

Rachid Boudjedra's Intellectual Writing: Exploring the Intersection of History and Ideology

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ABSTRACT: *The novelistic writing of Rachid Boudjedra exemplifies a remarkable fusion of erudition, where diverse fields of knowledge and cultures converge. Interweaving texts from various references, his work opens up multiple avenues, embracing history, philosophy, ideology, cultural heritage, and human knowledge. In his novels particularly Saint Georges Hotel, The Barbary Figs, and Spring religion intersects with atheism, fiction blends with rationalism, and opposing ideologies coexist. History often leaves its imprint through the integration of real historical events into the narrative framework.*

In this sense, the novelistic text becomes a fertile space for universalism, where Ibn Khaldun stands alongside Francis Bacon, Moussa Maimonides next to Ulugh Beg, and various other Eastern and Western thinkers such as Nietzsche, Saint Augustine, Saint Donatus, Homer, Suhrawardi, Ibn Bahr, and Al-Jahiz. The relationship between history and ideology emerges in the way historical narratives are shaped by ideological frameworks, influencing the perception and representation of past events in literary discourse. Boudjedra's novels illustrate how history is not a neutral record but a constructed narrative that reflects ideological struggles and cultural reinterpretations.

KEYWORDS: Intellectualism; History; Ideology; Novelistic writing; Referential erudition; Human values.

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Introduction

Rachid Boudjedra's novelistic writing exemplifies a compelling manifestation of erudition. Through the intricate interplay of diverse textual references, his novels engage with a multitude of perspectives within the vast domain of human knowledge. These literary works intertwine various cultures and abound with both Oriental and Occidental allusions, rendering them a fertile crossroads for multiple ideologies even those that may transcend the author's own conscious grasp. In this regard, Boudjedra's oeuvre charts alternative intellectual trajectories, giving voice to history, philosophy, ideology, cultural heritage, and the broader spectrum of human understanding.

Particularly in his recent trilogy comprising *Saint Georges Hotel*, *The Peakly Pear*, and *Spring* the author masterfully juxtaposes religion and atheism, fiction and rationalism, as well as competing ideological currents. The narrative framework often integrates real historical events, leaving indelible imprints of history within the fabric of the novels. Thus, the novelistic text becomes a fertile space for universalism, where Ibn Khaldoun stands alongside Francis Bacon, Moussa Maimounide next to Ouleg Beg, as well as numerous Eastern and Western thinkers such as Nietzsche, Saint Augustine, Saint Donas, Homer, Suhrawardy, Ibn Bahr, Jahiz, and others

From this perspective, the following questions arise:

- How do cultural and intellectual interactions manifest in Rachid Boudjedra's novels?
- Does the intellectual nature of these novels primarily explore the excavation of collective and individual identities through a heightened awareness of cultural and social realities, as well as the evocation of local and universal human heritage?

1- Between History and Ideology: Religion and Money as Trans-Temporal Forces Shaping Imperialism and Dictatorship:

History permeates Rachid Boudjedra's writings, exerting a haunting presence over the author. Through his literary explorations, he delves into buried worlds, engaging in meditations that implicitly or explicitly evoke ideological dilemmas persisting across time. His novels are interwoven with references to historical figures representing diverse and, at times, conflicting ideologies. Given history's cyclical nature, similar ideological struggles reemerge across different eras, embodied by individuals who, despite temporal distances, champion the same causes or face suppression for parallel reasons. In Boudjedra's works, the fight for freedom and the rejection of colonialism remain central themes, exemplified through historical figures such as André Mandouze, Monseigneur Duval, Saint Donat, Saint Augustine, Maurice Audin, Suhrawardy, and Ouleg Beg. Although separated by centuries, these figures share common ideological convictions.

Saint Donat, a Berber churchman born in the 3rd century, founded Donatism, a theological doctrine emphasizing the uniqueness of Christ while rejecting his divinity. Opposing Roman Catholicism, which is rooted in the doctrine of the divine Trinity, Donat refused to conduct prayers in Latin, opting instead for Phoenician and Canaanite languages. He strongly opposed Roman colonial policies, denouncing land confiscation, systemic social injustice between Numidians and Romans, and the enslavement of indigenous peoples. Donat's vision of Christianity positioned Jesus as a liberator advocating justice for the oppressed (Julien, 1994, pp. 219–220). Exiled to Spain, Donat ultimately perished in a Roman prison in 355 AD. Revered as a martyr of freedom, his doctrine, Donatism, continued to inspire Berber resistance against Roman rule.

