POWER AND COMMUNICATION IN *LA MAISON DE CICINE* BY MOHAMED NEDALI

PODER E COMUNICAÇÃO EM LA MAISON DE CICINE DE MOHAMED NEDALI

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Abstract. This study examines the intricate dynamics of power and communication in Mohamed Nedali's novel *La Maison de Cicine*, exploring how fundamentalist ideologies operate through sophisticated mechanisms of control and manipulation. Utilizing Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of power relations, the research investigates the microcosm of Dar Louriki, a shared living space in Marrakech that serves as a rich analytical site for understanding complex social interactions. The analysis focuses on Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge, a central character who exemplifies how power is exercised through nuanced communicative strategies. The research reveals two primary modes of communication: intimate "fraternal conversations" and public sermons, which function as sophisticated instruments of psychological manipulation and social control. Through these communicative techniques, the Sheikh establishes a comprehensive system of domination that penetrates the psychological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the house's inhabitants. By employing cognitive theories such as cognitive dissonance and protection motivation theory, the study deconstructs the Sheikh's rhetorical approaches. These strategies involve creating psychological discomfort, leveraging fear-based persuasion, and exploiting religious discourse to maintain authority. The research demonstrates how communication becomes a double-edged sword—simultaneously reinforcing power structures while revealing their inherent vulnerabilities. The characters of Leïla and Idar emerge as critical sites of resistance, challenging the Sheikh's oppressive system through their individual agency. Their tragic narrative illustrates the persistent tension between systemic power and individual freedom, transcending the specific Moroccan context to explore universal themes of domination, communication, and human dignity. Ultimately, the study offers a critical examination of how radical ideologies construct and sustain their dominance through complex communicative strategies. By mapping the intricate power dynamics within Dar Louriki, the research uncovers the sophisticated mechanisms through which fundamentalist narratives seek to control individual identities and suppress alternative perspectives.

Keywords: Power relations; Religious ideology; Resistance; Mohamed Nedali; Moroccan literature.

Resumo. Este estudo analisa as dinâmicas complexas de poder e comunicação no romance A Casa de Cicine de Mohamed Nedali, explorando como as ideologias fundamentalistas operam por meio de mecanismos sofisticados de controle e manipulação. Apoiada no quadro teórico das relações de poder de Michel Foucault, a pesquisa examina o microcosmo de Dar Louriki, um espaço de convivência coletivo em Marrakech, que constitui um terreno privilegiado de análise para compreender as complexas interações sociais. A análise concentra-se na personagem central, o Sheikh Mer de Savoir, que ilustra o exercício do poder por meio de estratégias comunicativas sutis. A pesquisa destaca dois modos

principais de comunicação: as "causeries fraternelles" (conversas fraternais) em particular e os sermões públicos, que funcionam como instrumentos sofisticados de manipulação psicológica e controle social. Através dessas técnicas de comunicação, o Sheikh estabelece um sistema de dominação global que se estende às dimensões psicológica, cultural e espiritual dos habitantes da casa. Mobilizando teorias cognitivas, como a dissonância cognitiva e a teoria da motivação à proteção, o estudo desconstrói as abordagens retóricas do Sheikh. Essas estratégias consistem em gerar desconforto psicológico, explorar a persuasão pelo medo e instrumentalizar o discurso religioso para consolidar sua autoridade. A pesquisa demonstra assim como a comunicação se torna uma arma de dois gumes—reforçando as estruturas de poder enquanto revela suas fragilidades intrínsecas. As personagens de Leïla e Idar se destacam como figuras de resistência, desafiando o sistema opressor do Sheikh pela sua capacidade de ação individual. Sua trajetória trágica ilustra a tensão persistente entre o poder sistêmico e a liberdade individual, indo além do contexto específico do Marrocos para abordar temas universais de dominação, comunicação e dignidade humana. Em definitiva, este estudo propõe uma análise crítica de como as ideologias radicais constroem e mantêm sua dominação por meio de estratégias de comunicação complexas. Ao mapear as dinâmicas de poder dentro de Dar Louriki, a pesquisa ilumina os mecanismos sofisticados pelos quais as narrativas fundamentalistas buscam controlar as identidades individuais e sufocar as perspectivas alternativas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The links between communication and power are often difficult to grasp and define. Indeed, these two concepts are interdependent and manifest in various ways depending on the context. However, it is undeniable that communication is an essential element and a sine qua non condition for the exercise of power, as it is, on the one hand, a means of exercising power, and on the other, a space where power is manifested and contested.

