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A Critical Analysis of Four Novels of Ibrahim Al-Koni

Fauzia A. Owhaidah

Faculty of Languages & Translation - University of Zawia
Az-Zawiah - Libya
106380071564
f.waheedah@zu.edu.ly
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7344-2077

Abstract:
Ibrahim Al-Koni's works have received both praise and criticism. Many critics commend his unique voice, his challenge to traditional literary forms, and his exploration of universal themes through the lens of Tuareg culture and the Sahara Desert. However, some common critiques focus on the perceived difficulty of his novels, particularly in terms of their structure, symbolism, and lack of conventional narrative explanations for Western readers. Others find his focus on the desert and its culture to be repetitive or overly mystical. Other critics claim that Ibrahim Al-Koni is indeed a philosopher of the desert; however, it can be noted that he overlooks reality and is disconnected from the existential issues of his people. Al-Koni, in most of his works, focuses on the dessert and the themes surrounding it, neglecting other topics such as, among others, women, the city, and social problems. The researcher, therefore, aims to present a detailed breakdown of criticism levelled at Al-Koni's novels. In order to reach this end, a descriptive critical analysis is carried out according to six axes: complexities of language, narrative structure, translation challenges, biased views on Islam and Islamic conquest of North Africa, duplicitous views on impact of modernity and technology, and negative views of women and gender. The critical analysis shows that Ibrahim al-Koni's views on the aforementioned issues are complex and nuanced, often depicted through the lens of his Tuareg background and his exploration of desert spirituality.
Key Words: Ibrahim Al-Koni, criticism, Tuareg, novel, Desert.

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تحليل نقدي لأربعة روايات لإبراهيم الكوني

فوزية أحمد المقطوف اوحيدة / أستاذ مساعد
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية اللغات والترجمة / جامعة الزاوية
f.waheedah@zu.edu.ly
106380071564
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7344-2077

المستخلص:

لقد تلقت أعمال إبراهيم الكوني الثناء والنقد. فبينما يثني العديد من النقاد على صوته الفريد، وتحديه لأشكال الأدب التقليدية، واستكشافه للموضوعات العالمية من خلال عدسة ثقافة الطوارق والصحراء، تركز بعض الانتقادات الشائعة على الصعوبة الملحوظة لرواياته، لاسيما من حيث هيكلها، رمزيتها وافتقارها إلى الشروحات السردية التقليدية للقراء (خاصة الغربيين منهم)، ويجد آخرون أن تركيزه على الصحراء وثقافتها متكرر أو روحاني بشكل مفرط، في حين يأخذُ فريقٌ رابعٌ على فيلسوف الصحراء، إبراهيم الكوني، تجاهله الواقع وهو ما جعل اعماله الروائية منفصلة عن القضايا الوجودية لشعبه. يزعم هذا الفريق من النقاد أنَّ الكوني يركز، في معظم أعماله، على الصحراء والمواضيع المحيطة بها، متجاهلاً موضوعات أخرى مثل قضايا المرأة، حياة المدينة وما يصاحبها من الآفات والمشكلات الاجتماعية، الخ. وبالتالي، تهدف الباحثة إلى تقديم تحليل مفصل للانتقادات الموجهة لروايات الكوني. ومن أجل بلوغ هذه الغاية، تقومُ الباحثةُ بإجراء تحليل وصفي نقدي وفقاً لسِتِّ محاور: تعقيدات اللغة، بنية السرد، تحديات الترجمة، عدم الحيادية تجاه الإسلام وفتوحات الإسلام في شمال أفريقيا، الآراء المتناقضة حول تأثير الحداثة والتكنولوجيا، والآراء السلبية عن المرأة. يُظهر التحليل النقدي أن آراء إبراهيم الكوني حول القضايا المذكورة آنفاً معقدة وملتبسة، وغالباً ما تُصوَّر من خلال عدسة خلفيته الطوارقية واستكشافه للروحانية الصحراوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إبراهيم الكوني، النقد، الطوارق، الرواية، الصحراء.

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Introduction:

Ibrahim Al-Koni (**إبراهيم الكوني**) is a Libyan writer whose works encompass a variety of novels, literary, critical, and linguistic studies, as well as themes related to history and politics. His celebrated novels granted him a place as one of the most prominent contemporary international novelists. He gained praise from cultural, critical, academic, and official circles in Arab world, Europe, America, and Japan, earning multiple Nobel Prize nominations (Ali, 2023).

