

## Urban Space and the Experimentation of Novelistic Writing: A Cultural Approach to *Al-Zilzāl* by Tahar Wattar

Dr. Zohra Gaouaoui <sup>1</sup>, PR. Mohamed seddik beghoura <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Bouira, Algeria . Email: [gaouaouizohra@gmail.com](mailto:gaouaouizohra@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> University of Msila, Algeria. Email: [mohamedseddik.beghoura@univ-msila.dz](mailto:mohamedseddik.beghoura@univ-msila.dz)

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### Abstract:

This study deals with Tahar Wattar's novel *The Earthquake* as a model of experimentation in the Algerian novel, based on a complete integration between the components of natural and urban space, and the social, political, and cultural movement that characterized the post-independence period. It originates from the hypothesis that the writer transformed the city of Constantine from a neutral narrative space into an active semantic system, in which geography, religion, myth, and politics are interwoven to serve the construction of a critical vision of the Algerian reality.

The study investigates the concept of experimentation as a shaking of the ready-made artistic form and a surpassing of traditional narrative systems. It also analyzes the meaning of the earthquake as a central symbol of multiple dimensions (religious, political, social), and the role of bridges and urban spaces in embodying ideological conflicts, especially the conflict between the revolutionary project and the conservative reformist forces. The research problem revolves around how spatial/cultural integration is employed in constructing an experimental novel that reveals the hidden ideological layer and re-questions the discourse of authority and social change.

**Keywords:** space, city, experimentation, cultural approach, earthquake, Wattar

### Introduction

The modern novel is no longer merely a story that is told, nor an imaginative structure that suffices with imitating reality or recording its superficial transformations, but has become a complex epistemological space where the systems of culture intersect, and the representations of power, memory, and identity intertwine within a narrative structure that is conscious of itself and of its function. From this perspective, the urban space emerges as one of the most capable elements to reveal the depth of social and ideological transformations—not as a background for events, but as a hidden discourse that participates in the production of meaning and establishes a particular vision of the world.

The novel has interacted with the knowledge surrounding it, and thus it is no longer only a traditional enjoyable narration, but has become a continuous search for new elements that deepen the narrative process and enable it to raise a greater number of questions. It is well known that since about twenty years ago the novel has turned into a means of research, and instead of presenting itself as an accomplished work, it has been connected to forms that are becoming each day more intense in their openness and opposition. (Fabre-Luce, 1968, pp. 125–131) These aspects appear clearly in the new novel, especially in that text which reviewed many artistic components and restructured them with a new spirit.

The literary experience is a human aesthetic experience; for man in literature speaks about his own vision of the world, and by that the narrative is a human characteristic in its purest sense. Therefore, it can be said that the practice of narration and literature are two interwoven things, and if scientific research makes use of several tools, instruments, and measurements, then the writer's main tool is imagination. (Lagab, 2021, pp. 135–146)

Some scholars have pointed to the importance of the novel in transmitting images of people and societies, because of this important narrative art's capacity for deep depiction of reality. Its necessity does not lie only in the artistic pleasure it offers—although this is vital in human existence—but also because "the novelist depicts the human being of a given society and at the same time describes a society; and Seignobos (1884–1886) used to repeat that for us, the historians, the novel is the only truthful method to grasp the real life, public or private, of people of the past, their sensibility, and their way of representing their world" (Zéraffa, 1985, p. 10).

It is to be noticed that between the *narrative*\* and the novel there is an essential dialectical relationship. All the development that these two genres have known since ancient times should be considered to understand their mutual influence, and the exchange by which both have been enriched together. Their relationship has oscillated between divergence and adjacency. (Nora, 2011)

This interrelation between both the narrative and the novel gives us a clear idea about how much the narrative work in general is connected with the depths of the human self; for no matter how the narrative

works develop and their structures become complex, deep inside there remains that natural instinct of storytelling.

The word *histoire* in French denotes a narrated event as well as "history," and it differs from *conte* (the tale); *histoire* may indicate simple storytelling not necessarily related to an artistic work.