In 356 AD, Saint Augustine was born in Taghaste (modern-day Souk Ahras) to a Roman father who owned a *latifundium*, an estate seized from its original Numidian owner. As a staunch proponent of Roman Catholicism upholding the divinity of Christ and conducting prayers in Latin Augustine became a leading ideological figure of the Roman Empire. He legitimized Rome's suppression of Donatists, branding them as heretics. In this context, Augustine emerged as a religious instrument of Roman colonial imperialism. In

contrast, Donat's theological and political stance resonated with early socialist ideals, aligning closely with principles later associated with communism. Julien (1994, p. 220) characterizes Donat as both a doctrinal leader and a defender of the impoverished masses. While Donatism symbolized popular resistance against colonial injustice, Augustine was among the first to fuse religion with politics in service of imperial authority.

Seventeen centuries later, on the same land formerly Numidia, now Algeria two opposing ideologies once again clashed: revolutionary anti-colonial communism and colonial imperialism. Monseigneur Duval, Archbishop of Algeria and Africa since 1926, consistently supported anti-colonial movements, resisting the French colonial regime, which bore striking parallels to Rome's imperial dominance in the 3rd century. Boudjedra highlights these enduring ideological struggles, which can be described as "trans-temporal," by juxtaposing two distinct ideological currents: that of Saint Augustine marked by a Machiavellian, imperialist religious ideology and that of Donat and Duval, embodying an anti-colonial and revolutionary ethos.

In *Printemps (Spring)*, the narrator delivers a powerful discourse commending the unwavering support of Monseigneur Duval and André Mandouze for the Algerian resistance (Boudjedra, 2014, p. 58). André Mandouze, who mentored Telj's father, Salim, at the University of Algiers in 1962, is widely recognized for his extensive research on the life and philosophy of Saint Augustine.

an emeritus linguist and qualified specialist in many ancient languages. He was a fervent Catholic and had supported, with the complicity of Monsieur Duval, Archbishop of Algiers and Africa, in a courageous and intransigent way the Algerian resistance which was fighting for the independence of the country... Professor Mandouze was a left-wing Catholic, highly respected in academic circles and nationalist circles who had admired his courage during the Algerian war, therefore, in favor of the country's independence - and finally - in the popular circles he frequented assiduously for their sense of hospitality, fidelity and tolerance.

The discourse on the Algerian church and its role in supporting the oppressed is a recurring theme in Boudjedra's novels. He presents the church as both a source of solace and a catalyst for change, exploring its internal complexities, ideological tensions, and the diversity of perspectives within its ranks. Through his narratives, Boudjedra interrogates the church's responsibility in promoting social justice and examines its interactions with external forces, particularly colonial powers.

In *The Prickly Pears* (Boudjedra, 2010, p. 86) he invites readers to reflect on the historical context and the evolving role of the church in acts of resistance. The novel underscores the church's potential for transformative action and its profound impact on the lives of marginalized communities. Overall, Boudjedra's works offer valuable insights into the historical significance of the Algerian church and its engagement in struggles against oppression. In this regard, he presents it as well:

Mr. Baudier taught me my first lessons in humanism and political vigilance. He is a practicing Catholic. At the time of the war, the Algerian church was progressive, anti-colonialist and very close to the poor. She still is today

Rachid explains how good people pay the price for their anti-colonial positions and their support for the oppressed, even if it irritates everyone around them

Monsieur Duval, Archbishop of Algeria and Africa, was hated by the black feet who had named him Mohamed Ben Duval. Mr. Baudier was proud to belong to this church whose reference and symbol was not Saint Augustine, born in Taghaste (Souk-ahras today) and Algerian bishop of Hippo (Annaba today) from the 2nd century, but Saint Donatus

Omar the cousin of Rachid was proud of the Donatist movement which was born near his hometown Batna

He was quite proud to expose the doctrine of Donatism which he described as primitive communism. He didn't like Saint Augustine too much, whom he described him as a harki in the pay of Rome and a fat bourgeois, with dripping confessions!

