Polyphony in *Sayyidat al-Maqām* by Waciny Laredj: A Bakhtinian Reading

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Abstract:

This article examines manifestations of dialogism in its Bakhtinian sense in Waciny Laredj's novel *Sayyidat al-Maqām*. It focuses on the author's presence and relationship with the characters, the extent of those characters' autonomy or subordination, and the narrative's linguistic diversity. The study draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts, particularly polyphony (the plurality of voices), dialogism, and heteroglossia (linguistic plurality or multilingualism).[1] Moreover, the chronotope (the unity of time and space) is used to uncover the degree to which vocal and linguistic multiplicity is realised in the novel and the extent of the implied author's presence in shaping perspectives and positions. The article concludes that although the novel appears, on the surface, to present a text characterised by multiple voices and languages, it ultimately remains bound to the authority of the implied author, who directs the characters' discourse and employs their languages to serve his ideological propositions. Thus, the novel emerges as dialogic in form yet monologic in essence, reflecting the distinctive nature of the modern Arabic novel as it interacts with Bakhtin's critical theories.

Keywords:

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[1] Tzvetan Todorov, *Mīkhaʾīl Bākhtīn: al-Mabdaʾ al-Ḥiwārī*, trans. Fakhri Ṣāliḥ (Cairo: Ruʾyah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2012), 148.

Introduction:

Bakhtinian theory is regarded as one of the most prominent contemporary critical approaches, having significantly contributed to the development of tools for analysing narrative texts. It has opened new horizons for the study of the novel from the perspective of the plurality and interaction of voices. For Bakhtin, the novel is not a monologic discourse closed in upon itself; rather, it is a dialogic space in which multiple voices engage one another, each possessing its own distinct consciousness and vision of the world and its objects. These voices intersect or clash within the text's structure. Among the conditions for the realisation of the polyphonic novel, as formulated by Bakhtin on the basis of Dostoevsky's work in this field, is "the profusion of voices and of independent, unmerged forms of consciousness, and the plurality of original voices belonging to fully realised characters. "[2]

The concept of dialogism has become one of the most prominent critical keys for approaching and understanding the modern novel owing to its meanings of openness, plurality, and disruption of the dominance of a single authoritative voice. From this standpoint, this article aims to examine Waciny Laredj's *Sayyidat al-Maqām* in light of these Bakhtinian critical concepts, focusing on three central issues:

1. The presence of the author between explicit presence and relative absence.
2. The voices of the characters between autonomy and subordination.

3. The diversity of linguistic levels within the narrative.

Our choice of *Sayyidat al-Maqām* in particular is because it represents a significant experience within the trajectory of the modern Algerian novel and because it engages with sensitive political, social, and religious issues (the events of 5 October 1988), political violence, and the dominance of religious discourse in its interaction with questions of self, identity, and memory. In doing so, the novel offers serious possibilities for applying Bakhtinian concepts, which affirm that it is not constructed on a single voice but rather through the dialectic of conflicting voices.

This study raises a fundamental problem: To what extent does *Sayyidat al-Maqām* realise polyphony and linguistic plurality in the Bakhtinian sense, and to what extent does it remain subject to the authority of the implied author? To answer this question, it is necessary first to outline the concise theoretical framework from which this reading proceeds.

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[2] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Shāʿiriyyat Dūstūyefski*, trans. Jamil Naṣīf al-Takrītī, rev. Ḥayāt Sharārah (Baghdad–Casablanca: Dār Tūbqāl li-l-Nashr, 1986), 10.

Concise Theoretical Framework:

A. Polyphony (Plurality of Voices):

This concept is among Bakhtin's most significant contributions to the analysis of the novel. He considered Dostoevsky's works to be constructed on a genuine plurality of voices, each with its own internal logic and distinct vision of the world. In other words, these voices are not merely simple instruments in the hands of their author; instead, they constitute autonomous consciousnesses that interact with other forms of consciousness that stand beside them and even with the author himself. It is precisely from this perspective that the designation "polyphonic novel" or "novel of many voices" arises.

B. Heteroglossia (tāʿaddudiyyat al-lisānīyah):

By this term, Bakhtin refers specifically to the diversity of linguistic levels within the narrative text. There is the language of the intellectual, the language of the commoner, the language of the authority figure, the language of the Sufi or religious figure, and so forth. "The novel is the social diversity of speech types, and sometimes of languages and individual voices, artistically organised. "[3] Every language among these carries a particular ideology, and the interaction between these linguistic levels reveals the extent of social and ideological conflict within the narrative. Thus, the novel becomes a mirror reflecting social plurality rather than merely a story recounted from a single, solitary voice.

