

Reconstructing Palestinian National Identity in the Mirror of History in Light of Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory: A Case Study of "A Mask the Color of the Sky" by Basem Khandaqji

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Introduction

Basim Khandaqji is among the contemporary Palestinian writers who have successfully reflected the condition of their society and the identity-related concerns of Palestinians in their works. One of his most prominent novels is "A Mask, the Colour of the Sky", which won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction - commonly known as the Arab Booker Prize - in 2024. By engaging with questions of history and national identity, the novel draws on literature's representational capacity to reread history and redefine Palestinian identity. Therefore, an analysis of history in this novel requires the simultaneous use of literary studies and postcolonial cultural studies. This is because the representation of history in the work manifests itself, on the one hand, in the novel's narrative structure and, on the other, relates to key postcolonial concerns such as domination, national identity, and resistance. Accordingly, the need for this research arises from the fact that the novel has not yet been studied within the framework of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory with a focus on the dimension of history. Employing this approach can both expand interdisciplinary scholarship in Arabic narrative studies and demonstrate how history contributes to the redefinition of Palestinian national identity. On this basis, the principal aim of the study is to explain how literary narrative participates in redefining Palestinian national identity through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method grounded in qualitative content analysis. In this regard, postcolonial criticism, as an interdisciplinary approach linking literary studies and cultural studies, provides the basis for analyzing "A Mask, the Colour of the Sky" by Basim Khandaqji. Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, together with concepts related to national identity and the historical dimension, is used to analyze the novel. The study brings narratology into dialogue with postcolonial cultural

studies by examining narrative elements and interpreting their functions through Bhabha's theoretical framework. Data were collected through library research and documentary sources. To this end, theoretical sources concerning Bhabha's postcolonial studies, national identity, and history were carefully reviewed, and the relevant material was extracted and organized. Subsequently, through an analytical reading of the text and in light of the study's theoretical foundations, the historical dimension was identified and analyzed through the novel's narrative elements, including plot, characterization, theme, and narrative time.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that the historical dimension in the narrative structure of "A Mask, the Colour of the Sky" - including its plot, characterization, themes, and narrative time - serves a function that extends beyond the mere representation of the past. In the novel's plot, the representation of historical figures and events turns history into an essential element in shaping the narrative and advancing its events, while also creating the conditions for the indigenous subject's resistance to structures of domination. In characterization, the protagonists' encounter with the dominant system's official history places them in a Third Space between colonizer and colonized, resulting in the formation of hybrid identities. Moreover, by mimicking elements of domination and deploying them against the dominant system itself, the characters create possibilities for resistance. The novel's thematic dimension, by foregrounding the distortion of history by the dominant power, prepares the ground for the rearticulation of suppressed and distorted narratives as well as for resistance to structures of domination. Finally, at the level of narrative time, the connection between past and present demonstrates the dynamism of national identity and the possibility of its redefinition. Within the framework of Homi K. Bhabha's theory, this reflection of history in the novel makes it possible to challenge the official history of domination and resist it, thereby contributing to the redefinition of Palestinian national identity. In this process, mimicry of elements of dominant discourse, without their full acceptance, becomes an instrument of resistance. Hybridity, resulting from the interaction between the cultural positions of colonizer and colonized, reveals the dynamic nature of identity; and the Third Space, by creating an in-between arena in which narratives encounter one another and new meanings emerge, enables the redefinition of Palestinian national identity.

Conclusion

The results show that, in the plot, history becomes a central axis in the formation of the narrative and a foundation for the indigenous subject's

resistance. In characterization, the characters' location within the Third Space leads to hybrid identity formation and to the mimicking of elements of domination as a means of resistance. The thematic dimension, by highlighting the distortion of history, fosters resistance to dominant narratives; and narrative time, through its connection between past and present, signals the dynamic character of national identity. This representation also results in resistance and the redefinition of Palestinian identity by challenging the official history of domination. Overall, linking narratology with postcolonial cultural studies in the analysis of "A Mask, the Colour of the Sky" demonstrates that examining history through the novel's narrative elements enables a more precise explanation of its role in shaping resistance to structures of domination and redefining Palestinian national identity. Accordingly, while demonstrating the capacity of an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the cultural and identity-related dimensions of literary works, this study may contribute to the expansion of interdisciplinary research in Arabic narratology and to a clearer understanding of the cultural dimensions of the novel in question.

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