And if, as Franz Fanon points out, when we deny the other – and do not recognise their identity, we keep the other within the self and, in the most extreme cases, even strip them of their very existence as such,⁹ Here, with regard to the play **Al-Falouka**, we are speaking of a reverse denial and appropriation of identity: a denial by the self of its own identity, in contrast to a recognition of the other and the retention of that other within the self. Here, the meaning is not the removal of the other’s presence within us, but rather its deep-rooting.

The play **Al-Falouka** was characterised by its use of satirical dialogue, the overt aim of which was to amuse the audience, whilst its underlying purpose was to engage the audience in an interactive experience and to restore a sense of belonging to a community that was once productive and capable of nurturing and raising children despite the economic circumstances. The wife’s sarcasm is evident in her remark: ‘He’s just busy loading and unloading.’¹⁰ The discussion of the mother’s role—as long as the nanny, the wet nurse and the pregnant woman are present—reflects the existence of institutions behind a strategy to create individuals without identity, by stripping away all maternal and paternal roles; thus, the issue of identity will take on a deeper dimension than simply presenting it in opposition to the ‘other’ or describing it as “the distinctive cultural traits and characteristics of people in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and belief”¹¹. The Distinctive Features of Identities .

The wife (ID number) rejects her husband’s idea and insists once again on adhering to Islamic boundaries, proposing alternatives supported by Sharia and Algerian law—such as caring for orphans—thereby demonstrating a sense of belonging and a deep-rooted identity, which is a legitimate sentiment, for “ ‘A person is only human to the extent that they wish to impose themselves on another human being in order to make that person acknowledge them (...) The meaning of their life is concentrated in that other person’¹² But for the wife, it is not a matter of whether the distant ‘other’ acknowledges her cultural and Islamic identity; rather, she is terrified that her husband—this close ‘other’ who shares her identity and belongs to the same community—might abandon his principles. Her fear is therefore twofold—and even more than that—that the other might undermine her Islamic identity and principles. ‘When a person senses that something threatens their very existence, they hasten to reaffirm themselves, seeking something authentic hidden deep within, something to rely on, so that they may feel the confidence, security and strength to face the danger; and thus identity is formed in the depths of the self, where it is embodied through affiliations and components relating to gender, age, social class and cultural heritage.’¹³ She responds to his wish to choose a German father for the child

⁷ - Gérard Leclerc, *Cultural Globalisation: Civilisations at Stake*, trans. George Katoura, Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid al-Muttahida, 1st ed., Beirut, Lebanon, 2004, p. 25.

⁸ - The play, starting at 48:00.

⁹ - Franz Fanon, **Black Skin, White Masks**, p. 230

¹⁰ - The play, at 49:44.

¹¹ - -Abdullah Al-Ghadhami, *The Tribe and Tribalism, or Postmodern Identities*, 2nd ed., Arab Cultural Centre, Casablanca, Morocco, 2009, p. 48.

¹² - Franz Fanon, **Black Skin, White Masks**, trans. Khalil Ahmad Khalil, 2004, Dar al-Farabi, Beirut, 1st ed., p. 230.

¹³ -- Magda Hammoud, *The Problem of the Self and the Other*, National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature Publications, 1st ed., Al-Safat, Kuwait, 2013, p. 15.

conceived from a pre-fertilised egg by saying: 'You're right, my dear. I'll risk my life, my future, my money and my reputation—let's have a child from Al-Qawariya and raise him.'¹⁴ And she adds, when he claims there is no other solution: 'A solution? In your head??? I hear people saying that orphans are roaming the country; my brother hasn't seen any of them with money. Who are we to think that you and I can raise twenty orphans, manage their lives and futures, and walk in the path of God without worrying about other things?'¹⁵ It is a call to resist the 'other' by returning to the Islamic canon and deriving solutions from lived reality, rather than viewing the 'other' as a sacred model.

In this discourse addressed to the husband, one can observe appeals to identity-based resistance by a self that clings to its identity through a return to:

- Gender and the preservation of lineage: 'The son of Al-Qawariya' does not represent an extension of Algerian origins, culture or environment; therefore, she will once again focus on raising Algerian orphans and no others.
- Seeking refuge in social class: a return to sharing in the people's circumstances and the hardships of their environment ('There isn't a single brother of mine in this country who hasn't suffered like them').
- Cultural and Islamic heritage: an expression of adherence to Algerian Islamic identity ('We walk in the path of my Lord').

Such discourses reflect the oscillation of the Algerian-Arab self between a sense of inferiority and a fascination with the 'other', which prevents us from recognising our own capacity for thought and the fact that solutions also lie at home, not elsewhere (identity/marital separation), and herein lies the entire danger – as Al-Maskini explains – that has afflicted our thought and identity: the failure today to construct a positive conception of time, through the desire to leap beyond the West, that is, the possibility of exempting 'us' from modernity,¹⁶ In contrast, the wife expressed a desire to embrace an authentic Algerian Arab-Islamic identity (identity connection / the wife).