C. Dialogism:

This term is one of the central concepts in Bakhtinian thought, and it refers precisely to the dialogic nature inherent in every discourse. "The dialogic orientation of discourse is, of course, a phenomenon that is characteristic of all discourse. It is the natural orientation of all living speech; in all the directions it takes toward its subject, it encounters another's discourse, a discourse already shaped, and cannot avoid a living, intense interaction with it."

In this sense, no voice exists in a vacuum. Every living discourse is addressed to another living discourse that responds to it or resonates with it. For Bakhtin, the novelistic text is a complex network of dialogic relations, not a structure sufficient unto itself. Accordingly, the concept of dialogism allows us to read the text as a dynamic space in which various discourses intersect political, religious, philosophical, and quotidian discourse.

D. Chronotope:

The concept of spatio-temporality (time–space) is among the most complex Bakhtinian notions. Bakhtin defined this concept as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and

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[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *al-Khiṭāb al-Riwāʾī*, trans. Muḥammad Barādah (Cairo: Ruʾyah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2009), 64.

spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."[4] This concept is, in fact, tied to the unity of time and space within the text and to the manner in which they interact with event and character. The chronotope, for Bakhtin, is not an entirely neutral framework but a structural component that contributes to the generation of dialogism. Space (the city, the street, the neighbourhood) and time (the events of 5 October 1988) in Waciny Laredj's *Sayyidat al-Maqām* are not merely a backdrop; they are essential elements in shaping the characters' voices and their interactions.

E. Authority of the Implied Author:

Some refer to this figure as the "abstract" writer (Abstrait). Al-Ṣādiq Qassūmah states, "The concrete or real writer represents the author's outwards or external self (that is, his personal self or his self as it exists in its social identity), whereas the abstract writer represents the writer's deeper self in a given work (or in the totality of his works). It is therefore a self of an artistic and intellectual nature."[5] Concerning this point, Bakhtin emphasises the importance of the autonomy of voices; however, the novel often maintains a varying distance from this ideal, depending on the degree of dominance exerted by the implied author. Some texts allow characters to express themselves and their consciousness freely, whereas others reshape these voices and their discourses into the author's own voice. Hence, it is important to examine these voices in relation to the author in terms of freedom and subordination.

1. The Presence of the Author and His Voice:

The author's presence within the narrative is one of Bakhtin's essential concerns. One of the principles of polyphony is that the author withdraws to the background, allowing the characters to articulate their internal logic freely. However, *Sayyidat al-Maqām* reveals the author's wavering presence: at times, he hides, opening space for the characters, and at other times, he appears through his implied voice, exerting control and direction.

1–1. The Implied Author and His Concealed Voice:

Let us consider the following passage from the novel, spoken by the protagonist–narrator, the university professor: "You will say *raṣāṣa*, Friday, 07 October of the autumn of 1988. A meaningless bullet, like the many bullets that pierced the silence of the city during those days. A bullet fired from a pistol whose owner never knew that he was the author of the catastrophe. He may be one of the passers-by I meet daily in the streets after finishing his national or nonnational service! I do not know. *Ouf … al-ʿaskar ʿaskar*. In the moment of death, it wears the boots of *al-qatl al-khinsha* and descends into closed places to make the massacre easier."[6]

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[4] Mijān al-Ruwailī and Saʿd al-Bāzʿī, *Dalīl al-Nāqid al-Adabī* (Casablanca–Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2007), 170.

[5] al-Ṣādiq Qasūmah, *Ṭarāʾiq Taḥlīl al-Qiṣṣah* (Tunis: Dār al-Junūb li-l-Nashr, n.d.), 134.

[6] Waciny Laredj, *Sayyidat al-Maqām* (Reghaia, Algeria: Moufem Publishing, 1997), 6.

