

Modern Arabic Literature and Communication

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Abstract

The usage of literature as a communication mechanism aiming at hiding information is widely spread among modern Arab poets and authors. This is due to many reasons. The first reason is the fact that most Arabs live under the reign of dictatorships, and thus they have to hide information in order to survive. Another basic reason behind this phenomenon is that the highest communication pattern in the Arab-Islamic culture tends to use minimum amount of words and sentences, and hence it entails the process of hiding information.

Communication as Hiding Information

The hidden information within modern Arabic literature is the most accurate and important information about the Arab-Islamic culture. It is extremely dangerous to explicitly reveal this hidden information due to its importance and accuracy. Revealing the hidden information is equivalent to challenging the status quo, and challenging the status quo contradicts the communication paradigm adopted by the Arab-Islamic culture. Most Arabs and Muslims use communication in order to maintain the status quo and minimize change. This is so because in the Arab-Islamic culture change is bad and dangerous. And since most Arabs and Muslims use communication as a mechanism for maintaining the status quo and avoiding change, it is natural that modern Arabic literature tends to be a process of communication aiming at hiding information, especially important information which usually challenges the status quo.

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In addition, using literature as a process of hiding information fits with the Arab-Islamic mind, which conceives "al-iajaaz" as the highest communication pattern. "Al-iajaaz" is the ability to express information through relying on minimum amount of words and sentences such that others are not able to do the same. Muslims believe that the Quran is "iajaaz". And on the basis of this belief they infer that the Quran is a divine revelation due to their belief that no human being can compose verses similar to those of the Quran. But "al-iajaaz" is a process of hiding information because of its usage of minimum amount of words and sentences. Thus, "al-iajaaz" is the ability to imply hidden information instead of explicitly expressing one's information. This shows that the usage of literature as a communication pattern aiming at hiding information fits with the Arab-Islamic mind which conceives "al-iajaaz" as the highest form of communication.

A Homeland of Prisons and the Terror of Civilization

The Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani successfully describes the current homeland of the Arabs through hiding information. He says in his poem "A Lesson in Drawing": "My son places his paint box in front of me / and asks me to draw a bird for him. / Into the color gray I dip the brush / and draw a square with locks and bars. / Astonishment fills his eyes: / "...But this is a prison, father, / don't you know, how to draw a bird?" / And I tell him: "son, forgive me. / I have forgotten the shapes of birds."

These poetic verses transmit the information that the father has failed to draw a bird because he has forgotten the shapes of birds, rather he was successful in drawing a prison. Hence these verses imply that the father only knows how to draw prisons. But the poet did not explicitly explain why the father has forgotten the shapes of birds, and why he only knows how to draw a prison. And thus, the poet is hiding a huge amount of information. The hidden information, implied in the previous verses, is that there are no birds, i.e. no freedoms, in the Arab world, rather there are only prisons. And this is why the father was not able but to draw a prison instead of a bird. In this sense, the poet is using poetry as a communication process which aims to hide important information. In this poem, the poet is hiding the information that the Arab world became a prison instead of a homeland.

Qabbani's previous poem continues to portray the failure of the father in every task his son is asking him to carry out.

This indicates that Qabbani's poem is also a communication medium for hiding the information that the current Arab culture is failing in each and every task. This poem ends in the following manner: "My son lays down his pens, his crayon box in front of me / and asks me to draw a homeland for him. / The brush trembles in my hands / and I sink, weeping." These final verses hide the information that it is impossible to draw a homeland in the Arab world because the Arab world itself turned out to be a prison imprisoning its own citizens. The Arab homeland does not exist anymore, and this is why the father wept instead of drawing a homeland.

The usage of minimum amount of words and sentences in order to implicitly convey information could be easily seen in many modern Arabic texts, and it is equivalent to the usage of literature as an information hiding mechanism. For instance, the Syrian author and poet Adonis says the following in his poetry book "Songs of Mihyar": "I buried in your subservient entrails, / in the head, the hands and eyes, / a minaret; / I buried two corpses, / the Earth and the sky." Here the poet is using the word "Earth" as a symbol to refer to human civilization, and he is using as well the word "sky" as a symbol to refer to divine revelations. In these verses, the poet transmits the information that the Earth and the sky are two corpses which he buried. Yet at the same time the poet hides the information that he is claiming that human civilization and divine revelations are deceiving us because they are full of lies and false beliefs, and that they are usually used to terrorize us. In this sense, Adonis is using poetry as a communication pattern aiming at hiding information.

Failure of a Culture

The Egyptian critic and author Yusuf Al-Qaid describes in his short story "Hunger Fantasia" a possible world in which the father is constantly sleeping for years and years, and in which hunger prevails leading people to actually eat each other. The author is transmitting the information which describes this possible world in the previous manner, but at the same time he is hiding the information that the Arab-Islamic world is identical to this possible world. This short story implies a deep analysis and critique of the current Arab-Islamic culture. And it amounts to claiming that the Arab-Islamic world today is suffering from extreme poverty, hunger and surrendering to the status quo. The inevitable result is that people will eat each other as this story indicates. The possibility of people eating each other is manifested in the continuous bloody conflicts among the Arabs themselves.

The important message of this story is the hidden message, which implicitly declares the collapse of the current Arab-Islamic culture.

Moreover, the Egyptian author and novelist Tawfik Al-Hakim portrays in his novel "Diary of a Country Prosecutor" how many Egyptians are not able to understand the laws imposed on their society. For example, they are legally punished through paying some piastres for carrying out certain activities, which they consider to be natural and normal to perform. In this manner, Al-Hakim is hiding one important message which is the following: modernism, as it is adopted by the Arabs and Muslims today, has failed due to the fact that some Arabs and Muslims are imposing on their societies certain laws which do not fit with the Arab-Islamic culture and the situations of the Arabs and Muslims.

Another clear example of the dominance of communication as a process of hiding information is the short story "The Conjuror Made off with the Dish", written by the Egyptian author and novelist Naguib Mahfouz. This story describes an Egyptian boy who fails in every task even very simple ones, such as buying some beans and returning home. The boy in this story is always failing because he is not able to use language, namely Arabic language, in an informative way, although he is mentally supposed to be able to do so. The boy knows all the necessary Arabic words in order to successfully communicate with others, but he is unable to be informative through the usage of Arabic language. For example, he is not able to specify whether he wants beans alone or beans with oil.

This short story shows how the current Arab-Islamic society is collapsing due to the misuse of Arabic language and failure of communication. In fact, this story assumes that successful communication is the main factor in forming a healthy Arab-Islamic society. And thus, the inappropriate and uninformative usage of communication led to the failure of the Arab-Islamic culture. Here, Mahfouz is hiding the important information that the failure of communication in the Arab-Islamic culture is the basic reason behind the collapse of the Arab-Islamic societies today. The boy in Mahfouz's story doesn't know anything about himself and his surroundings because he isn't able to appropriately express himself. This is how the failure of communication is a failure of knowledge, and the failure of knowledge is a failure of society.

In conclusion, modern Arabic literature is a communication mechanism aiming at hiding information due to different reasons. One main reason resides in the fact that the Arab-Islamic communication patterns necessitate the process of hiding information.

References

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