In the early seventies, it was generally believed that the novel was an urban genre, largely influenced by Georg Lukács's theory. According to this theory, novels were inherently linked to city life. However, Ibrahim Al-Koni changed this theory by writing a large number of desert novels and epics. His literary works are deeply rooted in the world of the desert, marked by its harshness, austerity, and its deep connection to the essence of the universe. The majority of his novels explore the complex relationship between humans and the desert's nature, its resources, and its world controlled by inexorable destiny and inescapable fate. His literary and fictional work is rooted in a set of constrained elements, focusing on the desert world with its elements of scarcity, vastness, harshness, and its profound connection to the essence of the universe and existence (Tajjiou, 2024).

Basically, four of Al-Koni's most ecocritically pertinent of the novels in English translation are selected for critical analysis. The novels to be considered *are Bleeding of the Stone* (نزيف الحجر) ,*The Fetishists* [Al Majus] (المجوس), *The Night Will have Its Say* كلمة الليل (في حق النهار), *Gold Dust* (التِّبْر).

Actually, this descriptive critical analysis is the researcher's humble attempt to examine how Ibrahim Al-Koni's desert fiction, while using language, myth, history and religion to enrich his texts with multiple layers of meaning, deepening the cultural and philosophical dimensions of his work, it suggests that these dimensions to be viewed through his Tuareg background. That is to say, Al-Koni's work expresses his ethnocentric views concerning Islam, Sufism, Women and gender, and modernity (Moolla, 2015). For instance, in *The Fetishists* [Al Majus] (المجوس), Al-Koni doesn't present

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monotheism represented by Islam, but rather utilizes Tuareg animism, Sufi mysticism, and even Egyptian, Arab, Carthaginian, Greek, Roman, and Hebrew myths to create a rich depiction of spiritual ideas. Similarly, in *The Night Will have Its Say* (كلمة الليل في حق النهار), it's Al-Koni's intentional choice that he placed *Al-Kahina*'s words in her own **Amazigh** tongue. He could easily have written the whole dialogue in Arabic. Instead, however, he decides to carefully transliterate her speeches as she would have spoken them in her native language, and then provide the Arabic translation on the lips of the interpreter (Mende, 2023). A third example would be Al-Koni's critique of modernity in *Bleeding of the Stone*(نزيف الحجر) , where he often contrasts the traditional, nomadic lifestyle of the Tuareg with the destructive forces of modernization and technology, highlighting the loss of cultural and ecological diversity of the Desert. Al-Koni's portrayal of Tuareg life can be criticized as romanticizing nomadic life and overlooking the harsh realities and social complexities of nomadic existence (Athanasiadis, 2022).

Given the length of this list of criticisms, the researcher emphasizes the importance of reviewing with some detail a number of Al-Koni's views and perspectives that have attracted valid criticism. To these criticisms we now turn.

Language:

Ibrahim Al-Koni's novels, while known for their unusual depiction of the Sahara Desert and Tuareg culture, have faced criticism regarding language and narrative structure. Some critics argue that Al-Koni's use of Arabic language can be overly complex, highly symbolic, and difficult to understand. Additionally, the translation of his texts into other languages (e.g., English) has been criticized for potential mistranslation of socio-cultural expressions and for failing to capture the nuances of his unique style (Zaidi, 2025).

Al-Ayyan (2020), Abdessamad (2020) and Zaidi (2025) give a more detailed account of these criticisms as follows:

- **Complexity and Symbolism**

Al-Koni's writing often examines philosophical and spiritual issues, making use of Tuareg mythology, Sufi mysticism, and animistic

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beliefs .This has sometimes lead to a dense and symbolic style, which challenges some readers' comprehension .His use of language is often considered to be abstract and metaphorical, requiring a deeper understanding of his cultural and philosophical context .Some critics argue that his symbolic language and narrative structure can sometimes overshadow the narrative, making it difficult to follow the plot .A good example comes from *The Fetishists* [Al Majus] (المجوس), where a sense of confusion is generated, right from the first chapters, by the use of certain terms such as '***Sheikh'***, '***Sultan'*** and personal pronouns '***he***' or '***she***', which sometimes are the only means by which one as well as several different characters are identified .The reader would also be reading with a sentence starting with '***The sheikh...***', which would be continued with using '***he***' or some other general term, whereas the said character remains unnamed or not until much later. Then you encounter some other characters, which are introduced as well as '***The sheikh***' or '***he***', and in the end, it does get confusing. By the same token, feeling lost and confused about both the novel time line and the historical time/period, which are not given in a precise manner, appear to be so vague that eventually this seems to add to the confusion.

- **Translation Issues:**

Translating Al-Koni's novels poses some obstacles due to the cultural and linguistic specificity of his writing style. The mistranslation of socio-cultural expressions, particularly those related to Tuareg traditions and beliefs, is a recurring problem. Translators may struggle to find adequate equivalents in other languages for concepts and terms that are deeply rooted in the desert environment and Tuareg culture . Some critics argue that certain translations flatten the richness and complexity of Al-Koni's original Arabic .For more details, see ***Translation Challenges Section*** below.