(Boudjedra, 2010, p. 87)

In *Saint Georges Hotel* (Boudjedra, 2007, pp. 77–78), Jeanne becomes acquainted with Saint Augustine through his book *The Confessions*, which her father, Jean, gave her during her baccalaureate year. During a discussion with Kamel about the book and its author, she reflects on the parallels between Rome and colonial France both imperialist powers driven by shared ideologies. These powers have committed similar atrocities on the same land, adhering to consistent strategies and principles to establish and maintain dominance.

Augustine, in legitimizing the Roman Empire's repression of the Berbers, neither opposed land confiscation nor acknowledged the oppression endured by the Donatists and Berbers. Both the Roman Empire and France, during their colonization of Algeria (formerly known as Numidia), applied the same ideological framework. This framework involved expropriating the lands of the indigenous population and granting them to colonizers, enforcing discriminatory laws that perpetuated social injustice, and instrumentalizing religion to serve imperialist ambitions.

Throughout his works, Boudjedra examines the manipulation of religion for ideological purposes across various historical periods, from antiquity and the Middle Ages to the contemporary 21st century. Wahhabism, in particular, serves as a relevant example of this phenomenon. Boudjedra addresses this religious ideology multiple times in *Spring*, where he defines it as follows:

Religious ideology founded by Muhammad Ibn Abdwahab (1703-1792) in Naji, central part of Arabia. His theory becomes the state doctrine adopted by Abdelaziz Al Saud when he founded the kingdom of Saudi Arabia under British rule (1932) and provides that the Muslim state must be universal and operate exclusively according to the principles of religious law (sharia and Koran)

Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.177)

Boudjedra explains further this ideology on page 227. Telj in a dialogue with Niève asks a denunciatory question:

How did the West with its enormous political culture of progress and light, its immense civilization, its formidable artistic and scientific potential, ally itself politically and ideologically with countries which disseminate this infamous Wahabi philosophy?

Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.188)

Saudi ideology is at odds with occidental principles of human rights. The author described it as violent, belligerent, cruel, misogynistic and inhuman (Boudjedra, 2014, p.228) He supports his thesis on the ideology of the Gulf countries and in particular Saudi Arabia by numbers:

(78 executions in 2013); where recalcitrant or not women are buried alive (27, in 2013); where it amputated the hands and feet to everyone (492, in 2013) for the slightest theft, for the slightest mistake.

Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.227)

Telj contemplates the contradiction between the humanistic principles championed by Western culture—particularly the emphasis on human rights—and the political ideologies upheld by Western governments. He questions how these governments remain complicit in the spread of Wahhabist ideology and fundamentalist Islamism among European youth. Telj offers his own explanation, arguing that Gulf

countries, leveraging their financial influence, have secured significant assets such as the P.S.G. football club and large sections of Parisian suburbs. He asserts that money and vested interests shape global dynamics, often uniting adversaries. What may be divided by principles can ultimately be reconciled through shared economic and political interests.

Telj further reflects on the historical pattern of creating and manipulating ideologies, a process that consistently results in the subjugation of marginalized populations. This ideological manipulation is frequently justified under the pretext of serving the supreme interests of the nation, yet, in reality, it primarily benefits an elite minority that holds power and exercises control over the state. He observes that imperialists and dictators remain steadfast in their core principles, regardless of the passage of time or the transformation of historical contexts. For them, the ends invariably justify the means. From Machiavelli and even earlier, up to the 21st century, oppression has persisted as a fundamental mechanism of power.

Picrocholine wars, therefore, of yesterday, today and tomorrow, intestine wars, fratricidal wars, religious wars, colonial wars, imperial wars. All lost. Always lost. With peoples always haggard, always in a state of survival and in search of it. Unable to stop this madness, to intervene in decisions; because these picrocholine wars have always been waged under the seal of state security, state secrecy, military secrecy. And by the will of the arrogant and insatiable powers who have devolved the role of watching over the world, of keeping it in check, of cleaning it up, of... For one reason, one and only goal: power and plunder.
Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.147.148)

Imperialist and dictatorial ideologies rely on strategies that appeal to emotions rather than rational discourse. Their rhetoric is often deceptive, presenting false objectives to justify their actions. Historically, these motives were frequently legitimized through religious narratives. In the 19th century, colonial expansion was framed as a mission to spread civilization beyond Europe. In contemporary times, imperialist ideologies manipulate the discourse of democracy and human rights to serve their interests. Notable examples include military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria conflicts initially justified as efforts to support populations in liberating themselves from oppressive regimes.

