

FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN THE LITERARY WORK OF ISMAIL KADARE

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ABSTRACT

The literary work of Ismail Kadare is one of the main references in terms of important historical concepts and cultural phenomena in Albania. According to Agim Vinca (2002) Ismail This paper, aims to bring together theories of communication, literary criticism and feminism, being thus the first different reading approach done to this author's novels. The various genres, the richness of treated topics, starting with antiquity and its modern continuity, accompanied with a wide range of characters and geographical areas included in it, create a great chance to trace the problem of feminist identity construction. Based on a poststructuralist approach this paper traces the dynamics of gender roles in his books. Through discourse analysis, it will analyze how is constructed the feminist identity, looking for main features or functions that are attributed to women, especially in terms of identity politics and sexuality. I aim to identify and examine the discursive strategies that are embedded in the novels I have selected, not only in their content, but also in their form, style and structure. According to Judith Butler (1990), identity is a perpetual construction and knowing that literature plays a significant role in the construction of the identity of the readers, it is important to ask whether his books, written during communism, are still important today and how do they influence the existing identity' categories.

Keywords: Identity, language, sexual identity, women, communism.

INTRODUCTION

Ismail Kadare is the most prominent author in Albania. His books are listed among the most well-known books, not only in Albania, but also in the European and World Literature. Both novels and poems written by him are a testimony of a highest artistic level that the Albanian language, as one of the oldest languages of the Balkans could offer. Ramon Sanches Lizarralde, one of his translators in Spanish, says that Ismail Kadare creates a gallery of characters, places, environments, connections, real or fantasies that live within his books...characters that want to create a whole new world, self-sufficient and alternative to this real world we live (Lizarralde 2008: pp. 23). As an author he is famous for his limits of time, geographies and sociological models. He himself says that "the combination of different periods of time, spaces, people's destinies, histories are often treated in literature and this means that literature is a vivid organism that has an answer for each dimension of human life (Beqiri, 1991: pp.127). Said this, in his works we can see the three dimensions of time clash together with geographical coordination, with social stereotypes and prejudices, all levels of consciousness, the man himself is a vivid and continuous battle field. It is due to this continuous dissonance that Ismail Kadare never declares a novel or a poem completely closed (Lizarralde 2008: pp. 21).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationalism, *the Other* and identity are some of the variables that are used to read and analyze the work of Kadare. His complexity has been one of the reasons why Kadare and his

works have been subjected to these kinds of studies. Enis Sulstarova, author of a book based on the analysis of Kadare's works, says that Kadare in difference with other socialist writers has achieved to create an identity literature for Albanians.... [Because] he has chosen to treat in his works themes that are related with key moments of the Albanian nation (Sulstarova, 2013; pp. 156). Robert Elsie shares the same opinion, saying that the works of Kadare are a perfect reflection of the Albanian political life (Elsie, 1997: pp.338). For Eric Faye, critic of Ismail Kadare, says that the ambiguity of the writer is a chance for a complete radiology of the Albanian society (Novel 5. 12). Another study conducted on Kadare's novels is the one written by Viola Isufaj, who sees the return of famous mythological figures in his novels. Ke jing is another researcher, who tries to analyze the national identity of Albanians in relation to the *Other*. Same as Sulstarova, he traces the appearances of the *Other* and literature is used as a mean to make people believe what are the do's and the don'ts of their nation (Jing 2013; pp. 39).

This paper, part of a PhD thesis, brings in the attention of the research the gender variable, which has remained unnoticed till now. Tefik Caushi, Kadare's most famous critic, says that Eros is a cuddling fire in all his works and in many cases the milestone of the whole novel's structure (Caushi 2000; pp. 9). Another researcher, John Cox, say that Kadare is quite interested in issues dealing with women rights... [but] as in all Balkan literature, women are present only through their silence (Cox 2004). Here we can bring an interesting data about the absence of women. Tefik Caushi says that from 1200 characters, 77% of them are males and only 21% females and in his works we can find representatives of all gender and sex roles such as prostitutes, whores, courtiers, lesbians, homosexuals, hermaphrodites etc(Caushi 2005: pp.10). All these data are closer, but do not cover entirely the focus of this paper that tries to analyze identity based on the lingual characteristics that the main characters have and how do these "discourse" performs their identity, in term of gender relations.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based in the idea that writers tend to present and bring in the eyes of their readers, cultural notions related with gender, within their texts. Generally speaking these notions come in the form of stereotypes or prejudices about the role of men and women and in the majority of novels men tend to share different characteristics than women. The feminist critical approach aims to raise the awareness on the importance that language plays in constructing characters within the novels and how language in literature is used to show that the dominant group, so men are in a much more comfortable power position than women (Lacoff, pp.161). Concisely below are explained the main research objectives, questions, hypothesis and study limitations.

Research objectives

This paper has three main objectives

1. To explore the role of discourse in constructing gender identity
2. To analyze the communicative features of female characters
3. To highlight the relation between discourse and gender concepts in the novel "Qorr femani"

Research questions

- 1- How is created the feminist identity in Qorrfermani' novel?
 - How is constructed femininity?
 - How do characters perform their gender?
- 2- How do characters talk?
 - What kind of language structure they use?
- 3- When do characters talk?
 - Are topics objects of gender divisions?

Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this paper is that Ismail Kadare, as a writer, builds the femininity and the female based on a typical masculine position, describing them as the other of the history and the drama that the hero passes through. Female characters tend to speak about less important topics than male characters, using simpler words in a complex grammatical structure. This kind of reading brings or better to say finds out lost elements within the text, completing entirely the character's identities in the eyes of the reader and in the image that the author itself creates for the female and the male within his literary universe.

Main theories and instruments of analysis

This paper aims to analyze the nature of discourse and its relation with power and ideology. As one of the main focuses of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is power relations within the text, the gender variable is one of the most interesting approaches in this field. In many ways, the feminist approach is paradigm, where a good part of the research is focused in social inequalities and domination (Van Dijk 2009: pp. 359). According to Michele Lazar (2005) the motivation for such an approach was that main names of CDA, such as Fairclough or Van Dijk have not been interested in this issue (pp.2-3). Jorgensen and Phillips (2004), in a broader sense CDA is a social –constructivist based in the idea that the representation of the world is half discursive, meanings are specific both culturally and historical and knowledge is created through social action (pp. 4-6). The feminist approach in CDA claims that this process of analysis is called demystification or denaturalization- so that its role is to undo those gender suppositions that are nothing but ideological and strengthen the power relation differences and inequalities (Lazar 2005: pp.7, Sunderland and Litosseliti: pp.19, 5, Talbot 1995: 151). Having in mind that CDA is a post- structuralist approach, we should not forget that language does not operate in an isolated environment, same as discourse that is always changing. Said this, the change in discourse in its essence is a cultural and systematic; even in the cases when it starts by one individual, it requires from the social community to change the way it speaks and reacts about it (Lemke 2008: pp. 26). Foucault says that...change in the case of discourse does presume the birth of “new ideas”, a small intervention or creativity...[it] implies transformations in the social practice, even in those close to it(Foucault 1969: 209).

We have no two main operational concepts to analyze the figure of women and femininity in Ismail Kadare's works. She is a semiotic body and a social subject. Lemke (2008) says that body carries a meaning (pp.71). Apart its biological function that is not of our interest, the body carries out a social meaning, or better to say the individual *per se*. What Lemke said above is the sum of meanings that we give and use together with specifics of speaking, opinions and actions. This semiotic body is the basis where will be built later on the social

subject and based on this we will analyse how does the author give to all female characters features that he himself perceives as typically feminine.

RESULTS

The “Qorrferman” and Maria

Who knows Kadare understands immediately from the title that the plot of this novel is unusual and is difficult to capture where or when is happening everything. An unusual order comes out in the empire to find or to catch “*the devil eye*”. Someone has seen someone with a bad eye and the emperor uses this order to stop the person who carries this bad eye. Referring to the Albanian popular culture, the eye carries several positive and negative meanings: from the most believable oaths till the most severe curses.

The two main characters are Maria Ura and Xheladini and both of them are in search of a discovery, a process that is divided in the most classical and sexist way by the author. They both find and they both lose at the end. Tefik Caushi thinks that the “drama, the discovery and the loss of Maria are very important cells of the novel and without them we cannot fully understand the drama of the main hero (Caushi 2000: pp. 2). The author builds in both characters the need to see; Xheladini wants to see in order to catch the bad eye that is driving insane the entire empire while Maria wants to see and capture the essence of her sexuality. Maria Ura is a young girl, soon to be married and eager to discover the hidden paths of sexual life. Combined with the character of her sister in law, she persists in learning what social norms prohibit to her, the mysteries of sexuality. Her eagerness is transmitted by the author in these words:

The girl listened with bright eyes, the words of her sister in law, whose words poor by her shyness and good conduct, in the time when her desert thirst was looking for more (Qorrfermani, pp. 44)

This moment is a confrontation between to different sociological stages of femininity; Maria courageous to declare her curiosity, while the other woman with “*her poor words*”, confirms the shyness and fear as an important social norm that women cannot talk about *certain issues*. This social fear to talk is confronted by her unconscious attitude of putting her eye in the keyhole and becomes a witness of Maria’s sexual body exploration

What she could see was impressive: Maria naked in front of the mirror dressing and undressing a pair of silky underwear...is it possible so soon? - whispered the new bride without taking away her eye from the white body that the girl moved gently. With her mouth numb, she takes away the eye from the keyhole, convinced that a woman could not play with herself like this without having sex or made love..