When we speak of power, we are mainly referring to a relationship between two parties. It is a "relational capacity that allows a social actor to asymmetrically influence the decisions of another social actor, or several other social actors, in order to favor the desires, interests, and values of the one in a position of power" (Castells, 2013). This definition highlights that the exercise of power cannot occur in isolation, but in a context where social interaction is possible. Power is based on an asymmetry of influence, where one actor, through their position, resources, or skills, manages to impose their will or interests on other actors. Thus, communication plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining the inequality between the one who holds power and the one who suffers it, as it allows for shaping perceptions, controlling information, and directing decisions in favor of the interests of the dominant power. Moreover, the space of communication becomes not only a receptacle for the exercise of power, but also a place of contestation where other actors can resist, engage in negotiations, or even overthrow the power.

It is in light of these elements that we have chosen to focus on the novel La Maison de Cicine (Le Fennec, 2010) by Moroccan author Mohamed Nedali. This reflection will seek to clarify the following question: how is communication essential in the power dynamics depicted in this text? We will begin with an introduction to the novel La Maison de Cicine, highlighting the social and political issues it addresses. Then, the focus will shift to an analysis of the power relations that run through the interpersonal relationships of the characters, particularly through the communication strategies deployed. The use of Michel Foucault's theory of power, particularly his approach to power relations as mechanisms of influence and subtle control, seems particularly relevant for conducting this analysis.

Finally, we will explore the mechanisms of communication and their role in the negotiations of power within the social space of the house. In La Maison de Cicine, communication is not

merely a means of exchange, but a true tool of domination and resistance, where figures like Sheikh Mer de Savoir, through his "fraternal talks" and public sermons, maneuver to impose a worldview and control the behavior of the other characters. Through these two modes of communication, the intimacy of a private conversation and the public dimension of a religious discourse, power unfolds and strengthens, while also providing a space for contestation.

This study will thus aim to shed light on the power relations and their manifestations in Mohamed Nedali's text, while illustrating how communication, far from being a mere tool of exchange, becomes a space of negotiation and resistance where deep social dynamics are at play. Through the analysis of the characters' interactions, we will seek to demonstrate how communication becomes an essential weapon for domination, but also a space where resistance takes shape.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE NOVEL LA MAISON DE CICINE

For Nedali, novelistic writing is inseparable from its socio-historical context. The act of writing adheres to the principles of the social novel, a process in which the novelist must analyze, interpret, and identify the essential aspects of social realities to transpose them into literature (Zéraffa, 1971, 41). In the context of *La maison de Cicine*, published five years after the attacks in Casablanca, the issue of "fundamentalism" is central to the novel and appears to be imposed by a context marked by the rise of radical Islamism at national and global levels.

The plot echoes the social turmoil and unrest that characterized society during this historical period. Moreover, the theme of fundamentalism serves as the common thread in several novels published during this period, notably: *Le jour de Vénus* (2009) by Mohamed Leftah, *Les* étoiles *de Sidi Moumen* (2010) by Mahi Binbine, *Oussama mon amour* (2011) by Amine Elalami, and Mohamed Nedali's own *Evelyne ou le djihad* (2016).

In *La maison de Cicine*, Mohamed Nedali introduces us to a microcosm where power relations are staged with great intensity. Located in a poor neighborhood of Marrakech's Medina, Dar Louriki, the house at the center of the narrative, embodies the social, economic, and religious dynamics of contemporary Moroccan society.

In this context, the role of Dar Louriki as a microcosm extends beyond simply representing the social tensions within an underprivileged community. It also mirrors the societal fractures and contradictions that permeate contemporary Morocco. By situating his characters within an environment shaped by power struggles, social inequalities, and conflicting religious influences, Mohamed Nedali demonstrates how external forces — be it economic pressures, religious doctrines, or cultural norms — condition interpersonal dynamics. This house, simultaneously a refuge and a site of confrontation, thus serves as a metaphor for the broader conflicts between tradition and modernity, individuality and conformity, resistance and submission.

The history of Dar Louriki is anchored in a complex historical reality. Once the property of a wealthy grocer family, the house is sold following inheritance conflicts and acquired by Louriki, a man compelled to flee the pressure exerted by the local power of his village to settle in Marrakech. This purchase is more than a mere economic transaction; it is a highly symbolic gesture that immediately draws the reader into a narrative centered on power dynamics.

Louriki, the new owner, decides to transform the house into a shared living space, a kind of boarding house, intended for tenants who cannot afford independent housing.