This passage clearly reveals the overt and explicit presence of the implied author. Here, the narrator does not merely recount the gunshot incident; he goes beyond it to issue general evaluative judgments about authority, the civilian sphere, and history. Expressions such as "a meaningless bullet" and "*al-ʿaskar ʿaskar*" cannot represent the consciousness of a specific character within the text; they belong to a broader discourse produced by a narrator functioning as a value-laden reference point, that is, a self that intervenes from a position of evaluative and moral authority over characters and situations.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, this tendency contradicts the principle of polyphony, as the characters' voices here are not liberated from the novel's authority; instead, they dissolve into the narrator's voice, which predetermines the meaning of the event. Instead of allowing the characters to express their anxiety, fear, or indifference, the implied author imposes a single reading of the bullet: it is "meaningless," merely an instrument in the hands of a military power indifferent to the individual.

This is precisely what Saʿīd Yaqṭīn warned against when he affirmed that "many significant comments within the discourse [...] express the stance of the writer, and the narrator here is merely the masked speaker of his voice."[7] In this passage, the narrator does not convey the incident from the internal perspective of a given character; instead, he assumes the role of preacher and interpreter, diminishing the space for dialogism.

Such overarching discourses often diminish the space for dialogism and dissolve the characters' voices. The closing sentence in the passage above, "In the moment of death it wears the boots of *al-qatl al-khinsha*...", is not a neutral description; rather, it is in fact a metaphor through which the writer's own vision is projected onto the event, transforming the bullet from a mere individual incident into a collective symbol of ruin.

We observe, therefore, from this passage that the implied author in *Sayyidat al-Maqām* imposes his vision upon the events; he does not grant the characters a margin of freedom to express themselves but instead provides a complete discourse that determines the meaning of the bullet, the agent, the city, and even the authority. This places the text in an intermediate zone between dialogism, which grants autonomy to each voice, and monologism, which subjects the narrative to the author's voice.

To support this point, we present another excerpt from the novel, spoken by the protagonist–narrator himself: "*Ḥarrās al-nawāyā* spread through the city like the sands of the hot southern winds. You know they come only when the city loses its enchantment and returns to its oral countryside, which accepts nothing but its rituals. A coastal city that once revelled in colours and the cries of white seagulls is now being deserted by *Banū Kalbūn* and is being finished off by *Ḥarrās al-nawāyā*. The Afghan cap, the *naʿla Boumental*, the *qashshābiyyah*, and the American coat on top, and the banishment of the modern age and civilisation from people's memory, we smell them from afar and change

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[7] Saʿīd Yaqṭīn, *al-Qirāʾah wa-l-Tajrubah: Ḥawl al-Tajrīb fī al-Khiṭāb al-Riwāʾī al-Jadīd bi-l-Maghrib* (Cairo: Ruʾyah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2014), 86.

our crossings and paths. The harsh and violent scent of their perfumes precedes them. A perfume whose strength resembles the one poured over the corpses of the dead."[8]

In this passage, the narrator–protagonist's voice rises to pronounce a sweeping judgement on a social group designated by the symbolic name *Ḥarrās al-nawāyā*. The metaphor here is not entirely innocent; it offers an evaluative reading that alludes to a force overwhelming the city, imposing its guardianship over society, returning the city to its oral countryside and to its closed rituals.

This discourse clearly reveals the presence of the implied author, who hides behind the narrator yet directs the reader toward a specific interpretation of reality: the conflict between the open, cosmopolitan city and the reactionary, conservative force. Expressions such as "its desertion by *Banū Kalbūn*" or "the harsh scent of their perfumes..." do not refer to the lived experience of a particular character as much as they belong to a broader discursive vision that the author seeks to convey.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, this passage narrows the space for dialogism. Rather than allowing different voices to express themselves freely, the narrator dominates through his metaphors and insinuations, presenting a complete political and cultural stance. Thus, the text becomes closer to monologism, as the character's logic here does not appear autonomous but rather an expanded version of the implied author's vision. In this sense, we may indeed agree with Maḥmūd Ṭarshūnah that "the more the author's consciousness is revealed within his novel, the more the characters' consciousness contracts; and the stronger his presence, the more the dialogic effectiveness fades, and his idea, his consciousness, and his voice overshadow all ideas, all consciousness, and all voices. "[9] Such that these voices ultimately become mere signs serving a single position: that of the implied author and his solitary voice concealed behind the threads of the narrative.