Marcel Bois points out that the seventies witnessed the emergence of a new genre—the novel written in the Arabic language—after poetry and the short story had already had a long history. He also mentions that the first novel that appeared before that was *Sawt al-Gharam* (The Voice of Passion), but it had no artistic level that would make it worthy to be considered one of the artistic works, emphasizing that *Rih al-Janub* (The South Wind), which appeared in 1971, is the first Algerian Arabic novel. (Bois, 1978, pp. 13–34) However, Bois does not mention that Ahmad Reda Houhou wrote *Ghadat Umm al-Qura* in 1947, while *Sawt al-Gharam* was published in the fifties and did not have wide resonance in the literary circles. (Tayyar, 2018) The Algerian narrative voice accompanied the movement of Algerian life early on and contributed to the development of the Algerian literary text.

In the context of the Algerian novel, the urban space acquired doubled significations because of its connection with the history of colonization, the experience of the revolution, and the struggle of the post-independence period. The city turned into a stage for complex conflicts where the remnants of the colonial past intermingled with the concerns of the national present, and within it, the projects of change collided with the forces of conservatism and regression. Hence, the invocation of the city in the narrative text was not merely an aesthetic

\* The French word *histoire* denotes a narrated event as well as "history," and it is different from *conte* (the

tale); *histoire* may also refer to a simple narration that has no relation to an artistic work.

choice but a cultural and epistemological stance that expressed the writer's awareness of the nature of the era and the complexity of its questions.

Tahar Wattar's *The Earthquake* is considered one of the foundational texts of this awareness because it contains a clear experimental tendency that made the urban space—represented by the city of Constantine—a dynamic semantic structure that approaches the political and social transformations through a network of urban, topographical, religious, and mythological symbols. The city here is not presented as a rigid entity but is narratively constructed as a tense body, fragile in balance, and threatened by collapse, just like the social structure living through the struggle of transition after independence.

From this consciousness, the present study is founded on a cultural approach that views narrative experimentation in *The Earthquake* as a conscious practice of revolutionizing the narrative and symbolic systems through a complete integration between space and architecture, religion and myth, politics and collective memory. It also begins from a central question: how does the urban space in *The Earthquake* transform from a spatial given into a cultural system that reveals the hidden ideological dimension and exposes the contradictions of political and social discourse in the post-independence phase?

Through the analysis of the structure of space, the symbolism of the bridges, the meaning of the earthquake, and the representations of characters, the study aims to uncover the mechanisms by which the narrative text operates as a critical discourse—not content with portraying reality, but working to shake it and to reintroduce its postponed questions within a horizon that makes experimentation both an aesthetic and epistemological choice, and the novel a tool for reading society and

questioning its historical and cultural trajectories.

### **Experimentalism and Revolutionizing Systems in Tahar Wattar's Novel Al-Zilzal (The Earthquake)**

Experimentalism in the Algerian novel is a new stage that represents the desire of any writer who believes in it to go beyond his artistic beginnings and the texts which he felt had turned into a dam preventing the movement of the text towards new horizons where no fixed form is accepted. The follower of Tahar Wattar's narrative writings notices that he does not lean towards repeating writing, because every original writing believes that the literary art is a continuous research far from the ready-made and repetitive forms.

Al-Zilzal can be considered as a model of the narrative work in which the feature of experimentation appears and becomes clear in a number of its artistic and intellectual aspects.

The features of experimentation in Al-Zilzal appear especially in the use of concepts related to the natural environment and the combination of a number of violent manifestations that have shaken Algerian society, and in the choice of the city of Constantine as the place where the events of the novel take place, because this city has a deep meaning in its indication of attachment to the soil, since the presence of the two words "earthquake" and "Constantine" together provokes fear.

From here we can enter the worlds of experimentation which the writer adopted in his novel in order to move us to each of the spiritual, architectural, and political aspects; all these aspects seem intertwined and indicative of the essential idea that moves the text as a whole.

