

## THE DISCOURSE OF ISLAM IN FRENCH POSTCOLONIAL NOVELS

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**Abstract:** The necessity to study the discourse of Islam in the context of French postcolonial novels remains the actual problem because postcolonial French literature, as an artistic reflection of reality, becomes a kind of prism through which the literature can look into the Islamic world. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the discourse of Islam in French postcolonial novels of Mustapha Tlili's "Glory of the Sands", Ahmadou Kourouma's "Allah is not obliged" and Yasmina Khadra's "The Attack". The image of Islam in postcolonial French literature is mediated, this image was refracted in the individual creative vision of the author's world, but it forms the image of Islam among the world and the French reader. Here were identified three main discourses of Islam - "Secular Islam", "Islam as the religion of its roots" and "Islam as a way of life". The materials of this paper may be interesting and useful for those who are interested in French literature of the postcolonial period and religious studies.

**Key words:** postcolonial novel, discourse, Islam, literature, religion

### 1 Introduction

Postcolonial French literature is a production of culture that had the influence of the imperialistic process and emerged from the zone of colonial influence. This literature appeared after the destruction of the colonial world, under the conditions of the formation of independent national states and the choice of identity.

The problem of the postcolonial French novel does not have an independent field of study. Both in French and Russian works, this topic is considered as a section of studies devoted to the French-language literature of Maghreb, which was studied at different times by Auguste Viatte, Charles Bonn, Progozhin, Boruyeva (Viatte, 1980; Bonn, 1985; Progozhina, 2001; Boruyeva, 2015).

The theme of Islam as the culture-forming religion of the Maghreb countries (former French colonies) and the religion that ranks second in France in terms of the number of believers, comes to the fore not only for French culture, but for the whole world literature. Postcolonial French literature, as an artistic reflection of reality, becomes a kind of prism through which the world literature can look into the Islamic world. The image of Islam in postcolonial French literature is mediated, this image was refracted in the individual creative vision of the author's world, but it is this image that forms the image of Islam among the world and the French reader. Despite the relevance of the topic, the problem of the discourse of Islam in the postcolonial novel has not been investigated. However, in Russia and France there are humanitarian studies devoted to the place and role of the Islamic factor in France. This problem was dealt with by researchers Ponkin and Boyer (Ponkin, 2005; Boyer 2006).

The purpose of this article is to look at how the theme of Islam unfolds in the French postcolonial novels of Mustapha Tlili, Ahmadou Kourouma and Yasmina Khadra.

### 2 METHODOLOGY

To solve the research problem posed in the article, we use discourse analysis. Discourse analysis, used in literary criticism, is a complex approach to the interpretation of an artistic text, in which a textual analysis, working with formal and content characteristics of a text, is supplemented by an appeal to the semantic context of the work. In a fictional work the fictional is refracted with the real through individual author's perception and is embodied in the artistic discourse. In order to fix the discourse, you need to turn to the storyline, pay attention to the disclosure of the characters, the scene and what is happening.

### 3 Results

In the analyzed novels, we identified three different discourses of Islam:

"Secular Islam";  
 "Islam as the religion of its roots";  
 "Islam as a way of life".

#### 3.1 The discourse of "Secular Islam"

The discourse of "Secular Islam" can be clearly traced in two of the investigated novels - "Glory of the Sands" and "The Attack". The main characters are Dick Casey and the successful doctors Amin Jaafari respectively. They do not abandon their roots and remember well their childhood associated with religious education and the fulfillment of religious orders, but their education and integration into European society changed their faith without shaking the essential foundations of Islam. On the pages of the novel "Glory of the Sands" we observe the reflections of Dick Keizy about the "God of Islam" as an Abstraction or Absolute: he does not call God as "Allax", does not pronounce appropriate religious formulas mentioning the prophet. The following quotation seems indicative in this respect: « I, God, Eternal, Bodiless, I, Something - Horrible, Almighty and Magnanimous ... I recognize you all as equal before Me» (Tlili, 1987; Karpanina et al, 2018). The nature of the reflections in this quote shows us that the main character, recognizing the existence of God, thinks of Him out of context traditions of Islam. At the same time, considering Islam as an integral part of his life, Dick Keizy contrasts himself with Islamism and jihadism as a painful form of Islam.

Belief in the God is opposed to mysticism and religious secrecy, faith is thought by Dick Keizy as a certain kind of rationality. «Your sorrows, your sorrows ... I will heal them, I will quench them forever with this calligraphy frozen like ice ...»- thought Dick (Tlili, 1987). Islam as religion is designed to preserve the harmony of the individual or is the guarantee of the peace of mind in the vicissitudes of life's adversities, but it is not the mystical "Divine will", but the "radical therapy of the Supreme," a harmony that is rationalized and materialized in shama'il (Progozhina, 2012; Villalobos Antúnez, 2001).