Even the metaphors employed, "the perfume poured over the corpses of the dead," do not belong to a neutral lexicon or to the realistic language of the characters; they are utterances issuing from the author's vision and channelled through the narrator. In this way, the narrative shifts from conveying an internal experience to becoming a symbolic discourse that reveals a specific political and cultural stance. This passage illustrates how the implied author's voice appears not only in declarative statements but also in metaphors and collective symbols (such as *Ḥarrās al-nawāyā*), which generalise the individual experience and turn it into a sign of a societal crisis. Thus, the text directs the reader toward a predetermined interpretation, restricting and overriding the freedom of other voices and rendering polyphony limited and conditional.

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[8] Laredj, *Sayyidat al-Maqām*, 11.
[9] Maḥmūd Ṭarshūnah, *Sardiyyāt ʿArabiyyah* (Tunis: Markaz al-Nashr al-Jāmiʿī, 2015), 71–72.

Let us consider another brief passage from the novel, in which the narrator says, "*Banū Kalbūn* fashioned death and brought this plague, when they stole this homeland and filled the cities with lies and thefts. Then, they said, the city is without culture, so they flattened it, filled the libraries with printed works that revive superstitions and *druwashāt*."[10]

This passage clearly highlights the strong presence of the implied author, as the narrator's voice is transformed into a general, sociopolitical discourse that condemns a specific group, *the Banū Kalbūn*, and holds them responsible for cultural ruin and theft. This is not the narration of a lived event or an individual experience; it is an evaluative discourse reflecting an overarching vision of local society and history.

Concentrated expressions such as "they fashioned death," "they stole independence," and "they filled the cities with lies" move beyond the realm of storytelling into another realm altogether, that of explicit accusation. Here, we are no longer dealing with the logic of an individual character but with a position that is that of the implied author, who slips through the narrator to present a complete thesis about the falsification and devastation caused, in his terms, by *Banū Kalbūn*.

From a Bakhtinian standpoint, this brief excerpt reflects monologic unity rather than dialogic confrontation. Other voices are granted no opportunity for justification or response; instead, they are reduced to a distorted image preconstructed by the narrator. Thus, the text becomes a space dominated by the author's voice, imposing a specific political interpretation of events.

This excerpt sufficiently reveals that the author of *Sayyidat al-Maqām*, the implied author, of course, does not confine himself to light commentary; he sometimes appears in the form of a direct discourse burdened with political and cultural judgments, turning the narrative into a tool for transmitting a ready-made ideological vision. This restricts the autonomy of the other voice, rendering polyphony conditional.

It becomes clear, therefore, from the examples presented, that the implied author in *Sayyidat al-Maqām* is strongly present, even as he attempts to hide behind the narrator. This presence takes multiple forms, whether through declarative commentary, symbolic metaphors, or direct political discourse. Accordingly, the characters' voices do not enjoy full autonomy; instead, they move within an interpretive horizon predetermined by the author, rendering the novel oscillatory between partial polyphony and dominant monologism.

1–2. The Authority of the Author between Directing and Granting Freedom to the Characters:

The presence of the implied author in *Sayyidat al-Maqām* is not limited to his concealed voice; it extends throughout the narrative, at times even further, to subtly influence events and shape the characters' positions. This voice, which at times appears neutral, almost like a whisper, reveals, at other moments in the novel, an implicit authority that governs

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[10] Laredj, *Sayyidat al-Maqām*, 228.

the trajectory of the narrative event. Hence, examining the relationship between the author and his characters becomes necessary to uncover the nature of this authority and its limits, between moments when characters are granted freedom of expression and moments when their voices are directed in accordance with his own vision and voice.

Let us consider the following passage from the novel, spoken by the narrator: "For more than fifteen centuries, we have not created a city we could hope for; we found it ready-made, and we entered it with chickens, rabbits, dogs, and cats, and we began falsifying it until it became like a tent. *Sāḥur mā* is what these cities lack, in which nothing remains except plants that have begun to lose their lustre, and all the objects and artefacts that once adorned their squares and entrances are falling away. Everything is annihilated quietly and calmly. We read in the eyes the words that have become among the city's habits: *silence! on tue*."[11]

This passage, spoken by the narrator, reveals the narrator–author's authority, as the narrative shifts from presenting events to offering a historical–cultural evaluative discourse. The narrator here does not describe a specific city or even a particular personal experience; instead, he issues a sweeping judgement on the course of Arab civilisational history over 15 centuries. This evaluative stance directs the reader toward adopting a critical reading of the Arab city as a failed, distorted city, stripped of all enchantment, bound by the voice of killing. No alternative interpretations are available here; the discourse imposes a single, final meaning: a corrupt, falsified city governed by ruin.