However, the consequences of these interventions have often proven to be more catastrophic than the authoritarian practices they were purportedly meant to dismantle. The reality on the ground stands in stark contrast to the noble intentions proclaimed by global powers, exposing the strategic and self-serving nature of such interventions.

Finally, the modern imperial wars: the invasion of Iraq, broken into a thousand pieces, looted, tortured in an abject way, locked up in this Abu Ghraib prison (Guantanamo prison? too) where the most filthy, obscene abuse had been practiced on Iraqi prisoners of war; vegetating since in a terrible religious and tribal deadly and daily war with its five hundred, seven hundred thousand deaths in ten years and of which nobody speaks.
Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.151.152)

Boudjedra, through his writings, frequently revisits the history of imperialist and colonial ideologies, exposing their violent legacies marked by bloodshed and destruction. From antiquity through the Middle Ages, wars were waged under various pretexts whether religious, economic, or ideological yet they consistently served the interests of dominant powers.

Always picrocholines made to be lost, with billions of deaths. Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Huns, Goths, Visigoths, Arabs, the eight crusades that opposed Christians and Muslims for so many centuries, Turks, Europeans (Germans, Russians and mostly French)
Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.152)

In a thought-provoking analysis presented in *Spring* (Boudjedra, 2014, pp. 146–151), Boudjedra traces the historical trajectory of imperialist ideologies across continents and centuries. Beginning with the Romans,

who expanded their dominion through military conquest and political subjugation, he examines the mechanisms of power driven by an insatiable desire for control and hegemony. He then turns to the Crusades, where religious fervor became deeply entangled with imperial ambitions, leading to widespread conflict, forced conversions, and territorial annexation.

Boudjedra further explores the rise of capitalism as a system propelled by unrelenting greed and the relentless pursuit of new markets and resources. Rooted in exploitation, this economic ideology not only facilitated the erosion of workers' rights but also justified the subjugation of indigenous populations in the name of wealth accumulation and geopolitical supremacy.

Throughout this historical inquiry, Boudjedra underscores the catastrophic consequences of imperialist doctrines. Entire civilizations were uprooted, cultural heritages erased, and local identities systematically suppressed, all under the pretext of progress and the so-called civilizing mission. His analysis exposes the brutal realities of imperial expansion, illuminating the structural injustices and inhumane practices that have scarred human history. By bringing these issues to the forefront, Boudjedra invites critical reflection on the enduring struggles of marginalized communities and the persistent legacy of imperialist ideologies.

Colonial wars that resulted in the extermination of races, cultures, entire continents and entire civilizations with this unique and terrifying example: the genocide of Indians by European whites from America, Australia, New Zealand...where countless races have been decimated forever. Exterminated. Disappeared Spring (Boudjedra, 2014, p.149)

2. Intellectualism vs. Extremism:

Boudjedra's works frequently explore the contrast between intellectuals and extremists across different historical periods and various forms of militancy whether armed, political, or scientific. He extensively examines figures such as Fernand Iveton, Henri Maillot, Maurice Audin, Suhrawardy, and Ulugh Beg, despite the significant time gaps between them. However, they converge in their unwavering dedication to the cause for which they were martyred: the fight for Algerian freedom.

Fernand Iveton, Henri Maillot, and Maurice Audin, among other anti-colonial communist pieds-noirs, sacrificed themselves for the Algerian cause. Like their Algerian counterparts, they endured torture and death. Unlike Maillot and Iveton, Maurice Audin was not an armed militant but a university professor who openly opposed French colonial policies and passionately supported Algerian independence. This young communist, a mathematics professor at the University of Algiers, was killed at the age of twenty-five because the colonial authorities perceived his intellectual influence as an even greater threat than that of armed anti-colonialists. These champions of freedom appear in varying levels of detail across many of Boudjedra's novels, including *The Prickly Pears* and *Spring* (Boudjedra, 2014, p. 98).

Boudjedra draws a parallel between Maurice Audin's assassination and those of Ulugh Beg and Suhrawardy. Ulugh Beg, the Wali of Samarkand from 1410 to 1447 and ruler of the Timurid Empire in 1447, was renowned for his passion for science and the arts. He asserted that "religion is provisional, but science is definitive" (Waugh, 1994, p. 67).