- **Use of Colloquialisms:**

Al-Koni's use of colloquialisms, particularly within his Tuareg-influenced Arabic, has drawn both praise and criticism. Some critics think it enriches his narratives, offering authenticity and cultural depth, while others claim that colloquialisms make his work

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inaccessible to non-Arabic speakers or those unfamiliar with Tuareg culture. Al-Koni's use of colloquialisms is shown to be challenging in the following ways:

1. ***Accessibility Issues: Language Barrier:***

Al-Koni's frequent use of colloquialisms, especially those rooted in Tuareg dialects, can create a significant barrier for readers unfamiliar with the specific linguistic nuances .For example, المهري "mahri camel", الأبلق الجمل" piebald", بوبو"Bobo/servant/slave" are all Tuareg lexical items used in *Gold Dust* "التِّبْر".

2. ***Disjointed Language:***

The shifting between formal and informal language, as well as the occasional jarring use of colloquialisms in translation, has been noted as a potential disruption to the reading experience.

3. ***Potential for Confusion and Misinterpretation:***

- **Cultural Specificity:**

Some colloquialisms might be so deeply embedded in Tuareg culture that their meaning or significance is not readily apparent to outsiders. Examples would be آمغار"the forefather" and إيركايتادم "rabble" or "riff-raff", the two Tuareg names of local herbs, تيفوشكان and تيبيريم "wild green herbs", all taken from ***Gold Dust*** "التِّبْر". It is clear that Al-Koni employs Berber and Tamahaq vocabulary to represent "aspects of the cultural Saharan life that are connected with the *Libyan* Tuareg".

- **Over-reliance on Dialect**

While some critics find the Al-Koni's dialect authentic, others might criticize an over-reliance on authenticity, potentially overshadowing the broader narrative or making it feel overly niche. For example, in the sentence

"يحلو **للمرحوم** أن يقول له في مسامرات ليالي الصيف في العراء" :إذا قررت أن تعيش وحيدا فعليك أ ن " .. (Bleeding of The Stone, 1992: 41) .

the word "**المرحوم**" means *God rest his soul*, showing one's respect and prayers for the departed. However, the word "**المرحوم**" in Libyan Arabic only indicates that the one being talked about is

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dead. Another example would be العجاج/ القبلى "sandstorm/ghibli", used in *The Fetishists* [Al Majus] (المجوس).

4. ***Perceived Lack of Clarity and Polished Language:***

- **Hybridity:**
  Al-Koni's mixture of formal Arabic with colloquialisms and dialectal forms is seen by some critics as a hybrid aesthetic that, while rich, can also be perceived as less refined or clear.
- **Focus on Authenticity over Clarity:**
  The emphasis on authenticity might sometimes come at the expense of a more universally accessible and polished style.

5. ***Criticism of Specific Content:***

- **Misogynistic Elements:**
  Some critics have highlighted misogynistic attitudes in his work, particularly in *Gold Dust* "**التِّبْر** ", where female characters are sometimes portrayed negatively .References to females as burdens overpopulate the story, as well as the protagonist's thoughts and decisions: women are scapegoats for mistakes, and failures.
- **Outdated Attitudes:**

Likewise, some criticisms are levelled against the depiction of women and certain cultural practices in *Gold Dust* "**التِّبْر** " as being outdated and problematic.

Originally written in 1990, the misogynist prose now feels somewhat antiquated … The physical pain experienced by the camel (due to illness) leans to a moral torment and a need for cleansing. Cleansing … involves radical remedies—all because of females of any species. While understanding this may indeed reflect local beliefs and customs, it makes for a trying read. Reading the novel three decades later, one wishes for more character development and examination of the female point of view in a story with overwhelmingly phallocentric plots and analogies. (Abdessamad, 2020: 2)

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In summary, while Al-Koni's language is often praised for its authenticity and cultural richness, it also presents challenges in terms of accessibility, translation, and potential for misinterpretation, particularly for readers outside of the Tuareg context (Zagood et al. 2023).

Narrative Structure:

Ibrahim Al-Koni's narrative style is generally praised for its *reminiscent* descriptions of the desert and Tuareg culture. It, however, has also faced criticism for its complexity and perceived obscurity. Some readers find his prose dense, with long, complicated sentences and a lack of clear narrative structure, leading to confusion about character identification and time chronology. Others appreciate this style as a reflection of the vast, enigmatic desert landscape and the nomadic way of life, but acknowledge it can be challenging to engage with .