In *La maison de Cicine*, Mohamed Nedali attempts, in the manner of experimental novels, to explore, examine, and experiment with the relationships between characters whose destinies have crossed paths at a specific moment in their lives. These are unhappy characters, some of whom "had themselves provoked their misfortune; others had suffered it head-on as one suffers a calamity from Allah, resigned and powerless. The river of life had then long carried them in its troubled and tumultuous waters before depositing them, one after another, at the gates of the

red city, like night's debris, or wrecks on a bank in the aftermath of a flood" (Nedali, 2014, p. 12).

After introducing these characters one by one into the social laboratory of Dar Louriki, Nedali attempts to study the effects of the intrusion of a new, different element. This is a Sheikh called Ocean of Knowledge. This character, whose wealth sets him apart from the house's residents, is described as follows:

He had the face of a mullah, animated by a quiet resolve, with dark eyes of a deep gaze, both caressing and severe, like Khomeini returning from his Parisian exile the day after the Islamic revolution in Iran. His massive skull was always covered with an immaculate skullcap; his broad forehead bore in the middle a small blackish dot the size of a coin, proof of a zealous practice of the five daily prayers. (Nedali, 2014, p. 112)

This description of the Sheikh reveals his complex personality, suggesting a charismatic authority like Ayatollah Khomeini, the highest title of Shiite clergy. The comparison is not fortuitous but refers, as Khadija Mouhsine well noted, to " a representative of an imported and politicized form of Islam " (Mouhsine, 2011, p. 131).

This character, an intruder in Dar Louriki since he does not reside there, was introduced by two Islamic studies students, Miloud and Bouchaib. The Sheikh's presence in the house is apparently justified by his desire for benevolence, an objective translated through daily sermons and collective prayers that all house inhabitants are required to attend. However, this intrusion goes beyond mere religious practices or the physical occupation of the house; it evolves into a true manipulation of minds, aiming to indoctrinate the inhabitants of Dar Louriki and enlist them as 'soldiers of the Cause'. Nevertheless, this bellicose and military project cannot be realized without establishing power relations allowing control over all residents.

3. ANALYSIS OF POWER RELATIONS IN LA MAISON DE CICINE

The influence of Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge permeates Dar Louriki, establishing itself through the relationships he forges with the inhabitants. These power relations penetrate all aspects of life, rendering his influence omnipresent, which leads us to examine the mechanisms allowing this power to organize and maintain itself.

Within this framework, we will explore the exercise of power through three key dimensions: first, through the manner in which the Sheikh differentiates and classifies inhabitants according to their identities; second, through the pastoral power he embodies, with the presumed objective of guiding souls toward salvation; and third, through the resistance that certain inhabitants, such as Leïla and Idar, oppose to this omnipresent domination.

The power dynamics imposed by Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge on the inhabitants of Dar Louriki manifest prominently in the daily life of the house, where characters are differentiated, classified, individualized, and assigned distinct identities. This type of power, which transforms individuals into subjects, seeks, according to Michel Foucault, to distinguish the subjected individual from one who defines their own identity through self-awareness or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1994).

The inhabitants divide into two principal categories: on one side, Leïla, Idar, and young H'cine, who possess a cultural, linguistic, and ethical rootedness conferring a strong identity cohesion; on the other side, the remaining inhabitants who find themselves in a position of submission to the Sheikh's power.

Leïla L'bidaouia, the receptionist at Hotel Kenza, represents a pertinent example of this identity anchoring. She perfectly embodies the subject who refuses complete submission to the Sheikh's power. Indeed, she is the last to yield to his indoctrination. Her gesture of solidarity

toward the brothers Idar and H'cine, marked by tragedy[1], is more than an act of compassion; it is a testament to her autonomy and the strength of her identity.

Idar and H'cine distinguish themselves through their attachment to Berber culture, represented by the Berber language they use to communicate, Idar's name, and the sculpture Idar practices. This anchoring positions them at the margins of the microcosm dominated by dialectal Arabic and the values promoted by the Sheikh. Together, they form what could be described as the 'margin of the margin'.

In contrast, Dar Louriki's other inhabitants find themselves in a position of submission to the Sheikh's power. They are characterized less by an identity rootedness than by their vulnerabilities, rendering them more susceptible to the Sheikh's authority. Their submission can be seen as passive acceptance of imposed norms, forced adaptation to new rules of life, or an inability to resist under the social, religious, and economic pressure exerted by the Sheikh.