The discourse of "Secular Islam" is a form of rationalized Islam, in which the foundations of faith are proposed to be singled out from the cultural diversity of the Maghreb countries and adapted to the European cultural system. "Secular Islam" is the Islam of people assimilated in European culture: they received a classical European education or grew up in metropolitan cities and perceived European culture as their own. The discourse of "Secular Islam" in many respects repeats or, it might be even said, reflects the concept of Euroislam that exists in the EU among liberal Muslims, which says that Islam can not be Moroccan, Algerian or Arabic - Islam, as a world religion, basically contains universal values, which, according to Tariq Ramadan, the main theorist of Euroislam, must be preserved as a primary Islam. A Muslim living in Europe can not live strictly according to Sharia law, he must interpret them according to European norms. (Ramadan, 2003).

#### 3.2 The discourse "Islam as the religion of its roots"

The discourse "Islam as the religion of its roots" is reflected in the novels "The Attack" by Yasmina Khadra and "Glory of the Sands" by Mustapha Tlili. This discourse reflects the process of finding its roots among migrants of the second and third generation. This discourse reflects the tragedy of the identity crisis that unfolded in post-colonial reality, when migrants and colonizers, crossing cultural boundaries, learned a completely different cultural identity (later theorists would call it "hybrid"), which naturally includes elements of culture from both the West and the East. These people have no roots but they have the right to choose their own roots, which raises the problem of lostness. Here the East does not accept the Europeanized "brothers by faith", treating them as traitors and for the possibility to return to their roots, it demands the refusal of Western values in the name of the so-called "truth". Also the European intelligence does not

want to put up with the presence of another value system in the European space (Khadra, 2003; Tlili, 1987).

The theme of lostness as part of the discourse "Islam as the religion of its roots" is well represented by Youcif Muntasser - the hero of the novel "Glory of the Sands". Youcif was twice orphaned. His biological mother, a Bedouin, refused him; his foster parents were French who did not excommunicate the boy from his cultural roots and who brought him up. So, Youcif received a classical Muslim education in madrasah and European education. The tragedy of his hybrid identity was the tragic death of his foster parents, who were executed by Algerian nationalists. Then, as a teenager, he concentrated all his energy to break all ties with his roots: he leaves for America to become "different." «Now Yusif had such an American look. He was felt in everything: in clothes, in behavior, in a manner of speaking, reasoning» (Tlili, 1987). In our opinion, Mustapha Tlili consciously chooses America as a haven for Youcif, as an image of a melting pot in which the French and Algerian roots should be harmonized. But this idyll, like the policy of multiculturalism in Europe, was a rather fragile construction. Youcif had only one meeting with the Pakistani Haider and once traveled to Mecca so the fragile idyll collapsed: « On that day in Mecca, Youcif walked around the Kaaba wrapped in white cloth ... He circled round and prayed to Allah, the Lord of his childhood, with whom met again; he made his walk with the most sincere prayers, calling upon the Almighty to purge him from the contamination of the West» (Tlili, 1987). Ethnoconfessional identity, as one of the forms of rigid identities due to a stable confessional component, does not allow multiplicity in a cultural sense. So Yusif, making ritual walks around the Kaaba and praying to Allah, finds himself again. But even this finding himself in the religion of childhood does not become a way out for Youcif: he, as absolutely lost in this world, is wailing to Allah, and this is no longer a prayer, it is a full-fledged challenge to the power of Allah by the terrorist capture of the mosque in the heart of the holy city of Muslims. In the tragic history of Youcif's life, as well as in the tragic life of the heroine of the novel "The Attack", Sihem Jaafari, is seen the whole insolubility of the identity crisis which became the brainchild of postcolonial reality. Do the authors themselves see the way out of this situation? In our opinion, the authors do not see a universal way out of the current situation, because generally it does not exist, but the way out can hide in the personal tragedy of each hero, as it happens in the main characters in the novels "Glory of the Sands" and "The Attack". "You can return to normal life - if you can!" - says one of the police officers to one of the heroes of the novel "The Attack" after he finds out that his wife blew herself up in a children's cafe. Is it possible to return to life after this?

The discourse of "Islam as the religion of its roots" reflects the processes of re-Islamization (return to the religion of the ancestors) and the radicalization of Islam that occurred in connection with the collapse of the policy of multiculturalism and the acculturation of migrants into European civilization. This discourse is expressed, as we see from novels, in several planes - in a personal individual crisis and tragedy, when a return to the religion of ancestors is seen as a kind of return to oneself, so religion is seen as a support for experiencing difficulties. Culturally, a return to religion can be seen as an alternative to the dissolution of the globalization process in the monoculture. Politically, the appeal to religion is seen as a division of spheres of influence.

### 3.3 The discourse "Islam as a way of life"

The discourse "Islam as a way of life", reflected in Ahmadou Kourouma's novel «Allah is not obliged», represents Islam not as a culturally-forming religion that regulates the life of its parishioners and sets a certain character for the entire Muslim society, but as an image rather sarcastic about the traditional way of life of a Muslim. The first thing that attracts the attention when you get acquainted with the novel is the ubiquitous use of ritual prayer formulas of Islam through a comma with the established expressions of obscene lexicon «I do not speak like decent black Africans: shit! scum! Bastard! - And I say different

words in the language of Malinka, for example: faforo! (Faforo means: I swear by a member of my father, or just a father, or your father.) Or: Nyamokode! (Nyamokode means: fucking Valaha!)» (Kourouma, 2000). Regular repetition of these expressions through a comma throughout the novel at the end of reading creates a stable association between these concepts. We can only assume that if the author uses this method consciously, then in this way he wants to demonstrate to us that under the use of prayer formulas in everyday life, not the high religious meaning, but the principle of habit, can be hidden, while the use of obscene lexicon subjects the entire sacred to profaning the meaning of the prayer formulas «Allah Akbar!» «Bismillah» and others.

