

The Representation of the Human Dimension in Algerian Narrative Fiction: An Analysis of *The Big House* and *The Gate of Memories*

Dr. Choul Fatima zohra ¹, Dr. Zoulikha Yahy ²

¹ PhD of Science, Talib Abdul Rahman Higher School of Professors-Laghouat-, Department of Arabic Language and Philosophy. Email: f.choul@ens-lagh.dz

² University of Algiers , Algeria. Email: zoulikha.yahi@univ-alger2.dz

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the Algerian novel's engagement with humanitarian themes, highlighting how Algerian writers and creators have addressed pressing social issues within narrative fiction. Specifically, it examines the representation of childhood and paternal authority in the works of Mohamed Dib and Assia Djébar, illustrating how these authors depict shared aspects of human experience. By embedding their lived realities into literary texts, Algerian novelists transcend national boundaries, revealing a journey from local concerns to a broader, universal perspective.

Keywords: Human Radiance, Algerian Novel, Childhood, Parental Authority, Mohamed Dib, Assia Djébar.

Introduction:

The novel is one of the most prominent literary genres, widely embraced by both writers and critics due to its ability to draw from the rich realities of society. It serves as a medium through which authors express societal hopes and aspirations, shaping literary creativity with steady yet determined steps toward progress and recognition. This is particularly evident in Algerian literature, where novelists have sought

to establish a distinct literary identity while navigating the complexities of their historical and cultural contexts.

Like other Arab nations, Algeria witnessed the emergence of the novel under challenging circumstances that initially hindered its development. However, over time, Algerian novelists strived to refine their craft, aspiring to reach the level of maturity and artistic balance achieved by their global counterparts. Through their narratives, they captured the essence of their lived realities, blending local themes with universal concerns. Despite the obstacles faced, Algerian writers engaged with the broader narrative movements of both Arab and Western literature, responding to the evolving literary landscape and the modern information revolution. This effort gave rise to distinctive Algerian literary voices that sought to position themselves on the global stage.

This research paper, titled "**Human Radiance in the Texts of Algerian Novelistic Creativity**," explores the themes of childhood and paternal authority in the works of Mohamed Dib and Assia Djébar. It seeks to address the central question: **How do themes of shared human experience manifest in the Algerian novel?** Furthermore, it examines whether Algerian novelists have successfully translated their lived experiences into literary expression

and how their works transcend national borders to engage with the broader world.

To address these questions, we have selected two novels as case studies: *The Big House* by Mohammed Dib and *The Gate of Memories* by Assia Djebar. Through an inductive and comparative analysis, we will examine how these works portray the themes of childhood and paternal authority—universal aspects of the human experience. Our study adopts a thematic approach, which focuses on identifying and analyzing recurring themes in literary texts, complemented by a descriptive method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the narratives.

The Evolution of the Algerian Novel

The development of the Algerian novel occurred relatively late compared to its Arab counterpart. This delay cannot be understood in isolation "from the broader social and political conditions that shaped Algerian society. Literature, like other forms of artistic expression, does not emerge in a vacuum¹"; rather, it requires a fertile cultural and historical context to thrive. Algerian novelistic production was influenced by processes of cultural exchange, connections with the Arab East, and engagement with both oral and written narrative traditions. However, the primary factor contributing to its late emergence was colonialism, which disrupted the natural progression of literary development.

Literary scholar Taha Wadi provides insight into this period, stating:

"The period extending from 1954 to 1962 is not only a radical transformation in the history of the Algerian struggle, but it is also the most fertile period in the literary field. This era witnessed the

remarkable growth of storytelling and the novel as Algeria, while confronting colonial rule, was able to reshape its literary expression within political, psychological, and social frameworks. New themes entered Algerian literature—or at least, their treatment evolved beyond conventional norms. After independence in 1962, Algerian literature, driven by the euphoria of victory and liberation, turned to documenting the epic of struggle and the triumph over colonial oppression."²

This acknowledgment highlights that the most significant literary activity in Algeria occurred between the outbreak of the revolution and the attainment of independence. During this time, the novel became a powerful medium for articulating national identity, resistance, and the collective experience of the Algerian people.