For the inhabitants of Dar Louriki, Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge is more than just a man; he is a true spiritual guide, an 'elect of Allah'. His authority is exercised through what Michel Foucault refers to as 'pastoral power'[2], with the goal of guiding souls toward salvation in the afterlife. (Foucault, 1994).

In his pastoral role, the Sheikh delivers daily sermons aimed at nourishing the inhabitants' faith. These discourses are perceived by the residents as protection against evil spells and a means of drawing closer to God. They believe that holding such sermons under the house's roof would certainly protect its occupants from misfortune and bring them closer to Allah and His ultimate messenger. This belief highlights the significance attributed to the Sheikh's sermons as essential components of their religious practice and spiritual security. By positioning himself as an intermediary between humans and the divine, the Sheikh establishes himself as the sole holder of truth and salvation, thereby reinforcing his grip on the inhabitants.

Pastoral power extends beyond the mere imposition of rules; it also encompasses a sacrificial dimension (Foucault, 1994). This dimension is evident in the Sheikh's efforts to improve his followers' living conditions, as demonstrated by the example of Hassan L'biaça, who was previously a mere street vendor before becoming a shop owner. This behavior reinforces the Sheikh's image as a benefactor while simultaneously consolidating the inhabitants' submission.

Thus, the influence of Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge extends beyond visible and explicit domination; it relies on a subtle system of social regulation where inhabitants, often without being fully aware, participate in their own subjugation. The Sheikh shapes a universe where the norms and values he promotes ultimately seem natural and inevitable. Each interaction with him, whether direct or indirect, becomes a constant reminder of his presence and authority. By establishing a framework of life structured around daily rituals and collective beliefs, he manages to inscribe his power into the residents' routine, rendering any resistance attempt more challenging. Consequently, control is not exercised solely through coercive means, but through the progressive infusion of his principles into individuals' minds and behaviors, creating an

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[1] Idar and H'cine, two brothers, were severely tested by the floods that devastated the Ourika Valley on August 17, 1995, simultaneously depriving them of their home and their loved ones.

[2] According to Foucault, pastoral power designates a very particular form of power:

- It is a form of power whose ultimate objective is to ensure individuals' salvation in the afterlife.
- Pastoral power is not simply a form of power that orders; it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. In this respect, it distinguishes itself from sovereign power, which demands sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne.
- It is a form of power that is concerned not only with the entire community but with each particular individual throughout their entire life.
- Finally, this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing what is happening in people's heads, without exploring their souls, without forcing them to reveal their most intimate secrets. It implies a knowledge of consciousness and an ability to direct it." (Foucault, 1994)

environment where submission becomes an almost organic condition of existence in Dar Louriki.

Furthermore, pastoral power is grounded in an intimate knowledge of individuals (Foucault, 1994). In the novel's context, the Sheikh is often represented as someone who seemingly knows everything about the residents. He is omnipresent and possesses comprehensive knowledge of everything happening in every corner of Dar Louriki. This profound knowledge enables him to exert control over consciences.

Through the establishment of daily rituals such as sermons and collective prayers, the Sheikh enforces religious practice and a behavioral model that gradually becomes ingrained in the inhabitants' habits. The gradual submission of individuals to the prayer ritual turns the inhabitants into 'soldiers of the Cause', ready to blindly follow the Sheikh's directives. As the text states, if he succeeded in making an individual pray, he could expect anything from them thereafter' (Nedali, 2014, p. 117).

As Foucault emphasizes, resistance is an intrinsic part of any power relationship (Foucault, 1994), a dynamic that is particularly evident in the characters of Leïla and Idar in *La maison de Cicine*.

Leïla personifies resistance through her independence and modern lifestyle, which stand in stark contrast to the Sheikh's religious and social expectations. Her beauty and elegant attire provoke jealousy and rumors, reflecting the pressure she experiences. Despite this pressure, Leïla steadfastly asserts her identity, refusing to conform to the rigid norms imposed upon her. When a neighbor, sent by the Sheikh, attempts to convince her to join the collective prayer, Leïla responds with an "Inshallah" that, while formally respectful, expresses a euphemistic refusal.

The solidarity between Idar and Leïla transforms into a form of collective resistance. Their relationship, evolving into a shared love, transcends a simple personal connection to become a challenge to the Sheikh's authority. Their sexual relationship transcends mere instinct; it becomes a declaration of individual freedom within an oppressive environment.

However, the Sheikh's rape of Leïla marks a turning point where power transforms into sheer violence. This brutal act exposes the Sheikh's desire to assert himself as the absolute master of Dar Louriki and beyond, with the assault taking place outside the house. The rape transforms into a means of intimidation and domination, where submission and silence seem to become the only possible responses.