On the pages of the novel "Allah is not obliged" Islam is presented as a set of religious superstitions and a manifestation of ignorance. In order to emphasize the state of ignorance of Muslim society, Ahmadou Kourouma represents the Muslim population of the village in which the protagonist was born and raised, as a community with a syncretic religious worldview in which the norms of Islam are intertwined with ancient pagan and magical beliefs. So, for example, the main character, describing his life in the village, tells that he believes in the existence of past lives !» (Kourouma, 2000).

Religious rites prescribed by Islam are performed by village sorcerers, and if villagers fall ill or die for no apparent reason, locals explain these events by the curse of a witch or sorcerer !» (Kourouma, 2000).

We believe that in the depiction of religious ignorance, Ahmadou Kourouma uses the same reception of the association, linking elements of the ritual cult of Muslims with magical beliefs, as in the depiction of the prayer formulas described above. The author does not hide his attitude to the depicted religious ignorance, but expresses it in the tragedy of the main hero. So, from the story of Birahima, we learnt that his life was tragic: he is a child-soldier who shoots people from a Kalashnikov's rifle, and to be brave, he smokes hash. Birahima considers a mother's curse as the cause of his tragedy. From the story of the main hero, we learnt that Birahima was growing up since birth in a mother's hut, his mother suffered from the fact that her foot was rotting. As soon as Birahima had grown up, he heard from the old people of his village that his mother was not dying of illness, but she was devouring her own leg, because she was a sorceress. As soon as he found out that his mother was a sorceress, he did not return to the mother's hut any more and had not time to say goodbye to her before her death. This happened because of his belief that a respectable Muslim does not have the right to share food and shelter with the infidel. Later, the grandmother told him that his mother was never a sorceress, and he realizes the pain of losing the opportunity to spend the last hours of the mother's life next to her. «My grandmother explained that maman had been killed by Allah with just the ulcer and all the tears she was always crying. Because Allah up in heaven can do whatever he likes; he doesn't have to be fair about what he does here on earth. That day I found out that I caused grief to my mother, a great sorrow» !» (Kourouma, 2000). This tragedy will poison the boy's attitude to himself, he can no longer stay in his native village, he leaves it and life leads him to the settlement of the lost children - the children of mercenary soldiers.

One of the leading themes of the discourse "Islam as a way of life" is the theme put forward in the title of the novel - the theme of theodicy (justification of evil). How to explain the presence of evil in this world? The author, in our opinion, responds with irony: «The Almighty is sitting in the sky, and he does not care, he does what he wants, and he does not have to always and everywhere be just in his earthly deeds» !» (Kourouma, 2000). But how then can a Muslim continue to believe in the God?

Ahmadou Kourouma reveals to us the everyday philosophy of explaining the existence of evil in a world where Muslims continue to pray and bring more sacrifices to their God, because if the sacrifices and prayers that were already offered did not

help, then they were not pleasing to God, and God waits for other sacrifices.

The discourse "Islam as a way of life", as we could see, reflects the caricature of religion. The author simplifies the religious reality of Islam, reducing the need of a religious person to the desire to receive dividends from God.

#### 4 Discussions

Postcolonial French literature is a masterpiece that has undergone the influence of the imperialist process and emerged from the zone of influence of colonization. This literature appears after the destruction of the colonial world, in the conditions of the formation of independent national states and the choice of identity.

In the post-colonial world, not only the national cultures of the Maghreb countries are changing, but the former metropolis, France, is increasingly influenced by the increasing migration flow and Islamization. In French literature, French-speaking Arabs are becoming increasingly prominent, their novels receive prestigious European literary prizes, they raise the problems of the inconsistency of the policy of multiculturalism. It is impossible to ignore these phenomena - they need to be studied, for the reality of the modern world indicates that the meeting, the dialogue of cultures, their peculiar metisation, interaction and mutual relations are continuing. These processes can not be stopped any more, which means that it is necessary to attest to them as objectively and fully as possible.

#### 5 Conclusion

Summarizing our article, we can note that in the postcolonial French literature there is no single discourse of Islam. In the literature we analyzed, we identified three possible discourses: "secular Islam", "Islam as the religion of its roots" and "Islam as a way of life". The religious discourse of the French-language literature is related to the "nomadic" theme and reflects the integrating and disintegrating functions of religion in the process of adapting the wave of migrants. It can also be noted that the use of the discourse of Islam in postcolonial literature by authors is often used as a means of attracting public attention for literature recognition.

As we could observe in the analyzed novels, the authors through the heroes show that the postcolonial character of the francophone world freed man from religious identity by a regulated tradition and society. The heroes of postcolonial works themselves construct their identity at times in opposition to the proposed options by social reality.

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