According to Carruba (2018), Alenezi (2018) and Harb (2019), criticisms of Ibrahim Al-Koni's narrative style has been centered under the following main headings:

- **Complexity and Density:**
  Critics of Al-Koni's work highlight the density of his prose, noting that his sentences can be long and winding, making it difficult to grasp the meaning.
- **Obscurity and Lack of Clarity:**
  Some readers struggle with the lack of clear character introductions, time markers, and narrative structure, which can leave them feeling lost and confused about who is speaking or what is happening.
- **Ambiguity and Open-Endedness:**
  Al-Koni's use of allegory, while often appreciated for its depth, can also contribute to the sense of ambiguity, as events and characters can be interpreted on multiple levels, requiring careful reading and interpretation.
- **Confusion and Displacement:**
  Some critics note that the narrative structure, with its constant shifts between characters and perspectives, can disorient the

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reader, mirroring the nomadic experience of being constantly on the move and encountering new landscapes and cultures.

- **Lack of Character Development:**
  While his characters are often archetypal, some find them lacking in individual depth and complexity, with their inner lives and motivations left underdeveloped. This is so because his focus is primarily on symbolic figures tied to the mystical and natural forces of the desert. Critics note this can lead to confusion for the reader due to vague timelines, unclear character identities, and a narrative structure that prioritizes allegory and a broader, communal perspective over individual psychological depth. some critics find the characters underdeveloped to the point of losing individuality and complexity.

  A good example would come from *The Bleeding of the Stone* (نزيف الحجر). The two main characters ***Asouf*** and ***Cain*** are presented as symbols of larger concepts of Good VS. Evil. ***Asouf*** represents the purity, simplicity and profound wisdom of traditional Bedouin life. ***Asouf*** acts as a guardian of the desert. ***Cain***, on the other hand, represents a destructive, modern force that threatens the natural world and traditional ways of life in the desert. This focus on the archetypal obviously limits the development of complex, multifaceted individual personalities.

- **Repetitiveness:**
  Some critics suggest that certain themes and motifs (like the desert, human-animal relationships, and the conflict between tradition and modernity) are overused in his work.

- **Lack of Contextualization:**
  According to some reviews of his work, Al-Koni doesn't provide much explanation or contextualization for his stories, which can be challenging for readers unfamiliar with Tuareg culture or the specific desert setting.

In essence, the criticism of Al-Koni's narrative style is often closely tied to the tension between the beauty and evocative power of his prose and the challenges it presents for readers accustomed to more conventional storytelling structures. However, many readers and

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critics also appreciate this style as a reflection of the desert's mystery and the nomadic way of life, finding it to be a unique and rewarding reading experience.

Translation Issues:

Translating Al-Koni's novels has often posed exceptional challenges due to his moving and powerful Arabic prose, rich cultural environment and frequent use of untranslatable cultural expressions. Practically, translators have to successfully deal with these difficulties to render both the literal meaning and the subtle artistic style of the author.

In particular, these challenges include (Zagood et al., 2023):

1. **Linguistic density and Eloquence**
   Al-Koni's Arabic is highly sophisticated, with long, complex sentences that can be difficult to translate into equally eloquent and readable English without sacrificing meaning.
2. **Cultural Context and Nuances**

Al-Koni's works are deeply rooted in Tuareg culture and the Saharan environment, making it challenging to translate cultural references, idioms, and proverbs that may not be readily understood by readers unfamiliar with the culture. Therefore, translators must be knowledgeable about this culture or find effective ways to explain these references to a broader audience.

Here are two examples taken from *Bleeding of the Stone*

"نزيف الحجر"

يحشو" أسوف "ذراعيه في رمل الوادي ويبدأ في التيمم لإنجاز صلاة العصر... (نزيف الحجر، ص 7).

is translated as (… *Asouf plunged his arms into the sands of the wadi to begin his* ***ablutions****, in readiness for his* ***afternoon prayers*** …) (*Bleeding of the Stone*: 1)

There are two main translation mistakes at the lexical and syntactic levels. The first is the word التيمم, which was translated as *ablutions*. The religious term التيممrefers only to dry ablution in Arabic, whereas in English, *ablution* refers to washing with water (*Cambridge Dictionary, 2023*). Second, the phrase صلاة العصرwas translated as *afternoon prayers*. The use of the implicitation technique in which the

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word صلاةin the ST becomes plural in the TT to include both صلاة الظهرand صلاة العصرresults in producing an inaccurate translation.