The vitality of the relation between the building of the city and its life and its bridges and the interconnection of its parts becomes clear, and the novel also connects the

conflicting cultural aspects and reflects the difficulty of the place on which the city was built. These aspects which the writer experimented to link with the nature of the political stage can be gathered in three dimensions: the cultural dimension, represented by Bularwah and all reactionary thought, the mythical thought, represented by the seven bridges, and finally the social group enthusiastic for the coming earthquake after independence. The cultural study also reveals the cultural background deposited in the narrating self which connected the earthquake with its religious, political, and environmental dimensions, starting from the writer's work on revolutionizing the concepts embedded in the collective unconscious from concepts and ideological conflicts that appear in the utterances of the narrative work.

Tahar Wattar practiced, in one of his works, namely *Al-Zilzal*, an investment of concepts related to the natural environment and the combination of a number of violent movements that affected Algerian society. The writer chose the city of Constantine as the place of the events of the novel because of its deep indication of attachment to the soil, starting from the fact that the mere connection of this word "earthquake" with the city of Constantine provokes many feelings of danger. From here the relation becomes clear between the building of the city on the edges of valleys and the interconnection of its parts by necessary bridges which are the foundations of its life, and he also connected the conflicting cultural aspects with the conflict that prevailed in this city between them and the difficulty of the place on which it was built. These aspects which the writer experimented to link with the nature of the political stage can be gathered in three dimensions: the cultural dimension, represented by Bularwah and all those who represent the thought that claims conservatism and religiosity, the mythical thought, represented by the seven bridges,

and the social group enthusiastic for the coming earthquake after independence. The cultural study undertakes to reveal the cultural background deposited in the narrating self which connected the earthquake with its religious, political, and environmental dimensions, starting from the writer's work on revolutionizing the embedded concepts in the collective unconscious that appear in the utterances of the characters of the two novels.

Tahar Wattar presented in his work interconnected images that gathered the environmental, architectural, social, cultural, and religious aspects in their conscious and hidden dimensions inside the general system, which appears in the utterances of the narrator and the characters, and by this the depth of the experimental mission becomes clear, because it offered us a work whose cultural reading enables us to uncover a number of its artistic and intellectual significations.

It happens that one of the works has a deep effect on the course of human thought; this is what can be said about Claude Bernard's book which dealt with scientific experimentation. It is the one that influenced Émile Zola, and thus his foundation of an important phase in the journey of the narrative text: it is his book *The Experimental Novel*, which also had a great influence on the theorization that touched the world of narrative writing after it was printed in 1880 in Charpentier Publishing House; it is a collection of articles, most of which were first published in the journal *Le Messager de l'Europe*, which was issued in Petersburg—the famous Russian city—before they were republished in France in other journals. Émile Zola had been fascinated by the introduction of *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, through which Claude Bernard became very well known, so he confirmed it and became one of its proponents, even becoming its first

spokesman. This new call, which highlighted the strong impact of experimental ideas, became like a hymn to what can be called a scientific certainty, especially after it affected the project of reviving the scientific spirit in everything, including the arts as well. This is what made Zola and his book represent, at the end of the nineteenth century, an essential side of the movement of aesthetic, moral, and political modernization that the course of the narrative work experienced.

It can be affirmed that Tahar Wattar achieved in his narrative text *Al-Zilzal* a clear experimentation in which he mixed the cultural components of the city of Constantine—of which one side was represented by the character of Bu al-Arwah—and the architectural components which appeared clearly in their most important aspect, namely the bridges which, just as they gave Constantine its feature and its personality, contributed to giving an idea of cultural and ideological bridges that must contribute to creating national and revolutionary consciousness. The political aspects were also clear in the conflict whose two sides were, on one side, the power with its project and its protection by its forces, and on the other side Bu al-Arwah. From here we can notice that the two sides of the conflict are not proportionate: if Bu al-Arwah is a cultural model with his discourse and his influence, then the question here is: where is the discourse of the revolution? Therefore, the cultural study can uncover a group of hidden ideological elements so that a set of points of the old conflict becomes clear, first against the reformists whose longing for the French era was presented by the narrative text, as evidenced by Abdelmadjid Boual'arwah's admiration for everything related to France, which appears in his almost sanctification of its architectural achievements and in his dark vision of the social project which, for the writer, is an

earthquake threatening the interests of the traitors.