The timing of this violent act is not coincidental. It precisely responds to the resistance that Leïla and Idar, through their sexuality, oppose to the Sheikh's orders. The tragic contradiction lies in the fact that this act of domination occurs precisely when Leïla begins to conform to the Sheikh's expectations, adhering to his religious demands and renouncing her relationship with Idar. This simultaneity underscores the brutality and absurdity of the fundamentalist power embodied by the Sheikh.

According to Foucault, a relationship of violence differs from a power dynamic in its tendency to act upon bodies: "it forces, bends, breaks, destroys it closes all possibilities; it has no pole other than passivity; and if it encounters resistance, it has no choice but to attempt to reduce it" (Foucault, 1994).

In *La maison de Cicine*, this power dynamic in response to resistance is not limited to Leïla's rape scene but crystallizes more intensely in the tragic conclusion where Leïla and Idar are burned alive while sleeping. The room's incineration, representing a symbolic pyre, marks the summit of violence exercised by the Sheikh. Fire, a symbol of both purification and destruction (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1990), becomes an effective tool here to annihilate all forms of resistance, both physical and symbolic.

By reducing Leïla and Idar's love nest to ashes, the radical ideology embodied by the Sheikh seeks not only to eliminate two 'impious' individuals but also to erase any alternative to the principles and norms fueling his infernal machine.

In closing this part of our analysis, *La maison de Cicine* illustrates how the Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge exerts his power through a formidable system of control aimed at subjugating the inhabitants of Dar Louriki. Differentiation, pastoral power, and repression constitute the pillars of this domination.

However, rather than destabilizing this system, Leïla and Idar's resistance merely forces it to unveil its true nature. Their defiance exposes the core mechanisms of power, illustrating how individual agencies can challenge systemic oppression.

Ultimately, the novel offers a critical examination of how fundamentalist ideologies operate, employing sophisticated control mechanisms that transcend mere physical force The Sheikh's power is exerted through psychological manipulation, religious rhetoric, and, ultimately, the violent suppression of any alternative narratives or identities.

By mapping the intricate power dynamics within Dar Louriki, the text uncovers how radical ideologies construct and sustain their dominance through complex strategies of differentiation, spiritual guidance, and violent enforcement. The experiences of the characters illustrate the persistent tension between individual freedom and systemic oppression.

In the following analysis, we will examine how communication functions as a crucial tool both in consolidating and contesting this power structure.

4. COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL OF POWER IN LA MAISON DE CICINE

An analysis of power relations in *La maison de Cicine* reveals the complexity of the mechanisms of domination employed by Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge. However, despite their sophistication, these mechanisms alone are insufficient to ensure the sustainability of his authority. Ultimately, their effectiveness hinges on one crucial factor: communication. It is through carefully crafted communication strategies that the Sheikh's power imposes itself and becomes consolidated. Thus, communication is not merely a vehicle of power; it becomes the primary tool that reinforces and sustains it.

To analyze how the Sheikh employs communication as a tool of domination over the inhabitants of Dar Louriki, we will focus on two primary forms of communication:

Private Communication, These intimate interactions, known as 'fraternal conversations,' take place in private settings. Held in one-on-one settings, these discussions represent a nuanced approach to power manipulation, allowing the Sheikh to establish personal connections and exercise subtle influence over individual residents.

Public Preaching, in contrast to private conversations, serves as a more explicit manifestation of the Sheikh's communicative power. These public addresses serve as a platform for broader ideological dissemination and collective control.

By examining these two complementary communication strategies, we will explore how the Sheikh utilizes discourse as a sophisticated instrument of social control and ideological transformation within the microcosm of Dar Louriki.

According to *Le Petit Robert*, the term " conversation" (*causerie* in French) can refer to either a "casual conversation" or an "unpretentious speech or lecture". The Sheikh emphasizes the informal nature of this communication form by associating it with the epithet "fraternal". However, ambiguity remains concerning the exact nature of its content: Is it a simple familiar discussion, an unpretentious conference, or an ingenious mixture of both?

In Mohamed Nedali's novel, the "fraternal conversations" between the Sheikh and Dar Louriki's inhabitants constitute a central element of the narrative. These exchanges, initiated by the Sheikh when he focuses on a specific character, are characterized by their injunctive, persuasive, or informative tone.