رمقته باستغراب .ابتسمت ثم تمايلت يمينا ويسارا وهي تخض قربة الحليب بين يديها... (نزيف الحجر، ص 10)

is translated as (*She gazed at him bemused, then smiled, rocking right and left as she shook the milk in her hands*.) (*Bleeding of the Stone*: 4) The phrase **وهي تخض قربة الحليب بين يدها**is mistranslated as follows: *as she shook the milk in her hands*. The word قربةwas unnecessarily deleted in the TT; thus, the phrase presents as
a meaning that she was shaking the milk as a liquid in her hands, which is both unrealistic and incorrect. The word قربةis translatable, and it can be rendered as *bottle*/*canteen*, so that the whole sentence can be paraphrased *as she shook the milk in a bottle/canteen made of goat skin*.

3. **Maintaining the Author's Voice and Style:**
   Al-Koni's distinctive style, including his use of metaphor, symbolism, and philosophical reflections, needs to be carefully maintained in translation.
4. **Untranslatable Expressions and Concepts:**
   Some cultural expressions, such as those related to Tuareg traditions or Saharan landscapes, may not have direct equivalents in English, requiring creative translation strategies like transliteration, borrowing, or cultural transplantation.
5. **Shifting Narrative Perspectives:**
   Al-Koni sometimes employs unusual narrative techniques, such as using the third person for dialogue, which can sound awkward when translated directly. Translators may need to adapt these techniques to meet the requirements of clarity and readability in English.

❖ **Examples of Translation Strategies:**

- Literal Translation Followed by Revision:

Translators often create a rough, literal translation first and then refine it through multiple revisions to ensure accuracy and readability. As Nancy Roberts puts it,

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This, of course, required first drafts of passages that were very … rough and literal, followed by countless goings over and rewordings over a period of time. I also encountered passages or phrases where I simply didn't understand what the author was saying … (in Mende, 2023: 3)

- Consultation with the Author:

In cases of ambiguity or difficulty, translators may consult with Al-Koni directly to clarify his intentions and ensure accurate translation. (ibid)

- Use of Footnotes or Glossaries:

Translators may include footnotes or glossaries to explain cultural references or untranslatable terms that are essential for understanding the text. According to Mende (2023), the English version of "كلمة الليل في حق النهار" is based on Nancy Roberts' translation entitled in English *The Night Will Have It Say* and published in 2022. To make it easier for readers to understand the events of the story, the translator added notes and appended a section of key terms at the end of the novel, where she explained particular words and expressions and gave background information on the various characters, historical events, and locations referred to in the course of the novel.

- Adopting Translation Techniques

Translators may employ various techniques, such as literal/direct translation, borrowing, transliteration, or cultural transplantation, adaptation and deletion to bridge the gap between the source and target cultures (Zagood et al., 2023; Tashani, 2023).

From previous discussion it may be concluded that translating Al-Koni's work is seriously problematic due to the cultural and linguistic specificity of his writing .The mistranslation of socio-cultural expressions, particularly those related to Tuareg traditions and beliefs, is a recurring concern. Translators may struggle to find adequate equivalents in other languages for concepts and terms that are deeply rooted in the desert environment and Tuareg culture .Some critics, therefore, argue that certain translations flatten the richness and complexity of Al-Koni's original Arabic.

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Ibrahim Al-Koni's Views on Islam and Islamic Expansion:

Ibrahim Al-Koni views Islam, particularly its historical spread in North Africa, as intertwined with the loss of traditional Tuareg culture and agency. He sees Islam, in some contexts, as representing a corrupting modernity that clashes with the animistic and nomadic values of his people. Al-Koni's works often explore themes of "Unity of Existence" and spiritual awakening, sometimes using Sufi motifs, while also critiquing the imposition of external systems, including certain interpretations of Islam, on indigenous cultures (Athanasiadis, 2022). What follows is a summary of Al-Koni's standpoint regarding Islam and Islamic expansion (https://www.notesfromoverthere.org/blog-ismail-fayed/ibrahim-koni-al-majus).

- **Islam and Cultural Loss:**

Al-Koni views the Islamic conquest of North Africa as a turning point where the Tuareg lost their agency and their traditional way of life was disrupted.

- **Modernity and Corruption:**

Al-Koni acknowledges Islam as a significant force that reshaped Tuareg culture and society, particularly through the Islamic conquest of North Africa. However, he doesn't see Islam as inherently enlightening or civilizing but rather as a force that can lead to a "corrupting modernity" that clashes with the purity of their animistic culture.

- **Critique of Imposition:**

Al-Koni's narratives can be seen as a critique of the imposition of external systems, including certain interpretations of Islam, on indigenous cultures and their traditional ways of life.