Discussing the Algerian novel necessitates an examination of its two distinct linguistic trajectories: literature written in Arabic and literature written in French. "As previously mentioned, the Algerian novel is a relatively recent literary phenomenon, with Arabic-language novels emerging later than their French-language counterparts. However, from its inception, the Arabic Algerian novel made a strong impact on the literary scene. Apart from the early, relatively simple attempts such as *Ghada Umm al-Qura*, *The Afflicted Student*, and *Al-Hareeq*, it was *The Wind of the South* that marked a mature and significant turning point,

¹ Saleh, Mafqda. *Research in Arabic Novel*. Dar Al-Huda Press, Ain M'lila, Algeria, 1st ed., 2008, p. 18

² Taha Wadi. *The Political Novel*. Egyptian International Publishing Company, Longman, Egypt, 1st ed., 2003, pp. 212–213

signaling the true beginning of the Algerian novel in Arabic.³"

Due to Algeria's colonial history, it was natural for literature written in French to emerge alongside Arabic literary production. Historian Jean Déjeux identifies 1920" as the actual starting point of the Algerian novel in French with *Ahmed Ben Mustafa, El Qawmi* by Al-Qaed Ben Cherif. This was followed by *Zahra, the Miner's Wife* (1925) by Abdelkader Hadj Hammou, a novel that employed the naturalistic style of Emile Zola. In 1929, Suleiman Ibrahim, in collaboration with Etienne Dinet, co-authored *The Dancer of Ouled Nail*, while Abdelkader Fikri, with the approval of Robert Randau, wrote *The Garden Companions* (1933), a politically ⁴ charged fictional dialogue.

This historical overview highlights the significant role of political circumstances in shaping and delaying the emergence of "the Algerian novel in both Arabic and French. The colonial context imposed linguistic and cultural barriers, influencing the evolution of Algerian literary expression. Despite these challenges, Algerian novelists—whether writing in Arabic or French—" ⁵ managed to carve out a unique literary identity that reflected their lived experiences and national struggles.

Over time, the Algerian novel written in French firmly established itself as a literary form that not only reflected reality" but also redefined its own narrative space. Algerian novelists began to challenge the traditional colonial discourse by reclaiming their voices and shifting the narrative perspective. The native "self" (the Algerian subject) moved from being an object of

discourse to becoming the producer of speech, thereby reversing the colonial hierarchy. This transformation positioned⁶ the Algerian writer at the center of literary production, while the French "other" was relegated to the margins.

The core themes of the Algerian novel in French—reality, history, and revolution—served as its foundation. However, colonialism left a lasting impact on Algerian writers, as the French language became deeply ingrained in their literary expression. This linguistic duality resulted in two distinct streams of Algerian literature: one written in Arabic and the other in French. Nonetheless, the use of French does not negate the Algerian identity of these works, as they were infused with the spirit, experiences, and struggles of the Algerian people. Many Algerian writers simply lacked proficiency in Arabic and thus expressed their emotions and national concerns in the language of the colonizer.

The distinction between Algerian and French writers goes beyond linguistic or educational backgrounds; it is rooted in geographical, social, and historical factors. Algerian writers emerged from the depths of their local history, carrying with them the weight of traditions and a deep connection to the Algerian nation. In contrast, French writers in Algeria often maintained a more superficial attachment to the land.⁷ This is why, regardless of the language in which they wrote, Algerian literature remains inherently Algerian.

Notable early works in this tradition include *Idris* by Ali Al-Hamami, *Labbayk* by Malek Bennabi, *The Black Sapphire* by Marguerite

³ Mustafa Fassi. *Studies in the Algerian Novel*. Dar Al-Qasba for Publishing, Haidra, Algeria, n.d., p. 3

⁴ Khalif, Houaria. "The Emergence of the Algerian Novel Written in French and the Issue of Identity and Belonging." *Contemporary Studies Journal*, University Center of Tissemsilt, Algeria, Vol. 2, June 2017, p. 78

⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

⁶ Ahmed Manour. *Algerian Literature in the French Language: Its Emergence, Development, and Issues*. Diwan of University Publications, Algeria, n.d., 2007, p. 41

⁷ Aida Adib Bamia. *The Development of Narrative Literature in Algeria (1925–1967)*. Translated by Mohamed Saqr, National Office of University Publications, Algeria, n.d., 1982, p. 53

Taos Amirouche, and *Laila, the Algerian Girl* by Djamila Debbache. However, Algerian literature in French soon took a new direction, particularly with works that sought to portray the harsh realities of colonial oppression. Novels such as *Son of the Poor* by Mouloud Feraoun, *Earth and Blood, Rough Paths*, and *The Forgotten Plateau* by Mouloud Mammeri, along with "*The Sleep of Justice*," marked a turning point in Algerian literary expression. These works moved beyond the colonial narrative, which often idealized French administration, and instead depicted the suffering and deprivation experienced by Algerians under colonial rule.

A significant breakthrough occurred with the publication of Mohamed Dib's *The Big House* in 1952, which vividly portrayed the hardships of Algerian life. Dib followed this novel with *The Fire* in 1955 and *The Loom* in 1957, forming a trilogy that chronicled the experiences of the Algerian people through the eyes of its protagonist, Omar. The trilogy encapsulated the collective memory of Algerians and emphasized the necessity of resistance for a better future.⁸

Other key figures in this movement include Malek Haddad, whose works—*The Sidewalk of Flowers Does Not Answer*, *I Will Give You a Gazelle*, *Dangerous Misery*, and *The Student and the Lesson*—explored themes of national identity, human suffering, and political struggle. Despite the paradox of writing in the language of the oppressor, Haddad remained deeply committed to expressing the national and humanitarian concerns of his people.