### **1- The construction of the narrative text and the shaking of the ready-made artistic form**

#### **Al-Zilzal: dialoguing with topography and architecture:**

The literary arts responded to a number of changes that occurred in the political, social, cultural, economic structures..., because the movement of creativity and renewal is dependent on the developments taking place in society. This movement led writers to experimentation, which made the novelistic form more open and able to respond to the developments of the present. However, experimentation did not settle on one concept; some define it as the departure from the fixed model and the exceeding of traditional forms, as it is “the negation of rigid assumptions, fixed traditions, and suffocating conventions, and the formulation of the question and the practice of the freedom of creation in its most extreme states” (Bin Shousha, 2003, p. 31). From here the difference becomes clear between renewal, which is a simple modification of the work that adds something of partial improvement and keeps all the components of the work as they are, preserving the bond between the work and the theoretical philosophy in whose light it was established, while experimentation works on narrowing that intimate relation between theorization and the process of artistic creation which brought the work into existence.

Balzac, the pioneer of experimentation, says about experimentation that his idea is founded on doubt, because the experimenter should not have any preconceived idea before nature, and he must always preserve his intellectual freedom. He must accept only the phenomena that occur when the proofs of them are present. (Zola, 1902, p. 3)

A number of Algerian writers contributed to the development of their

narrative texts, and some of them practiced experimentation practically. The experience lived by the Algerian novel at the hands of a large number of writers, among them Tahar Wattar, who tried to link the idea of the earthquake with three cultural elements forming the deep narrative background, represented by the religious, environmental, and architectural aspects, shows this, as he connected all those cultural elements with the political earthquake, and made them all reinforce the concept of the earthquake that appears in the title of the novel. By researching the systems that moved the two writers, we find that the deep spiritual accumulations leaked strong human concepts that were brought out in the form of a group of artistic symbols expressing a political reality in two political periods characterized by boiling. Thus, we can imagine the unity of political artistic thought expressed by many Algerian novels regardless of the language in which they were written.

We can imagine, then, that every form of writing has a particular purpose confined within it, which no other form of writing can achieve. It seems that the shaking of modernist certainty led to avoiding the adoption of any specific proposition, and thus experimentation in literary art came haunted by doubts and attempts to surpass the ready-made. This can be projected onto the stages through which the Algerian novel passed as well; some scholars considered the post-seventies period a stage of experimentation and technologization in the course of the Algerian novel, taking Tahar Wattar's *Al-Zilzal* as a clear example of that. (Zaghina, 2007, pp. 259–272)

This means that the stage of experimentation is early, both in the life of the Algerian novel as a whole and in the particular novelistic trajectory of Tahar Wattar himself.

## **2- The title and the revolutionizing of the religious system:**

By returning to the religious knowledge that was part of Tahar Wattar's culture since childhood, and by looking at his upbringing in a conservative village from the villages of eastern Algeria, it is very natural that his memory and his personal depths would store many feelings and images that entered into his culture. From here it becomes possible to imagine that non-intentional relation which arose between the "earthquake" mentioned in the title and the political and religious earthquakes, and likewise it becomes possible to imagine that the earthquake, before entering as a title for the novel, was a title for Wattar's culture and a method in life, by virtue of the entry of a new revolutionary culture that found itself strongly connected with Islamic culture. Therefore, it was possible to link between two concepts, one of them political-social and the other religious, through recalling the saying of Allah: "O mankind, fear your Lord. Indeed, the convulsion of the [final] Hour is a terrible thing. On the Day you see it every nursing mother will be distracted from that [child] she was nursing, and every pregnant woman will abort her pregnancy, and you will see the people [appearing] intoxicated while they are not intoxicated; but the punishment of Allah is severe." (Al-Hajj, 1–2, Sahih International)

This religious meaning is employed in harmony with the political-social signification related to the end of the period of total domination that the *colons*, the aghas, and the agents of the colonial authority were living, so that the end of the exploitative system, for them, becomes similar to the Day of Judgment.