The declarative formulation "we have not created a city we could hope for" places the reader before a conclusion that allows for no revision or debate, thereby stripping the characters of any will to speak or construct their own meaning. Their voices are dissolved within the judgment of the implied author. This is precisely what Bakhtin terms *authoritative discourse*: "the word that demands from us recognition and assimilation; it is imposed upon us regardless of its inner persuasiveness for us."[12]

This passage is also saturated with totalising metaphors: "we entered it with chickens, rabbits, dogs, and cats," "it became like a tent," "*silence on tue*." These images do not reflect the character's internal consciousness during the event; instead, they express a sarcastic, overarching stance. They are "revealing" metaphors employed by the implied author to position the city within a framework of falsification and civilisational failure. Here, metaphor does not serve any ornamental function; it is a medium for transmitting a particular political and cultural position.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, the previous passage intensifies the narrative's monologic character; there is no room for other voices to express divergent viewpoints or propose alternatives. Thus, the excerpt serves as a clear example of the implied author's authority, which shapes the city's meaning and prohibits any form of polyphonic plurality. The narrator is not describing a passing incident; he occupies the position of one who issues a

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[11] Ibid., 34.

[12] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Mukhtārāt min Aʿmāl Mīkhaʾīl Bākhtīn*, trans. Yūsuf Ḥallāq, intro. Buṭrus Ḥallāq (Cairo: al-Markaz al-Qawmī li-l-Tarjamah, 2008), 146.

sweeping judgment grounded in history, symbolism, and metaphor, guiding the reader toward a monologic meaning that allows for no negotiation. In this way, the text becomes closer in spirit to an ideological declarative discourse than to a polyphonic narrative that would allow characters to express themselves fully and freely.

Let us now consider another passage, spoken by Maryam, the central character in the narrative: "Imagine, even this marriage did not find its time to breathe air far from the gloom of the present," Maryam says. It too passed with an astonishing speed. I was sad, feeling nauseated and anxious when he approached me on the wedding night. I sensed a foul smell. I stood up. I was in deep pain and resisted stubbornly. I said to him, and he had prepared himself for the moment of rape:

Please, not now. I cannot.

Ma tkhāfīsh. ʿandnā waqtnā."[13]

This passage allows Maryam to express her experience in her own voice, free from the authority of the narrator or the implied author. Here, we hear an internal monologue of sorrow, nausea, and anxiety that articulates the character's individual consciousness, alongside a direct dialogue that reveals her refusal, in contrast to Ḥammūdah's violence as he attempts to impose himself. The narrator does not intervene to condemn Ḥammūdah or to justify Maryam's stance; instead, he leaves the character to reveal her emotions through a sequence of fragmented sentences: "I was sad … I sensed a foul smell … I stood up." These sentences, in fact, embody the character's autonomous internal logic.

The dialogue between Maryam and Ḥammūdah, although brief, reveals a genuinely dialogic moment: two opposing voices confronting one another's refusal versus insistence. A moment such as this brings the text closer to a tangible plurality because it does not present a single ready-made meaning; instead, it highlights an existential and social conflict that remains open to interpretation. The dialogic scene also reveals a multiplicity of discursive levels: Maryam's internal discourse expressing psychological and physical pain; Ḥammūdah's external discourse marked by violence and superficiality ("*ma tkhāfīsh. ʿandnā waqtnā*"); and, alongside these two, we sense the presence of an implicit traditional social discourse in which marriage is reduced to a moment of coercive violence. This interweaving of multiple discourses reflects what Bakhtin described as heteroglossia within the narrative text.

This passage thus constitutes a counterpoint to the scene of authorial direction (p. 43). Whereas the implied author determines the meaning of the city, here, he grants the character space to express her pain and refusal, thereby allowing a degree of vocal autonomy. This becomes sufficiently clear in the following excerpt from the novel, spoken by Maryam's mother, the mother of the protagonist:

"He had to be shocked and saddened so he would recognise the delusions of his reality. His face darkened, and he began to gnaw at his fingers and his insides. He turned into a

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[13] Laredj, *Sayyidat al-Maqām*, 103–4.

rabid dog struck on the head, unable to keep silent, to the point that he even thought of hitting me. He raised his hand high, then cursed the accursed devil and the whispering tempter; he stepped back a little, then let the words flow from his heart.