- **Tensions Between Tradition and Islam:**

Al-Koni's works often depict the tension between Tuareg traditions, including their mythology and spiritual practices, and the influence of Islam. He portrays how some Tuaregs embrace Islam while others struggle to reconcile it with their ancestral ways. In essence, Ibrahim Al-Koni's views on Islam are not monolithic. He presents Islam, not as a religion, but as a historical and cultural force that has shaped the Tuareg world. He also views Islam as a complex and sometimes

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contradictory element within that world. His work explores the tensions between Islam and tradition, the spiritual depth of the desert, and the ongoing search for meaning and identity in a rapidly changing world.

❖ Questioning Islamic Expansion and Its Impact:

Athanasiadis (2022) claims that Ibrahim Al-Koni offers a critical perspective on the Islamic conquests, particularly in North Africa, focusing on the human cost and the disruption of existing cultures and spiritual traditions. He examines the violence, injustice, and exploitation of natural resources that accompanied the spread of Islam, challenging the idealized narratives often associated with these historical events .

Athanasiadis (ibid) thinks that Al-Koni's viewpoints about Islamic conquests highlight the following:

1. The Human Cost of Conquest:

- Violence and Exploitation

Al-Koni openly depicts the brutality of Islamic conquests, including plunder, revenge killings, and the enslavement of individuals.

- Disruption of Society

He portrays the destruction of existing social structures, displacement of populations, and the imposition of new systems of governance and taxation.

2. Challenging Dominant Narratives:

- Beyond a Simple Story of Conversion

Al-Koni resists the simplistic view of Islamic conquests as a straightforward spread of Islam, emphasizing the complexities of religious and cultural encounters.

- Focus on Indigenous Perspectives

He centers the experiences and perspectives of the indigenous populations, particularly the Amazigh (Berber) people, who resisted the conquests and maintained their ancestral traditions.

- Multi-Confessional Reality

Al-Koni acknowledges the multi-confessional nature of North Africa before the conquests, where Judaism and Christianity

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coexisted alongside indigenous beliefs .When Islam spread in North Africa, a clash of belief systems took place. Al-Koni explores the conflict between Muslim invading forces and indigenous spiritual traditions, particularly the veneration of ancestral deities like Tanit.

To fully understand Al-Koni's extremely critical stances of Islam and Islamic conquest of North Africa, we should focus on his novel *The Night Will Have Its Say* "كلمة الليل في حق النهار". As Athanasiadis (2022: 1) puts it:

> [*The Night Will Have Its Say*] … A damning alternative retelling of how Islam expanded into Amazigh North Africa by an authoritative insider-outsider voice… Koni chooses to fix his gaze on the plunder, revenge killings, vindictive taxation, kidnapped children, raped women and encompassing injustice justified by self-serving interpretations of divine rulings. And he highlights how, when they were not finding ways to engage in plunder (which ballooned into such a mainstream activity as for the word *ghanima* — "spoils of war" — to be formalized in religious doctrine), the purveyors of the new faith were often busy backstabbing each other. A poignant example of this concludes Koni's novel.

❖ **Sufism and Mysticism:**

Al-Koni frequently incorporates Sufi motifs and mystical elements into his narratives, suggesting a connection between Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam, and the Tuareg experience of the desert. This suggests a way of understanding Islam that resonates with the Tuareg's spiritual worldview (https://arabic.georgetown.edu/abstracts/).

Basically, Al-Koni's work offers a complex and sometimes critical perspective on Sufism. He uses the imagery of the desert and the contrast between genuine and false Sufis to examine the human condition and the search for meaning in a world often marked by materialism and conflict (https://www.notesfromoverthere.org/blog-ismail-fayed/ibrahim-koni-al-majus).

Al-Koni frequently contrasts the idealized, spiritualized desert with the materialistic, corrupted world, sometimes using Sufi characters to show this contrast. While explicitly expressing sarcastic views on

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Sufism, his representations can be seen as highlighting the potential for hypocrisy and the gap between the ideal and the real in Sufi traditions (https://arablit.org/2010/12/23/a-celebration-of-ibrahim-al-koni-the-desert-russian-literature-and-swiss-sufism/).

In this connection, Assadi (2021) states that *The Fetishists/Al Majus* (المجوس) is a typical representative of Al-Koni's use of Sufi motifs, themes and symbols that refer to Sufism, Sufi figures, ideas and practices. Sufi contexts are used everywhere in this novel. Using Sufi themes like **deletion**, (al-maḥow /المَحْو) **reincarnation**/**embodiment** (ḥolūl /الحُلُول), **grief** (wajd /الوَجْد), **ascension** (Mi'rāj /المعراج), saints, dervishes, wanderers, **dhikr** (الذِّكْر), etc., Al-Koni sarcastically extends critique to Sufism, particularly if Sufi practices are seen as being used to justify or enable materialistic pursuits.