Through its exploration of the theme of illegal immigration, the theatrical play **Al-Falouka** succeeded in highlighting the danger of stereotypical misconceptions about the 'other': not only do we abandon our own identity, but we also seek to justify this abandonment and even adopt the role of defender of the 'other'—a stance deeply ingrained in our subconscious. Consequently, the husband seeks to persuade his wife, despite being fully aware that the idea of having a child by another man dismantles every element of his identity and undermines its foundations. Unconsciously, he speaks in the voice of the white man and employs post-colonial centrist discourse. When his wife says to him sarcastically: 'Oh, you've won; my son is a Shnouia.' 'And Baba Taliani.'¹⁷ It conveys a message steeped in bitterness and pain, despite being delivered in a comical manner to make the audience laugh. Her husband replies: 'Go on then, choose whichever you like; the Germans will come and rule us,' and adds, 'I'll just sit back and watch the show.'¹⁸ The West constructed stereotypical identities according to its own perception; by utilising propaganda mechanisms and discourses of knowledge, it was a direct cause of the denigration of other ethnic groups, including Asians—an idea promoted by the European centre and subsequently internalised by Arabs, who have always believed in the superiority of the West over China and its scientific, cultural and even aesthetic superiority. This beauty—'I'll add that the young girl is pretty'—whose standards were also defined by the West, It is therefore not inconceivable that the husband might take it upon himself to defend an other's identity, because what he had internalised was an unconscious pattern deeply ingrained in him thanks to propaganda, discourses of knowledge and the media—unlike the wife, whose rejection, whilst not based on intellectual awareness or sober analysis, is nevertheless 'When an individual becomes aware of their identity—which encompasses their individuality, affiliations, differences and values—they have formed a more or less clear conception of another, negative identity, based on specific traits and characteristics that they reject or avoid.'¹⁹ This includes matters that directly conflict with and affect the Islamic faith.

If we consider the subject of IVF and fertilised eggs outside the womb, the issue of procreation can be viewed here in a deeper sense than mere biological reproduction; symbolically, obtaining a child from another environment serves as a vehicle for coded messages to the public, aimed at fostering a sense of belonging and entrenching the foundations of Algerian identity, far removed from direct preaching, advice and guidance.

The play's intention in presenting the issue of illegal immigration—with the aim of obtaining a son (who is, in fact, illegitimate) to be raised in an Algerian environment, and the husband's belief that the solution lies in the hands of the West—is to raise the question of identity fragmentation within a larger global system. This self, which turns to the 'other' to serve self-interest or national interest in a way that undermines the foundations and principles of identity, cannot gain the legitimacy to endure, for it is, in essence, the product of a fusion far removed from the womb of Algerian reality, culture and identity.

Secondly: Identity-based communication: Strategies of theatrical discourse in rooting national belonging:

1/ Addressing public consciousness and fostering a sense of belonging:

¹⁴ - The play, 50:11

¹⁵ - The play, at 50:24.

¹⁶ - See: Fathi al-Maskini, **Identity and Time: Phenomenological Interpretations of the Question of 'We'**, Dar al-Tali'ah Publishing, 1st ed., Beirut, Lebanon, 2001, pp. 42–43.

¹⁷ -The play, at 50:04.

¹⁸ - The play, at 50:06.

¹⁹ - Alex Michelelli, **Identity**, op. cit., p. 83.

The dialogue in the play **Al-Falouka** is generally presented in a comedic style, though it is not without moments of seriousness, whilst strictly preserving the stereotypical realistic portrayal of the Algerian mentality—a portrayal that is not without its own perpetuation of stereotypes (the woman who resorts to crying or feigning illness in certain situations, who always talks about other women, the grumpy woman who repeats the same mistakes and is ashamed of her body and its functions (referring to the monthly period as ‘Lala Haddah’s visit’), the man who is always trying to prove his virility and who insists on following his wife even if it is dangerous, and the man who is afraid of his wife), which points to the failure to appropriate the Algerian identity in contemporary Algerian theatre in the face of the temptations of the age, in which the playwright imitates the works of others—both in writing and characterisation—thereby stripping the work of its national spirit and original cultural value. The play also endeavours to preserve aspects of living Algerian local culture, such as the rituals of the wedding night and the women waiting outside for the husband to emerge and bring them joy upon the completion of the marriage ceremony—recreated using cinematic flashbacks—and conveys popular beliefs, such as the wife urging her husband to be patient and visit the Boumediene shrine, or resorting to the blessing of the aunts or the application of blessed olive oil to treat delayed conception.