For this analysis, we will rely on an example of a "fraternal conversation" between the Sheikh and Leïla. This episode, notable among the novel's numerous interactions, illustrates a scene where the Sheikh, as a religious authority figure, exercises his influence over Leïla. Although taking place in an apparently informal setting—the courtyard of the house—this 'fraternal conversation' unveils the communicative strategies employed by the Sheikh to shape behaviors and beliefs. The observance of prayer and wearing of the veil constitute the primary objectives of this conversation.

The Sheikh initiates his discussion with Leïla by employing a strategy that involves questioning whether her behavior aligns with that of a 'good Muslim'. As described by Festinger, the process of cognitive dissonance can be summarized in three stages: '(a) when an individual is confronted with two inconsistent cognitions, (b) they will experience psychological discomfort (i.e., a state of cognitive dissonance) (c) which will motivate them to use strategies to return to a satisfactory state' (Vaidis, 2011).

Key Example of Dialogue:

> **"** [...] You absolutely must return to Allah! And the sooner, the better!
> — But I am, my lord! the young woman replied in a slight tone of protest.
> — You are not! decreed the Sheikh, shaking his head from side to side. You are not!
> — How can this be, my lord? I have never killed, nor stolen, nor denied the faith.
> — Do you pray? Do you wear the veil?
> Leïla fell silent, embarrassed, discomfited.
> — Answer! Do you pray? Do you wear the veil?
> — No, my lord! she murmured.
> — Well, there you have it! the Sheikh resumed, triumphant. You are not! (Nedali, 2014, p. 138) **"**

This strategy aims to create psychological discomfort in Leïla by making her aware of the inconsistency between her beliefs (being a good Muslim) and her actions (not praying, not wearing the veil). This discomfort will serve as the driving force behind behavioral change, encouraging her to reduce the dissonance and restore internal coherence.

Here's a translation that maintains the academic and analytical tone of the original text:

The analysis of this fraternal conversation reveals the effectiveness of communication as an instrument of manipulation, where each word serves as a lever in constructing submission. Despite the seemingly informal and friendly nature of this interaction, its function is clearly to dominate the other. The Sheikh relies on a series of discursive strategies to instill uncertainty and guilt in his interlocutor. In Leïla's case, for instance, he employs a subtle method of destabilizing her certainties, transforming a simple exchange into a process of radical self-questioning.

By steering the conversation toward strict religious criteria — prayer, the veil — he imposes behavioral norms while simulating fraternal concern. This demonstrates that communication, far from being a simple means of exchange, becomes a terrain of struggle for conformity, where persuasion takes varied forms, ranging from cognitive dissonance to threatening images of future violence. The Sheikh thus exploits the psychological vulnerabilities of his interlocutors to maintain his power, showing that domination is not merely physical, but also mental, and that communication is the quintessential weapon for deploying and reinforcing control over others.

The nuanced approach highlights how communication transcends mere dialogue, becoming a sophisticated mechanism of psychological manipulation. Through carefully crafted linguistic strategies, the Cheikh transforms an apparently benevolent conversation into a calculated

instrument of social control, revealing the profound complexity of power dynamics in interpersonal interactions.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Sheikh's verbal communication is his reliance on fear-based persuasion. This strategy is evident in several passages of the "fraternal conversation," where fear is instilled through threats such as eternal punishment, physical suffering, social and spiritual exclusion, and divine wrath.

To better understand this persuasive behavior, it is relevant to analyze it through the lens of Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), developed by Rogers (Blondé & Girandola, 2016). This theory, which falls within a cognitive perspective, posits that responses to fear appeals result from a combination of cognitive evaluations rather than a simple emotional reaction.

According to this theory, two types of perceptions are crucial in the persuasion process:

A. Threat Perception:
- Perceived vulnerability: The individual's assessment of their personal risk in relation to the threat.
- Perceived severity: The evaluation of the potential consequences of the threat.

B. Efficacy Perception:
- Perceived effectiveness of recommendations: The belief that the proposed solutions will effectively counter the threat.
- Perceived self-efficacy: The individual's confidence in their ability to implement the recommended solutions.

Protection Motivation Theory suggests that persuasion, expressed through the motivation to protect oneself, is most effective when both perceived threat and perceived efficacy are high. In such cases, individuals are more likely to adopt the recommended behaviors to counter the threat (Blondé & Girandola, 2016).

In the context of the "fraternal conversation" between the Sheikh and Leïla, this theory provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding how the Sheikh structures his discourse to maximize his persuasive influence.

The Sheikh manipulates Leïla's perception of vulnerability by making her believe that she is personally exposed to an imminent and direct threat—eternal punishment in hellfire for her religious transgressions. This threat is explicitly articulated through vivid depictions of infernal torture, as illustrated in the following passage: "Imagine your body, your beautiful body, engulfed in flames from head to toe!" (Nedali, 2014, p. 138).