The novel presents Abdelmajid Boularwah and his group of fake religious men, traders in religion, and those whose interests intersect with French colonialism, who felt that their end was near after those whom they called the scum of the people dared to enter the city and kill its nobles. (Wattar, 1980, p. 29)

Thus, the images of the torment prepared for the polytheists interfere in depicting the fate of the traitors, starting from the image of the earthquake that strikes this world, and from the similar political, social, and cultural earthquake that changes the reality of the country and returns to the oppressed their rights. According to Lukács, the artistic form can achieve the exception and cross all boundaries even within the model that can be said to be a realistic work. (Zima, 2000, p. 36) This confirms that the model, in the case of the existence of a genius capable of surpassing it, can remain only a starting point, while the writer can give it from his art whatever he wants.

From this starting point, the title came, which he derived from a specific religious vision, and the novel also connects between the seven bridges and the mythical mentality that supports the enemies of deep social change, and also clarifies the accusations directed against the authority at the end of the novel which wished Boularwah to continue living so that the conflict would remain between him and the social hopes desired by the earthquake of revolutionary democratic construction after the first earthquake which was the achievement of political independence. All these artistic aspects of intertextuality with heritage and history appeared in the process of experimentation which the writer implemented in his text, announcing a new stage of the Algerian novel.

By returning to the signifying power of the paratext, the seven chapters that formed the novel *Al-Zilzal* contained a journey undertaken by the main character "Bou al-Arwah," which contributed to the shaping of his ego, and his feeling of loss was doubling whenever he penetrated deeper into the different quarters, searching for his relatives.

This state of loss which is repeated in the folds of the narrative contents is the end of a mythical journey that is in fact the

beginning of a project of society according to a metaphysical vision that embodies a purely religious interpretation, and it is clear that the absence of relatives for Bou al-Arwah means that this project has ended and no longer has supporters who believe in it.

The novel focused on the formation of the ego, which "is of extreme importance for every human being since it is the world through which each one of us realizes his self, and it is also the self to which all acts of consciousness are referred, whether emotional, rational, or volitional... and it is not easy to separate it from its aims; it stands opposite to the other and the external world and tries to impose itself on others."

It can be said that the novel establishes a semantic tension between the collapse of the metaphysical project and the rise of the ego as a symbolic alternative; when the community loses its faith in the project, the self withdraws into itself, trying to impose its existence and to redefine its meaning in a world that no longer grants it a ready-made certainty. This is what gives the narrative its problematic character: it is a narration of transition from a closed collective certainty to an open individual question, and from a founding myth to a crisis-ridden individual consciousness.

### **3- The old renewed conflict (the Left and Reform):**

If Algerian resistance began with an Islamic spiritual consciousness, starting from the resistance of Emir Abdelkader in its independence framework arising from confronting the enemies of the homeland and Islam, and if this religious consciousness gave birth to a series of popular resistances that did not stop until the end of the nineteenth century, French colonialism then adopted a method of taming and distorting religious concepts in an attempt to overcome the will rooted in the spirit of liberation. Perhaps "Bou al-Arwah," the negative character opposed to the revolution, is a

model of that taming, distortion, and dilution which embodied a negative concept of Islamic spiritual values, but the reality around him strengthens the revolutionary position through what people inherited of principles as firm as the seven bridges, and from here the relation becomes clear between the function of the structures of the city of Constantine—its bridges, heights, and lowlands—and the general mythical atmosphere that tries to stand in the way of realizing the projects of the revolution of the new society.

The text does not hide its contempt for this current; this appears even in the meaning of the nickname “Bou al-Arwah,” whose attribution to the character can be considered a deliberate violent style, since in our popular heritage it often refers to the cat and sometimes to the dog, and in both cases it is a description of the person who is calm and obedient to his master. The text also does not hide the name of Ibn Badis; rather, it states it and clearly declares the man’s alignment with France.