Ana?! rāk ghālṭa: wuld imra'ah u rajel? rajel faḥl yṭīḥ ḥīṭ w yaqʿar es-smā' w yjben el-mā'. Law kān ʿandī imra'a kāmla kount waldit'hā khamsīn marrā. Maʿāk Allāh ghāleb. El-arḍ yābsah. W et-terbah nāshfa."[14]

This scene shows that the author grants both the mother and al-ʿAbbās space to express themselves through a logic distinct from that of the narrator. The mother reveals the shocking, destabilising truth: "Maryam is the daughter of al-Ḥasan, not the daughter of al-ʿAbbās." Moreover, al-ʿAbbās respond with a discourse charged with boastfulness and exaggerated virility. The narrator here does not intervene to resolve the situation or to offer a ready-made explanation; instead, he allows the voices to confront and engage one another dialogically and directly. This is precisely what Bakhtin calls *dialogism*, where diverse forms of consciousness encounter one another without ever melting into a single authorial perspective.

The mother's discourse in the passage is calm and controlled, revealing her strategy in shocking al-ʿAbbās. Al-ʿAbbās' discourse, by contrast, is saturated with colloquial expressions and exaggerated bodily imagery "*rajil faḥl yṭīḥ ḥīṭ w yaqʿar es-smā' w yjben el-mā'*." This language does not belong to the narrator's or the author's lexicon; it belongs to the character's own linguistic register, which affirms the independence of his voice. Indeed, "the more a character is distinguished by a greater degree of objectivity, the more sharply its verbal physiognomy becomes defined."[15]

The scene also reveals a clear linguistic plurality. On the one hand is the mother's rational–moral discourse; on the other hand, al-ʿAbbās' colloquial, populist discourse, filled with excessive imagery; and on the other hand, a third, implicit discourse with a sociocultural background concerning lineage, honour, and virility. This diversity of discourses brings the text closer to genuine narrative polyphony: "In the polyphonic novel, the importance of linguistic diversity and verbal specification is indeed preserved."[16]

Therefore, *Sayyidat al-Maqām* clearly oscillates between moments in which the author's presence is strong through his commentary and authoritative discourse and moments in which his voice recedes, allowing the characters to express their positions according to their own logic. This alternation between direction and freedom causes the narrative to fluctuate between dominant monologism and partial liberation. However, examining the author's presence alone is insufficient for understanding the nature of polyphony, which leads us to the next point of the study, where voices are analysed in terms of their autonomy or subordination to the author's discourse.

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[14] Ibid., 87.
[15] Bakhtin, *Shāʿiriyyat Dūstūyefski*, 266.
[16] Ibid., 266.

2. Characters and Voices:

2–1. Autonomy of Voices:

Let us consider the following passage from the novel, spoken by Ḥammūdah, Maryam's husband: "*Bint en-nās* they said I was *marbūṭ*, I said *maʿlihesh*. They said *ṭaḥḥān*, I said *ṭuz*. They said *ḥāwī*, I said a word, and it passed. They said the wedding blood is doubtful, I said, let them go with their talk.

I know her better than they do, and I love her. I cut my finger for your sake; I said she is beautiful and deserves it, and I will wait more days if necessary. Moreover, you are insistent on remaining sealed like an enchanted bottle. My patience is gone, and I am exhausted."[17]

Here, Ḥammūdah speaks in his own voice without any intervention from the narrator or the implied author, using expressions belonging to the Algerian colloquial register (*marbūṭ*, *maʿlihesh*, *ṭaḥḥān*, *ḥāwī*, *ydizzū maʿāhum*), which reflects his personal lexicon and affirms the autonomy of his voice. These words and expressions cannot be attributed to the author's or the narrator's discourse; instead, they express a specific popular social register.

Notably, Ḥammūdah does not limit himself to superficial reactions; he constructs an internal logic through which he defends himself against the accusations "they said … I said …" and presents arguments that concern him personally: the sacrifice (cutting his finger), the willingness to wait, and the admission of his love. He also insists that he knows his wife "better than they do," placing his consciousness in confrontation with the opposing collective consciousness.

Through this scene, a dialogic space is created on two levels: a direct dialogue with Maryam as the primary addressee (*yā bint en-nās … wa anti hiya anti*) and an implicit dialogue with the community that repeatedly launches accusations in the form of "they said …." Thus, Ḥammūdah becomes part of an interwoven dialogic network in which the voice of the individual confronts the voice of the collective. This realises Bakhtinian dialogism at its finest, where diverse forms of consciousness confront one another rather than being reduced to a single, unified awareness.