To add another example, some of the Sufi characters in *The Fetishists/Al Majus* (المجوس) read the "Throne Verse," the 255th verse of the 2nd surah of the Qur'ān, "Al-Baqarah" along with some pagan spells when in difficult situations, thus, sarcastically demonstrating the synchronization of Islam with other religions.

In conclusion, Al-Koni's work can be seen as an ironic form of "Sufi fabulation," using the power of narrative to explore spiritual realities and challenge conventional ways of understanding the world. Al-Koni believes that, since the real world of modernity is dominated by evil powers, oppression and injustice, Sufi ideas constitute an escape from time, history and life into a dream-like world in an empty, isolated desert. Sarcastically stated, these Sufi ideas can be suitable responses to injustice, political transgression, insanity and irrationality. Al-Koni goes further to claim that, by doing this, he expresses his opposition to elitism, priesthood and authoritarianism, which have characterized Arab-Islamic history.

Ibrahim Al-Koni's Views of Woman and Sex:

Ibrahim Al-Koni's views on woman, as presented in his works, are complex and multifaceted, often drawing on Tuareg traditions and exploring themes of sin, temptation, and the relationship between men and women. While some interpretations suggest a negative view of women and sex, characterized by themes of deception and a sense of

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inherent evil, others highlight the strength and influence of women, their capacity for revenge, and the idea that men find happiness with women while women find it elsewhere. Al-Koni's portrayal of women in his novels, like *Gold Dust* [التِّبْر] includes descriptions that can be seen as misogynistic, with women depicted as gossips and chatterboxes. However, it's also acknowledged that women hold considerable power and influence, especially in matters of plotting and revenge. A good example of this view is the novel *The Night Will Have Its Say* "كلمة الليل في حق النهار". The ambiguity in his depiction of sex and women is a recurring theme in his works, suggesting that his views are not straightforward and invite multiple interpretations (https://arabic.georgetown.edu/abstracts/).

Similarly, in Ibrahim A-koni's novel *Gold Dust* [التِّبْر], the female symbolizes the physical and social constraints that shackle the soul. Woman represents the "lasso" that drags men into slavery, and contrasts with the desert values of freedom, asceticism and spiritual transcendence. Therefore, the hero sacrifices his wife and son in an effort to liberate himself and escape from the world of materialism and illusionary attachments to the desert and spiritual purity making her a symbol of slavery that must be abandoned in order to achieve inner freedom (https://arablit.org/2015/11/17/the-scarecrow/).

Here's a more detailed breakdown of Al-Koni's views (ibid):

- **Original Sin and Temptation:**

Al-Koni's work, particularly *The Fetishists* [Al Majus] (المجوس), incorporates themes reminiscent of the "Judaeo-Christian paradigm", including the concept of original sin, which is unusual, given his Tuareg background. This suggests a complex relationship with Al-Koni's concepts of temptation and the inherent "evil" of sex and women.

- **Ambiguity and Complexity:**

There is no singular, simplistic view of sex in his writing. It's a multi-layered issue with contrasting perspectives. For example, women are portrayed as both deceptive and powerful.

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➢ **Women's Role:**

When it comes to the role of females, Al-Koni's depiction is complex. In ***Gold Dust*** (التِّبْر), for example, they are depicted negatively, but also as powerful figures capable of cunning and deception, particularly against males. However, in ***The Night Will Have Its Say*** (كلمة الليل في حق النهار), Al-Kahina is the symbol of self-defence. That is, she devoted herself to resisting injustice, which made her a heroin. The fact that she is a woman makes her a heroin twice over and, for her to have reached an advanced age, made her a heroin three times over, because such a person defies fate. For this reason, Al-Kahina**'s** story is the epitome of tragedy for the simple reason that it does not count on the protagonist's salvation.

Also, Al-Koni explores the idea that while men find happiness with women, women's happiness may be found elsewhere, suggesting a different perspective on fulfillment.

➢ **Misogyny VS. Facetiousness:**

It is often unclear whether Al-Koni's portrayals are genuinely misogynistic or whether they are, at times, satirical or facetious, designed to provoke thought and discussion.

➢ **Influence of Culture:**

Al-Koni's views are heavily influenced by Tuareg culture and traditions, but they also incorporate elements that might seem contradictory or drawn from other sources, creating a unique and complex perspective on sex and gender.