The play **Al-Falouka** was characterised by its experimental use of cinematic techniques and the incorporation of non-theatrical genres, which gave the play an aesthetic openness. Among other things, the use of these non-theatrical genres can be seen as part of the playwright’s and director’s strategies to reinforce a sense of belonging to Algerian identity: the letter written in Algerian colloquial Arabic, which conveys a call to remain in the homeland and reject risking one’s life for the sake of illegal migration; the song in Algerian colloquial Arabic (‘Ta’ahdiniwana’ahdaka’); and well-known Algerian folk proverbs spoken by the characters (‘Al-mu’min yibda bi-nafsuhu’ (‘Our dog is on us; its food comes from others’), (‘The haisha protects her sister’), (‘The early risers said: “Salt without Christ”’) and others, which reinforce a sense of belonging to Algerian identity through their presence in the theatrical discourse as part of what represents and expresses us, particularly by preserving the local character of the language, for “Language, viewed from the perspective of identity, is not merely a neutral and passive means of communication; rather, it is a positive and active force in the reproduction and development of that identity, or, conversely, in its deterioration and disintegration”²⁰. This reflects the writer and director’s concern with preserving the distinctive features of Algerian identity, including the preservation of linguistic intermingling (the infiltration of French vocabulary), which reflects the reality of Algerian communication, which has not yet shed the French language; this is an undeniable part of the history that underpins Algerian identity.

2/ The Symbolism of Theatrical Events: Towards Building a Sense of Belonging:

This table presents examples of theatrical events with symbolic dimensions that can be linked to the context of identity and the dichotomy of connection and disconnection explored therein:

Implied meaning / Interpretative meaning	The apparent meaning	Theatrical event / Dialogue
-Reflecting on our values, our roots and our sense of belonging—which is so rich—as opposed to the identity towards which we are blindly heading and whose values we are adopting. The symbolism of turning one’s back signifies abandoning a foreign identity and turning one’s back on it; it is an expression of ‘the regressive nature of Arab behaviour in the face of the Other, the protection of the self, and the affirmation of identity by taking refuge in the background’.	-To really look at the beach and at what his family, his home and his surroundings have left behind.	-Have a look at what you’ve done to your hair ²¹
- The sea is part of the homeland and the most important resource to be utilised; the focus will not be on the shoe, which is a secondary and unimportant element (even the linguistic meaning of the word ‘shoe’ refers to the periphery rather than the centre). Therefore, one will look	- The husband wanted to express his love indirectly in that request.	-When his wife is about to throw herself into the sea, the husband asks her to take a shoe with her, fearing that the rocks might cut her feet, but she mocks him. ²²

²⁰ - Ramzi Munir Baalbaki and a group of other authors, *Language and Identity in the Arab World: Historical, Cultural and Political Issues*, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 1st ed., Beirut, Lebanon, 2013, p. 52.

²¹- The play, at 35:59.

²² - The play, at 25:27.

beyond it, and the focus will instead be on the riches and treasures within the sea—that is, within the homeland.		
- The husband's attempt to decipher the message highlights the importance of language as a fundamental element of communication; yet, even before that, it underscores its role in understanding others—both those close to us and those who have passed away, who have left us with what we can make sense of. The implied meaning suggests that the strategy does not lie in what already exists, but in education and focusing one's attention upon it, and because it is a message from Akli ibn al-'Arabi (the significance of the name here is crucial in its connection to both the Arabic and Amazigh origins), who informs them of their distress, their flight and the breakdown of their boat's engine out at sea, the symbolism of reporting and conveying brings to mind the necessity of learning a lesson from those who have gone (capitalising on the past through its linguistic and material substance), so that the rejection of emigration—and the rejection of a foreign identity—is founded on the development of human resources through the cultivation of a sense of national identity, the deepening of national belonging within it, and its reconnection to the roots of its identity.	- The event was organised to encourage Algerians to avoid illegal migration due to the risks involved (an event that reveals a lack of artistic skill, as the message was forced upon the audience; it was merely a coincidence that the protagonist was also Algerian, as illegal migration is not limited to Algerians alone but affects many Arab countries).	- Warda returns to the boat carrying a box which they believe to be a treasure, before they discover it contains a letter. Her husband struggles to read it at first, but then realises it is in Arabic and reads it with ease, reciting it aloud to the audience alongside his wife. It is a letter from Akli Ould al-Arabi, one of the migrants who was lost at sea along with those travelling with him.²³
- To forge new connections with the marginalised and neglected sections of society and humanity, both in terms of representation and in material terms, whilst focusing on the Amazigh and Arab dimensions	- Incentives to discourage emigration.	- The letter written by Akli ibn al-Arabi, in which he asks his mother for forgiveness for having embarked on an illegal journey and describes the plight of his companions who died of thirst and hunger.²⁴
- The capacity for domestic production and the patience to resolve crises, whilst viewing others as a potential part of the solution rather than portraying them as the miracle of the century or scientific progress that is the sole driving force behind the development of any other civilisation. The need to foster a sense of hope within the Algerian people, rooted in their homeland, and to instil a positive mindset.	- A dream come true and a natural return home.	- Warda discovered she was pregnant after experiencing nausea and vomiting and realising her period was late; they then decided to return home, as the reason for their trip – seeking fertility treatment – no longer applied.²⁵

Conclusion:

²³ - The play, at 25:30.