Let us closely examine another scene in the novel that embodies this intense dialogism. The passage consists of a dialogue between Maryam's mother and her husband al-ʿAbbās:

"*W el-mārouziyyah en-nāqṣa men wīn jāat?!* Tell me!! I gathered all my strength and said within myself, and then what? He knows everything.

'*El-māzouziyyah en-nāqṣa* is your brother's daughter.'

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[17] Laredj, *Sayyidat al-Maqām*, 188.

He said nothing at all, but he turned red like a rag and bit his lower lip until it bled. *Ma ʿandī ma ndīr yā wuld en-nās.* If al-Ḥasan were to return, I would endure and tell him I do not know you. I would deny him because I tied my life to yours. However, I cannot lie to my own belly. Maryam!! She is my only truth. "[18]

In this passage, the mother assumes a sharply confrontational stance, confronting al-ʿAbbās with the painful truth: Maryam is not his daughter but the late al-Ḥasan's daughter. This decision to confess reflects her independence and her courage in expressing her own consciousness. She does not submit to the logic of the male husband, who wishes to deny the truth to preserve his masculinity; instead, she openly and honestly declares her stance.

Here, we perceive genuine dialogism in the Bakhtinian sense: the mother's explicit discourse, which refuses falsehood and insists on acknowledging the truth, stands alongside al-ʿAbbās's discourse, which manifests as a silent bodily reaction, reddening, biting the lip, and suppressing anger. We thus find ourselves before opposing voices that do not fuse into a single perspective but coexist within the narrative as an open conflict.

Through Ḥammūdah's voice and the mother's voice in confrontation with al-ʿAbbās, it becomes evident that some of the novel's characters are indeed capable of maintaining their own discourse and distinctive linguistic register without being dissolved into the author's or narrator's voice. In this way, a degree of vocal autonomy is achieved, reflecting the text's diverse forms of consciousness and affirming its presence as a dialogic, plural discourse.

However, this autonomy does not, by any means, imply the absence of subordination to the author's voice, a matter that will be addressed in the following section of the study.

2–2. Subordination of certain characters in the authorial discourse:

If some characters, as we have previously described, retain vocal autonomy, enabling them to express their own internal logic, other characters, foremost among them Maryam, appear outwardly independent yet, in depth, consolidate the author's discourse. Her voice is frequently employed to serve his intellectual and social thesis, as becomes evident in the following passage spoken by the protagonist:

"Since the events of 05 October 1988, a person has been able to open his mouth slightly to the air, but many of those imprisoned among human beings have begun opening it to its fullest, so that daily discourse, written, visual, and oral turns into barking, into a desperate insistence on returning the country to the horrors of a medieval apocalypse. *Ḥarrās al-nawāyā* have begun transforming into an organised army that controls the city's vitality.

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[18] Ibid., 88.

You know?! I no longer feel any safety at all in this city. They could emerge from your evening cup of coffee or from the cracks of the bedroom walls, erect their gallows, and prepare the block for the beheading of a head that sees more than it should. "[19]

In this passage, it appears as although Maryam was narrating her personal feelings after the events of October 1988. However, the language quickly slides toward a general ideological discourse: "an organised army," "the Middle Ages," "the gallows." These metaphors do not, in reality, reflect the consciousness of a frightened woman; instead, they express the implied author's position toward the rise of conservative and fundamentalist forces. At this precise point, the character serves as a transparent mask for the writer; she thus loses her autonomous voice and merges entirely with her author.

Among the examples that deepen the idea of covert subordination is the following passage spoken by Maryam, which appears as although she is thinking in her own voice about the relationship between man and woman; however, in depth, she speaks in a generalising, ideological register that fully merges with the author's discourse on masculinity, religion, and authority:

"A man runs after his woman, in most cases not out of love, but to pour into her his hell and his books. After a year, he turns his back to her in bed, and intimacy dies under the brutality of the oppressed moment. After another year, he begins his feverish search for another woman to complete his religion and desire, which is fulfilled only through the women against whom fat was issued daily in mosques and public squares. She is the accursed devil, and he is the angel of the Merciful."[20]

This passage takes a critical stance toward the relationship between men and women. On the surface, Maryam appears to be speaking from her own personal consciousness. However, the generalisation "the man … the woman" and the prosecutorial tone "the daily fat was … the mosques and public squares" reveal that her discourse aligns with the author's discourse in critiquing patriarchal and religious structures, rendering her voice subordinate rather than independent.