From here that conflict becomes clear, a conflict which was announced only on few occasions: a conflict between the revolutionaries whose approach was socialist and the reformists whose approach was conservative. In this there is a revival, within the artistic work, of the old conflict that existed between the Left and Reform, which is the heated dialogue that is still going on today and will remain posed as long as we have not determined the aim of each current; the revolutionary current is different in its visions, its plans, its style, and its aims from the reformist current, therefore any comparison has no meaning.

#### **4- The seven bridges and the mythical number:**

The bridges of Constantine may be more than ten, but in the novel they are seven, and it is known that this number has a strong relation with myths, sorcery, and superstition among many peoples, and one of the well-

known explanations is that this number originates from the number of stars that form the Pleiades (Al-Thurayya). The novel, however, uses this number as a hint against the mythical mentality which prevents the realization of the social project that is, in the eyes of those threatened by it, a dangerous earthquake.

In the first pages, the bridge appears as essential for entering the city from its first chapter “Bab al-Qantara,” and from here the text begins and the journey also begins. There must, then, be a bridge that connects the revolution with independence, and what is this bridge? Abdelmajid Boual’arwah says, after presenting a sacred image of entering Constantine on a Friday, as it resembles Mecca: “This bridge is the best of Constantine’s seven bridges; wide and short, one quickly forgets the abyss that separates him from the valley...” (Wattar, 1980, p. 6)

Abdelmajid is “Abd al-Muhid,” that is, the writer played a distortion game by adding a dot to the letter “ḥa” and instead of “Ḥamīd” he wrote “Muḥīd,” and from these first lines the character begins to reveal its traditional reality which refuses any renewal: “Everything on this side seems as it was in his time: the greenness of the trees, the distinction and difference of the buildings...” (Wattar, 1980, p. 6). With this precision, we enter the depths of Boual’arwah, who loves non-change and non-equality, when he expresses his admiration for the difference of the buildings.

#### **5- The reformists and nostalgia for France:**

Al-Zilzal raises the issue of reform and judges it politically, placing it in a specific negative category, and the great rift that prevailed between the two currents becomes evident. The writer exploited the main character of Al-Zilzal to put forward the well-known accusations, among them the fluctuation of positions and flattery of colonialism, even standing by its side when it



comes to considering France as a mother for the assimilationists, but the discussion of this aspect requires a broader treatment.

The narrator speaks and presents the character of Boual'arwah with what it perhaps hides from many people, as he declares explicitly his nostalgia for the colonial era and describes it in a romantic way, sealed with an explicit welcome also to the Zionists:

"...No, truly, truly, the city has been turned upside down. In the time of the French it was calm. Calm in a striking way. Life would creep into it with the break of day, little by little, and flourish between ten and midday, then suddenly fade until three o'clock, to resume its rise until it intensifies between five and nine, when the pupils leave the schools, lycées, and institutes, and the lights shine, and the perfumes spread from the European and Israelite young women who fill the streets, like houris, joy and delight." (Wattar, 1980, p. 8)

The vocabulary that Boual'arwah uses refers to a clear religious reference, especially when he says: "like houris, joy and delight," and all this is repeated in many scenes in the novel, and shows that the work is almost like a settling of ideological accounts between the Left and Reform. Nothing proves this nostalgia more than Boual'arwah's saying in describing one side of Constantine: "The god of Constantine: the suspension bridge." (Wattar, 1980, p. 6)

The suspension bridge itself suggests the situation of Boual'arwah, who remained tied to the colonial time that has vanished.

#### **6- The double game:**

The novel clearly points to the double attitude of the authorities towards the enemies of the revolution, and this becomes evident in that ending which depicts the survival of "Bou al-Arwah" from death after he tried to commit suicide, and this was not by coincidence; the artistic work is an intentional work in all its details, and thus it

is the authorities that contributed to that survival and he was saved by the will of the men of power who prevented the execution of his suicide: the writer says describing that situation: "...the children shouted, while the police were arresting him and preventing him from committing suicide."