The severity of the threat is further amplified by associating the consequences with the physical destruction of Leïla's body: "Imagine your flesh, so young, so tender and fresh, turning to ashes before your eyes!" (Nedali, 2014, p. 138). This rhetorical approach aims to heighten Leïla's perception of the gravity of inaction.

The Sheikh's use of such imagery proves effective, as evidenced by Leïla's reaction: "She shuddered completely, her skin bristled; she instinctively closed her eyelids. A second later, she saw her body catching fire like a bundle of hay soaked in fuel." (Nedali, 2014, p. 138).

However, the Sheikh's discourse is not limited to these terrifying images; he also provides clear recommendations to avoid the threat—namely, prayer and wearing the veil. He reinforces the perceived effectiveness of these actions by emphasizing that Allah's forgiveness and protection from temptation are attainable through their practice. Nevertheless, Leïla expresses hesitation, particularly regarding the veil due to her professional obligations. In response, the Sheikh escalates his rhetoric, invoking curses to reinforce the perception of urgency and the necessity of compliance.

Ultimately, the "fraternal conversation" between the Sheikh and Leïla represents one of the many instances in the novel where interpersonal communication becomes an instrument of manipulation and control. By relying on persuasive strategies rooted in cognitive dissonance

and fear appeals, the Sheikh deploys his communicative arsenal, further consolidating his monopoly on power.

While the "fraternal conversations" are characterized by an apparently informal dialogue, the Sheikh's public sermons adopt a more formal and theatrical approach. These sermons address a larger audience and employ different persuasive techniques.

Our analysis will focus on the sermon delivered by the Sheikh following Leïla's assault and her resumed relationship with Idar. The objective of this sermon is clear: to pressure the two rebels into leaving Dar Louriki. The Sheikh strategically chooses to address a highly symbolic topic—"illicit relationships in Islam." This sermon takes place in the courtyard of Dar Louriki, in front of an audience of about twenty students and several neighbors.

In the Islamic religious tradition, sermons hold a sacred character and are delivered at moments of significant religious value. They aim to unify the community, with oratory skills playing a crucial role. This aspect enables the preacher to captivate the audience continuously and optimize the effectiveness of message transmission (Sèze, 2012).

The Sheikh's sermon follows a clearly defined structure, typical of persuasive discourse: it begins with an "extended prayer," which anchors the discourse within the religious tradition and establishes the preacher's authority. The introduction of the topic highlights "illicit relationships" as a "major sin," immediately emphasizing the seriousness of the subject. In the development phase, a series of arguments based on sacred texts—the Quran and hadiths—enhances the sermon's persuasive strength and legitimizes the significance of the topic. The Sheikh concludes his sermon with an impassioned call to action against this "sin."

Intertextuality, as analyzed by Zhor Chnina in her study on the discourse of online religious preachers (Chnina, 2022), plays a central role in Muslim religious sermons. The frequent use of Quranic verses and hadith citations lends legitimacy to the preacher's words and strengthens the persuasive force of the discourse. Within this framework, the audience is unable to challenge or question the reliability of such a speech.

In the Sheikh's sermon, several instances of intertextuality can be observed, where he references sacred texts to reinforce his argument, such as:

> "The hadith is unequivocal on this matter: Whosoever among you (note the addressee!) ... Whoever among you witnesses an abomination and can fight it with his hands, let him fight it with his hands! If he cannot, let him fight it with his tongue! If he cannot, let him fight it with his heart, and this is the weakest level of faith!" (Nedali, 2014, p. 180).

Another example is the phrase: "Adulterers, flog them until death follows!" (Nedali, 2014, p. 180), presented as a sacred teaching, whereas in reality, it originates neither from the Quran nor from the hadiths.

The adoption of such falsified intertextuality reveals a form of religious manipulation. The Sheikh strategically blends authentic quotations with fabricated assertions, exploiting the authority ascribed to sacred texts to propagate ideas that deviate from the true principles of Islam. This practice not only spreads misinformation about religion but also fosters radical behaviors, as demonstrated by the tragic fate of Leïla and Idar, who became the targets of the Sheikh's incendiary rhetoric.

Furthermore, the Sheikh's preaching is characterized by audience interaction, which contrasts with the traditional sermon format that typically consists of a monologue dominated by the preacher (Chnina, 2022). This interaction helps to establish a strong bond between the Sheikh and his followers, further solidifying their commitment as "soldiers of the cause."