These two excerpts thus show how the central character is used as a tool for conveying the author's vision. She appears, outwardly, to express her own experience and suffering, yet in depth, she speaks in the language of the implied author. This paradox restricts the novel's dialogism, as the characters' voices do not always remain autonomous; they sometimes dissolve into dominant monologism. However, dialogism is achieved not only through the autonomy or subordination of characters but also through language itself and the diversity of discourses and their interaction within the text. Our study opens the question of *dialogism and language*, where we uncover how religious, authoritative, and feminine voices intersect within a multilayered linguistic network.

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[19] Ibid., 138.
[20] Ibid., 102.

3. Dialogism and Language:

3–1. Dialogue among Voices (Authority/Woman/City):

The novel constitutes a stage for multiple intersecting or conflicting voices, forming a dialogic space that reflects the complexity of Algerian reality at the end of the 1980s.

1. **The Voice of Authority**

   The voice of authority does not express a complex internal logic; instead, it is reduced to a monologic, authoritarian discourse, which corresponds precisely to Bakhtin's view of monologic speech, which rejects negotiation. However, the presence of this voice in confrontation with other voices (the woman/the city) renders dialogism possible because repression is often met with refusal and resistance.

2. **The Voice of the Woman:**

   The voices of Maryam and her mother represent the text's feminine dimension. This voice oscillates between personal confession in narrating suffering (with Ḥammūdah/al-ʿAbbās) and ideological discourse (critiquing masculinity and religion). Here, the woman is both witness and victim, yet she is also an active narrative agent, as she exposes the contradictions of society. In her dialogue with authority, her voice becomes one of resistance and refusal; in her dialogue with the city, it becomes a discourse of nostalgia, longing for childhood.

3. **The Voice of the City:**

   The city of *Sayyidat al-Maqām* is not a silent backdrop to events; it becomes a living character with its own voice. Algiers, coastal cities, are evoked as living beings that have lost their beauty under the pressure of war, violence, and fundamentalism. The narrator's language renders it present through its features: "the cries of seagulls, the colours, the sea" in contrast with the sounds of "gallows, bullets, fear." In this way, the city shifts from being merely a place to becoming a participant in the dialogue, revealing the tragedy of the community.

The interaction of these voices within the novel brings it closer to the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony, which cannot be reduced to a single voice. However, this plurality remains limited because the author's voice continues to lurk in the background. Hence, uncovering the multiplicity of linguistic levels and the ways they interact within the narrative is important.

3–2. Multiplicity of Linguistic Levels (Religious Language – Modern Narrative Language):

Alongside the diversity of voices, as previously noted, the novel is marked by a multiplicity of linguistic registers. Among the manifestations of this plurality is the presence of authoritarian religious language, embodied in the discourse of *Ḥarrās al-nawāyā*, who fill the city with their fatwas and rigid vocabularies. This language becomes an instrument of repression, eliminating diversity and difference.

In addition to this register, modern narrative language, expressed in the narrator's style, employs techniques of contemporary fiction, such as temporal fragmentation and the use of French expressions (*silence! on tue*), reflecting the text's openness to a contemporary, hybrid language. This linguistic diversity enriches the novel artistically and opens it to multiple semantic levels; however, it ultimately remains bound to the authority of the author, who harnesses this diversity in the service of his intellectual vision.

From this final point, it becomes clear that dialogism in *Sayyidat al-Maqām* is achieved through two levels of voices and languages, yet this plurality does not attain the absolute autonomy described by Bakhtin; as previously stated, it remains directed by the implied author.

Conclusion:

Thus, *Sayyidat al-Maqām* is a dialogic novel in appearance yet monologic in essence. It presents a façade of multiple voices but ultimately gathers them into a single vision that of the author. This reflects the particularity of the modern Arabic novel, which draws on Bakhtinian concepts while reshaping them in light of its own cultural and political reality. While this study affirms that reading the Arabic novel through a Bakhtinian lens reveals spaces of vocal and linguistic plurality, it simultaneously opens a serious discussion on the limits and possibilities of such diversity.

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