²⁴ - The play, minute 29.

²⁵ - The play, minute 52.

This research paper has examined the dichotomy of identity-based connection and disconnection between the two protagonists (the husband and wife) in the play **Al-Falouka**, in which we have highlighted the tension between isolation and identity assimilation. Among the findings that can be presented are the following:

- Algerian theatre has evolved from the direct presentation of current issues to an indirect approach, by stimulating audience engagement and relying on the Algerian audience's ability to deduce the implicit messages behind the staged comedy, and by shifting from a discourse of instruction and information to one based on suggestion, conciseness and the intensification of meaning (We observed this in the way dialogues between husband and wife are presented; whilst not direct, they are charged with cultural, social and psychological dimensions, in addition to the connotations of the theatrical drama. This is evident even in the set design, where any representation of a boat has been omitted and replaced with a coarse rope; yet the audience begins to imagine the boat with the aid of the music and the rhythms of the), and his ability to draw on contemporary issues (illegitimate childbirth) by weaving them into a dramatic narrative linked to a more immediate current issue (illegal emigration from Algeria), which opened the way for questioning identity and examining the dichotomy between identity-based closure and openness.

- The dialogue in the play **Al-Falouka** succeeded in portraying the loss of a sense of belonging and the abandonment of one's identity (on the part of the husband) as opposed to an attempt to reconnect with one's identity (on the part of the wife), and the sense of an identity crisis at the level of the self/the husband and at the level of his relationship with the close other/the wife and then the Western other, the causes of which – that is, the sense of an identity crisis – can be attributed to: firstly, the inability of the Algerian self to break free from the dominant Western centralised unconscious constructs and its deep-rooted stereotypes, often transmitted through the media, technology and globalisation; consequently, the husband in the play repeats a discourse of Western centralism that is not fundamentally his own (as we have illustrated in the issue of viewing the white person as a symbol of beauty, regarding the West as the sole superior entity and the only one capable of excellence in the husband's eyes), which renders his identity alienated and subservient to the Other. His engagement with the West necessitated the abandonment of his self and the values of his national Islamic identity (resorting to illegitimate procreation) as part of a clear progression of the identity crisis that began with the denial of national identity (the turning of the boat at the start of the play), followed by an actual clash with the close other who shares the same values (the wife), culminating in the denial of those values and the repetition of statements affirming an other's identity, within an escalating dramatic arc.

- On another level relating to identity, the play preserved the distinctiveness of Algerian identity by retaining the Algerian dialect, including the linguistic intermingling (the infiltration of French vocabulary), which reflects the reality of Algerian communication that has not yet shed the French language—an undeniable part of the history that underpins Algerian identity—and by evoking Algerian folk culture in its various forms: linguistic (Algerian proverbs and folk songs), performative (Algerian behavioural patterns and the populist mindset of the citizen/the stereotype of women), and ritual (Algerian marriage rituals). This reflects the writer's and director's commitment to preserving the distinctive features of Algerian identity.

The underlying strategy of theatrical discourse to foster a sense of belonging and resist the dystopia of a painful reality is evident in the symbolisation of both the dramatic action and the theatrical dialogue, in tandem with the performance on stage, as most of the events presented had a restorative purpose aimed at repairing the individual's relationship with their identity and homeland, and at rooting feelings of belonging to the Algerian environment with its particularities, culture and even its shortcomings (see table). If we consider the subject of IVF and fertilised eggs outside the womb, the theme of procreation here can be interpreted on a deeper level than mere biological reproduction; symbolically obtaining a child from another environment serves as a vehicle for coded messages to the audience, aimed at fostering a sense of belonging and rooting the foundations of Algerian identity, far removed from preaching and correctness and direct instruction. The theatrical discourse aims to present the issue of illegal immigration to obtain a son (who is, in fact, 'illegitimate') to be raised in an Algerian environment, and the husband's belief that the worldly solution lies in the hands of the West—a reference to the question of identity fragmentation within a larger global system. This self, which turns to the 'other' to serve self-interest or national interest in a way that undermines the foundations and principles of identity, cannot gain the legitimacy to endure, for it is, in essence, the product of a fusion far removed from the womb of Algerian reality, culture and identity.

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