The Sheikh's sermon embodies the characteristics of an enthusiastic discourse (Chnina, 2022), designed to mobilize and leave a lasting impression on the audience, ensuring their engagement and reinforcing the core arguments.

The audience's reactions testify to the Sheikh's impressive communicative impact. Group responses such as the collective shouting of "Allahu Akbar!" and the choral repetition of key phrases illustrate the Sheikh's ability to unite his audience, instilling a sense of unity and shared purpose. This mobilization is crucial in the exercise of power through communication, as it enables the Sheikh to consolidate his leadership and direct the actions of his followers.

The Sheikh's sermon extends beyond mere religious mobilization, representing a subtle form of psychological manipulation. By categorizing deviant behaviors as major sins, he transforms them into spiritual threats, compelling his audience toward total submission to his vision.

The Sheikh strategically employs fear and guilt to reinforce his authority and maintain control, positioning himself not only as a spiritual guide but as the definitive arbiter of collective morality. This emotional control mechanism serves to solidify his power and deepen his influence over the audience.

Through carefully constructed religious rhetoric, he creates a psychological framework where compliance becomes equivalent to spiritual salvation. The sermon functions as a sophisticated instrument of social regulation, where religious discourse is strategically deployed to shape individual and collective behaviors, penetrating deeply into the community's psychological and social fabric.

By connecting individual actions to broader existential consequences, the Sheikh establishes a pervasive environment of surveillance and self-regulation, transforming religious instruction into a powerful tool of psychological manipulation.

Ultimately, this analysis of the communicative strategies employed by Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge in *La maison de Cicine* reveals his strategic use of communication to consolidate his power. Through fraternal conversations and public sermons, he skillfully manipulates the perceptions of the inhabitants, keeping them in a constant state of submission. Thus, communication—functioning as an instrument of manipulation and control—becomes the cornerstone of his authority and the social order within the house.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the exploration of Dar Louriki as a microcosm in Mohamed Nedali's novel *La Maison de Cicine*, the author attempts to illuminate the power relations that structure interactions within a social and religious context marked by profound complexity. The narrative offers a critical perspective on these relationships by examining the dynamics of domination and the subtleties of resistance within a space where communication plays a central role.

Embodying the image of domination through intimidation and manipulation—including economic coercion—Sheikh Ocean of Knowledge establishes an omnipresent control system. This system relies on sophisticated practices of persuasion and coercion, where communication becomes a tool for manipulating minds and normalizing behaviors. Through strategies such as fraternal conversations and public sermons, the Sheikh exploits the psychological, cultural, and spiritual vulnerabilities of the inhabitants to consolidate his authority. These mechanisms highlight a fundamental paradox: while communication serves to reinforce power, it simultaneously reveals its inherent fragilities.

This analysis also demonstrates that communication, as an instrument of power, is a double-edged sword. While it enables the Sheikh to assert his authority and standardize behaviors, it simultaneously generates resistances—sometimes subtle, sometimes more pronounced—as represented by Leïla and Idar. These acts of resistance, although severely repressed through extreme violence, reveal the fissures in a dogmatic power founded on oppression. Leïla and Idar's revolt transcends individual challenge, becoming a symbolic affirmation of freedom confronting an authority that seeks to erase all forms of singularity.

The work is also situated within a broader reflection on ideological deviations and modern forms of domination. Through his writing, Mohamed Nedali critiques power dynamics that operate under the mask of religious benevolence but tend to reduce individuals to passive subjects. In this context, Dar Louriki becomes a metaphor for social tensions and struggles for emancipation within a Moroccan society traversed by profound contradictions. The author interrogates how religious, social, and economic influences converge to maintain systems of domination, while emphasizing that these systems are never entirely immune to contestation.

Moreover, *La Maison de Cicine* transcends its Moroccan context to evoke universal problematics related to power abuse, the significance of communication, and struggles for human dignity. The novel reminds us that the quest for freedom is a universal constant, and that even within the most oppressive systems, dissenting voices—like those of Leïla and Idar—continue to resonate. These resistances, though ephemeral and tragic within the narrative, testify to an oppositional spirit that persists beyond imposed violence and silences.

Thus, *La Maison de Cicine* emerges as a poignant critique of coercive power disguised as moral authority, while celebrating fragments of resistance that, though ultimately annihilated, reveal the fissures of this oppressive system. The final tragedy, far from definitively closing this cycle of domination, reflects the persistent and universal tensions between power, communication, and freedom.

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