Purposely, the author puts them in front of each other, trying to capture the dimensions of power that sexuality plays in the life of a woman and on the other side, portray the war against prejudices of what is allowed to be said and what not: ‘*because in her thoughts what had happened could come true only in the wedding night*’. Sexually, the bride is physically attracted by the white and smooth body with the curved lines of her buttocks that changed dramatically in each movement. For her is almost impossible for a woman to legitimize her sexuality through her eye: it is the outer masculine and apollonian eye that makes her conscious for the power of her sex. Maria dared to break this taboo, acceding herself to her fiancée and allowing him to do anything with trembling center of her body. Despite this, the

whole scene of her sexual discovery is accompanied by a veil of fear or a justification to legitimize what she had done in that room. Same as Virginia Woolf that was looking for a room of her own to think and to discover her ideas, Maria wants a room to break the chains of her virginity. In her mind, she compares her body with her underwear that are cold and dead, inside the bride's dowry box, waiting to revive. Not only her underwear, but her entire body as well is eager to experience love and sex but she can only accept this silently and uses this outer mean to signify her entire body that swarms and longs for the furious body interchange. *There they were, in line, clear blue, frozen but she would wear them all, one after the other, would baptize them, sanctify and fill them with the warmth, flavor, marks, fluids and groan of love.*

Another important testimony of Maria's discovery is the mirror, in front of which she tries her underwear. The mirror becomes an eye where she could search for her reflection, waiting for an approval, the mirror is Xhaladin, is her man. Through the mirror she allows to herself, lightly to see a part of her sex that she describes as such:

... This was the entrance to her body...it should be beautiful, decorated with almond flower laces and be welcoming... she had heard that the women's sexes were all different as her faces... Maria was sure her sex was beautiful and if so it would be a sin for him not to see it...

She explores delighted each detail of her body, details that fill her with thrilling pleasure and make pain insignificant.

... Looked at her undisturbed venter, the black triangle above her pubis and then, with her legs half opened, started to observe its sex- tranquil, she said, as nothing has happened...

The author puts an emphasis on each erotic part of her body: the black shrub, the pink pale lips, the dumb limbs that just before were as crazy and all wet. This moment makes Maria aware about the mysteries her entrance gate hides from her and in that moment she has the flashlight that *"the woman's sex was the most impenetrable wall in the world and that those dumb lips will never reveal what had happened in and around them.* Maria discovers her sensuality through thinking; she does not speak and even sometimes she hesitates to give a name to what *"she makes"*. This hesitation is drawn clear, not only in her lonely moments but also in the moments when she is with him: she invites him in that game without saying anything.

Let's do it...let's make love, how people say now... half drowsily, in dark midnight...let's celebrate again...

The peak of the novel is the moment when Xheladini tells to Maria that the order that he was responsible has to be applied on him as well because *"his eye has seen many things"*. That eye was stacked on her pubic, *in her breast, in the dark marks of her legs, her venter and down between her legs that she opened for him to better see the lips of her sex.* At this exact moment Maria dares to be egoistic saying that:

... I feel that I will die if you do keep me in your memory as I am now.....i will dim as a shadow, do you understand? ...I will not have any more my life nor my image...will I be just the one whom you remember... and remember that if you erase me, I will fade out for real same as that sketch that is erased by wind...

If his eyes will cease to see her sexuality, her body will cease to exist. It was for those eyes that gave life to her sexuality and they are responsible for its continuation. Even if Maria dares to promise that she will wait for him, the fear inside make her aware that she will not

keep up with this promise. She burns into tears when he proposes her to become his day and he her night. At the end the two characters lose and the pleasure was so little as the pleasure of a first sexual act. The drama of each of them, even though it develops in separated parallel lines, meets in this bedroom. The bedroom was the livid testimony of their truths. His eye has to be blind and the lips of her sex for the truth to be erased. At the end every one choses to cry for his own drama and not only the voice of Maria, but her mother's, her sister in law, are excluded from the main theme of the novel, a fact that is stated by Aleks Ura, the father of the family, who was not in favor women getting involved in important topics. Maria, as a character would not play any action in the whole drama, if it was not for her sexuality. Maria or Menekshe, as a rivalry between west and east, dares only to discover her sexuality before it was expected and everything else, role or acts pass in complete shadow.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Maria is probably the most erotic character of Ismail Kadare. She is sexually powerful and from the description and importance that the author gives to her body and to her eagerness to experience this unknown world, the reader gets the feeling and somehow the message the only mean that woman possesses to change her social position is her body and nothing else. Critically thinking, this statement, expressed directly or indirectly leads to the idea that Ismail Kadare tends to describe women through a sexist position, meaning that he undresses them by all other social roles and diminishing their power only within the frame of the private. The language that the female characters use is quite apolitical in the sense that they use a lot of subjective grammatical constructions, full of hesitations. For example, Maria does not speak in most of the cases; she just experiences her body through her thoughts without having the courage to utter or name *her entrance gate, the shrub of her pubis or the dumb lips of her sex*. *Qorrfermani* is a novel where sex becomes an important weapon to fight social anomie. In an empire where everybody is looking for *the bad eye*, Maria finds her gate of salvation, the gate of her body. Xheladini, as the main hero of the novel, is the legitimizer of Maria's sexuality; his eye is the masculine eye that legitimizes femininity; he losing his eye means for Maria to lose her sexuality, because his eye is the prerequisite for her sexuality to continue its flow.

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