He was murdered by his own son, supported by the dervishes (Daniel C. Waugh, Ulugh Beg's Observatory) who perceived Ouleg Beg as a genuine threat. Dervishes, being fundamentally sophists and mystical ascetics, dedicate their lives to worship and meditation. Over time, they incorporated numerous superstitions into their philosophies, perceiving any pursuit of reason and science as a threat to their existence. The dervishes transformed into "assassins," much like the Hashashin

group, targeting anyone who posed a challenge to their ideas and objectives, such as the renowned Seljuk minister Nidam El Molk

(Laurence Lockart, 1928: Vol V)

Similarly, Suhrawardy (Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi), a Sufi mystic, was executed in the 15th century. He sought to bridge Western and Eastern philosophical traditions within Islam, advocating a humanistic vision (مدكور ابراهيم, 1974,36).

The intellectualism embodied by these three figures proved more dangerous to their assassins than any weapon, as their dedication to knowledge and humanitarian values posed an existential threat. Throughout history, fundamentalists have systematically targeted intellectuals, recognizing them as a profound danger to extremist ideologies.

3. Intertextuality as a way and voice of intellectualism and human values:

Intertextuality serves as a powerful instrument for intellectual exploration and the affirmation of humanist values in Boudjedra's fiction. His novels are richly interwoven with references and quotations spanning multiple disciplines, including history, anthropology, sociology, literature, and religion. Figures such as Ibn Khaldun, Moses Maimonides, Ibn Bahr, Ibn Battuta, Homer, Jean Jaurès, Albert Camus, William Faulkner, and Emir Abdelkader are intricately embedded within his narrative framework. These historical and literary figures function as referential characters, allowing the author to engage with critical debates on humanist thought (Reuter, 2000, p. 30).

Boudjedra juxtaposes modernity, rationality, and enlightenment against intellectual stagnation and dogmatism. His characters Telj, Omar, Rachid, and Mr. Baudier engage in philosophical dialogues, challenging conventional wisdom and exploring themes such as Al-Khwarizmi's contributions to mathematics, Ibn Khaldun's historiography, and historical materialism. The author further examines Ibn Rushd and the Qarmatian revolution, emphasizing the establishment of a proto-communist republic in Baghdad that lasted nearly two centuries. This interplay of conflicting perspectives within the same novel often within the same page becomes a literary strategy to advocate for humanist values while countering intellectual dogmatism and exclusion.

Boudjedra also draws on the works of the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, particularly *The Guide for the Perplexed*, to explore the historical dialogue between Islam and Judaism. He highlights the paradox of history: during World War II, the Great Mosque of Paris sheltered approximately 1,732 Jews between 1940 and 1944, while Jews in Algeria faced persecution under the Vichy regime and the *pieds-noirs* loyal to Marshal Pétain (*Spring*, p. 140; *The Prickly Pears*, p. 61).

His novels further incorporate direct citations from classical historians such as Sallust, alongside excerpts from literary masterpieces, including Proust's *Swann's Way*, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. These intertextual references serve not merely as embellishments but as intellectual anchors, providing deeper insights into the novel's thematic concerns.

Boudjedra also evokes symbols of Islamic enlightenment, such as Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi and Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, alongside spatial symbols like Timbuktu, a historically significant Islamic intellectual hub in Africa (present-day Mali). He underscores the city's invaluable manuscripts, ancient libraries, and the contributions of its scholars across various disciplines. The references to Timbuktu also serve as a historical reminder of the city's cycles of destruction, from fires and looting to foreign invasions.

Through his intricate web of intertextuality, Boudjedra creates a literary tapestry that challenges exclusionary ideologies and fosters a nuanced engagement with humanist thought. His novels stand as a testament to the enduring power of intellectual exchange in resisting dogma and reaffirming the universality of knowledge.

Conclusion

Boudjedra's writing unfolds as a complex mosaic, where erudite elements intertwine to form a narrative that is both intellectually rigorous and profoundly engaging. His work fosters a continuous dialogue between cultures, ideologies, and historical references, allowing for a dynamic interplay of conflicting perspectives. By weaving together diverse scholarly traditions, his novels challenge monolithic readings of history and identity, compelling readers to navigate a space where ideas intersect and evolve.

This intricate engagement with intertextuality transforms his literature into more than just a storytelling medium; it becomes a site of critical reflection and intellectual exploration. The multiplicity of voices, sources, and philosophical currents within his narratives underscores the richness of human thought and the enduring influence of intellectual exchange in shaping collective memory and understanding.

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