The text presents to us a mythical dimension through the character of Bou al-Arwah, and strengthens this dimension by linking his character with two basic components: the first is the nature of the charlatan, superstitious culture which represents the distorted *tariqa* version, and the second is the relation of this character with the components of the city of Constantine, full of heights, slopes, caves, and bridges.

The text has linked the components of Algerian life through Constantine, so that the human being in it became part of the cultural, spiritual, and political worlds and of the architectural structure which in itself suggests many contradictions and conflicts.

The reader finds himself here between three elements that were carefully chosen to play a sensitive role: the children, the police, and Bou al-Arwah; the children were shouting: "O Bou al-Arwah!"

Who are the children in this text? And why are they shouting? Can their shouting have a specific meaning? Why did they suffice with a single call without adding one more word ("O Bou al-Arwah!")?

Was their shouting a working important reason in saving Bou al-Arwah, although he had stripped himself completely and his game was no longer hidden from anyone:

*"I threw my jacket. I threw my shirt,  
my shoes, my trousers.*

*They arrived before I could throw myself.*

*O Sidi Rashid. O inhabitants of  
Constantine."* (Wattar, 1980, p. 318)

This cry for help that Bou al-Arwah shouted can be contemplated, and we can stop at some key words he said: "I threw my

jacket.” When we link the word “my jacket” with its meanings, it becomes deeper in its symbol than a piece of clothing that covers the body, and may indicate the exposure of the man’s affair, who has become besieged, and his losing his shoes may also indicate that his journey in obstructing the building of socialist Algeria has stopped and that his backward line has been defeated.

Was that naivety on their part? And who are the children? Are they the good ones who believe the politician’s manipulation of values? However, the clear position that the text presents is the directing of a direct accusation to the political and security authority, and the content of this accusation is that it prolongs the life of its own survival by preserving its enemies in appearance, who are in reality its allies and the enemies of the people’s interests.

#### **Conclusion:**

This study confirms that the novel “Al-Zilzal” does not represent a merely isolated artistic experiment in the trajectory of Tahar Wattar, but rather constitutes a pivotal moment in the development of the modern Algerian novel, in terms of its deep awareness of the function of the narrative form and of the ability of experimentation to question reality, not only to represent it. Wattar succeeded in constructing a text based on the superposition of systems, where geography and architecture were no longer descriptive elements, but turned into active symbolic structures that contribute to the production of meaning and the orientation of reading.

The analysis reveals that the city of Constantine performed a double function: on the one hand, it is a realistic space charged with historical memory, and on the other hand, it is a mythic-cultural structure that embodies the fragility of social and political balance. As for the seven bridges, they went beyond their architectural function to become a sign of the mythical mentality and of the

obstacles that hinder crossing from the logic of the past to the horizon of change, while the earthquake represented a major metaphor for the collapse of the colonial system of values and the emergence of new conflicts related to the outcomes of the national project after independence.

The study also showed that the experimental construction in the novel was closely linked to the deconstruction of the conflicting ideological discourses, especially the discourse of conservative reform and the discourse of political authority, through the character of Bou al-Arwah as a model of crisis-ridden consciousness and nostalgia for colonialism, and through the open ending that exposes the duplicity of the authority in its dealing with its apparent enemies. In this sense, the text becomes a critical space that reproduces the conflict between the revolution and its residues, and raises burning questions about the legitimacy of change and its limits.

It can be said, in light of this, that experimentation in “Al-Zilzal” was not merely a formal deviation or a stylistic adventure, but an epistemological and aesthetic choice that enabled the Algerian novel to expand its semantic horizon and to move from the logic of storytelling to the logic of vision. Thus the novel contributes to consolidating a critical narrative tradition that makes literature a tool for reading society, revealing its contradictions, and rethinking its historical and cultural trajectories, which grants this work its enduring artistic and intellectual value within the Algerian narrative corpus.

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