Criticisms of Ibrahim Al-Koni's Approach to Technology and Modernity:

Criticism of Ibrahim Al-Koni's views on technology and modernity often focuses on the romanticization of the past and traditional ways of life as a nostalgic ideal, potentially overlooking the complexities and benefits of modernity, a reductionist "magical realist" interpretation of his work that can dismiss the authentic socio-environmental concerns driving his narratives, and concerns that his critique of modernization can be misread as an anti-modern stance rather than a nuanced call for balance and a spiritual alternative to

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Western modernity's damaging effects (https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1810600.). What follows is a summary of the main criticisms expressed of Al-Koni's negative views on the role of technology and modernization in his narratives (https://hkjoss.com/index.php/journal/article/view/472).

➢ **Romantic Nostalgia:**

Critics note that Al-Koni's literary works often portray the pre-modern, traditional past as a utopian ideal, a "haven from the evil of enforced modernization". This perspective can be seen as overly romantic and potentially problematic by idealizing a past that may not have been as harmonious as depicted.

➢ **Underestimating Benefits of Modernity:**

By focusing on the destructive aspects of modernization and Western technology, Al-Koni's work may be seen as failing to acknowledge or explore the potential positive aspects of modernity, including its ability to foster different kinds of human connection and progress.

➢ **The "Magical Realist" Trap:**

Some postcolonial critics have labeled Al-Koni a "magical realist" to highlight acts of "political resistance" through supernatural forces. However, this reading can be criticized for reducing the rich, mythical, and symbolic elements in his narratives to mere symbols of human suffering or resistance, thereby obscuring the nuanced ecological and spiritual dimensions of his work.

❖ **Broader Implications:**

- **Spiritual VS. Modern Worldview:**

Al-Koni's critiques of modernity stem from a spiritual, often Sufi and Tuareg-influenced, perspective that views the rationalist and materialistic aspects of Western modernity as a source of corruption and alienation. While this provides a powerful alternative vision, it can also be interpreted as a rigid rejection of modern systems rather than a quest for integration.

- **Focus on Cultural Gap:**

While Al-Koni's novels highlight the cultural clash between traditional desert life and modern invaders, some interpretations focus

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on the "cultural gap" as evidence of the destructive force of modernity without fully exploring the potential for dialogue or transformation between these seemingly opposing worldviews.

- **Misinterpretation of Environmental Themes:**

While Al-Koni's ecological themes are central, critics have noted that the narrative's ecological message—warning against the destructive impact of modern technology on the desert ecosystem—can sometimes be overshadowed by interpretations of the magical or mythical aspects of his stories.

In his novels, vehicles, rapid-firing rifles, and other modern tools are associated with environmental degradation, the destruction of natural habitats, and the loss of traditional knowledge. For example, in *Bleeding of the Stone* "نزيف الحجر", the introduction of modern hunting methods leads to the depletion of wildlife and disrupts the delicate balance of the desert ecosystem.

The "duplicitous" nature of Al-Koni's views stems from his recognition of both the promise and the peril of technological progress. He does not offer a simple condemnation or endorsement, but rather explores the multifaceted consequences of technology in the context of his characters' lives and the environment they inhabit (https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1810600.).

In summary, Al-Koni's work presents a nuanced and often critical examination of technology's role in shaping the modern world, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that respects both tradition and progress (https://hkjoss.com/index.php/journal/article/view/472).

Conclusion:

Criticisms of Ibrahim Al-Koni's works often center on their difficult, abstract, and hybrid language, which can be alienating for readers. Al-Koni's use of a complex, abstract Arabic that incorporates Tuareg concepts and linguistic purity can be challenging for many readers . While his unique blending of Tuareg traditions, mysticism, and sophisticated Arabic is celebrated as a powerful literary achievement, some critics find this linguistic and cultural hybridity, along with the stark and at times harsh depiction of life and death, to be an obstacle

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to engagement .Moreover, His writings are deeply rooted in the Tuareg world, presenting a universe that, while richly detailed, can be unfamiliar and difficult for those outside this specific cultural context (https://www.worldliteratureforum.com/forum/index.php?threads/).

Similarly, the portrayal of women as underdeveloped or secondary characters within predominantly male-centered, patriarchal narratives is often criticized. His novels are often seen as "phallocentric," with a strong emphasis on male protagonists and their experiences, often at the expense of exploring female perspectives .The portrayal of women in his works is often criticized as limited or antiquated, with them frequently appearing as burdens, scapegoats, or minor figures in narratives that are otherwise rich in spiritual and existential themes (ibid).

With regard to mystical and spiritual emphasis, while a core strength for many, the deep integration of mystical and animist elements from Tuareg culture, though a deliberate artistic choice, can make the narrative less accessible to readers who prefer more rational or secular viewpoints (ibid).

Likewise, Al-Koni's works are also criticized for their duplicitous depiction of modernization and technology.

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