Thus, Algerian literature in French evolved into a powerful instrument of resistance, offering an authentic depiction of colonial realities while forging a unique national identity that transcended linguistic constraints.

A defining moment in Algerian literature came with the publication of *Nedjma* by Kateb Yacine, a novel widely regarded by critics as one of the greatest achievements of Algerian literature. In this groundbreaking work, Yacine depicted the brutal practices of the French colonizers, including the horrific massacres of May 8, 1945. Alongside *Nedjma*, novels such as *Children of the New World* by Assia Djebar and *The Stick and the Opium* by Mouloud Mammeri further expanded the landscape of Algerian fiction, offering nuanced portrayals of colonial oppression and the complexities of identity.

Discussing the literary experiences of Algerian writers, historian Abu Al-Qasim Saad Allah:" highlights a key characteristic that sets them apart from their French counterparts: their deep connection to the realities of daily life. He notes that Algerian writers share similarities with American authors in that many engaged in various professions before turning to literature, grounding their works in personal experience.

For instance, Kateb Yacine worked as a journalist and laborer in ports and agriculture before establishing himself as a writer. Similarly, Mohamed Dib took on multiple roles—including accountant, weaver, teacher, and journalist—before fully committing to literature. Notably, many of these writers practiced teaching, a profession that remains a significant part of their lives. Journalism, in particular, provided them with exposure to societal struggles, allowing them to observe and articulate the realities of their time with great depth.⁹

As a result, their literary works emerged as rich and diverse, filled with intellectual depth and originality that set them apart from other writers. Despite the hardships Algeria endured, the country's literary creativity never waned. Over time, Algerian novels written in French

⁸ Khalif, Houaria. "The Emergence of the Algerian Novel Written in French and the Issue of Identity and Belonging." Previous reference, p. 79

⁹ Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah. "Studies in Modern Algerian Literature." Dar Al-Ra'id Lil Kitab, Algeria, 5th ed., 2007, p. 96

flourished, developing unique stylistic and thematic features that captured the complexities of Algerian society and its ongoing struggles. This body of literature became a crucial space for reflecting on history, identity, and resistance, solidifying its place in both Algerian and world literature.

The Human Dimension in Literary Writing

Human beings have always been at the heart of philosophical, intellectual, and literary discourse. Throughout history, literary texts have explored the profound impact of human experiences, emphasizing values that transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. As scholars argue, "common human values serve as a bridge between nations, expressing universal humanity regardless of differences in language and culture. This universality enables literary works to break free from national confines and attain global recognition."¹⁰

Humanity remains a constant "companion to mankind, accompanying individuals in their joys and sorrows, their faith and doubt, their virtue and transgression. It is an enduring force that does not fade with time or shift with changing circumstances".¹¹ As a defining element of universality, it recognizes no regional borders and views all people as fundamentally equal.

Linguistically, the term "humanity" is often understood in contrast to "bestiality," signifying the qualities that distinguish humans from other beings. It encapsulates the essence of what makes a person truly human, encompassing moral and intellectual growth¹². Rooted in Renaissance ideals, the concept of humanity has

evolved into a broad and fertile discourse filled with rich, nuanced meanings centered on the core values of human existence.

Gibran Khalil Gibran further enriches this discussion," noting that in the Arab world, the idea of humanity is deeply intertwined with compassion—care for the poor, orphans, and the needy, as well as mercy toward the weak, sick, and helpless¹³". He asserts that true humanity is embodied by those who embrace these noble virtues, making compassion and empathy fundamental markers of humanistic thought.

The Manifestations of Humanity in Literature

Humanity has always been a central theme in literature across different eras, but its presence in modern discourse has become especially pronounced. The study of humanism has gained significant attention due to its role in reinforcing fundamental human principles¹⁴. As Jamil Saliba notes, "*Humanity signifies the characteristics that distinguish humans, and in Arabic, it is most commonly associated with praiseworthy qualities such as generosity, kindness, and compassion.*"¹⁵

Literature, by its very nature, aspires to reach the realm of humanity in all its expressions, often serving as a vehicle for confronting oppression and injustice. George Bernard Shaw reinforces this idea, stating, "*Has literature not become a struggle, and struggle literature?*" This perspective highlights the role of literature as a battleground for human values, where writers

¹⁰ Hamza Qarira. "Globalism and the Human Dimension in the Novels of Amin Zaoui." *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, No. 35, September 2018, p. 910.

¹¹ Thuraya Abdel Fattah Malhas. *Spiritual Values in Ancient and Modern Arabic Poetry*. Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, Beirut, Lebanon, p. 304

¹². Arabic Language Academy. *Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet*. Cairo, Egypt, n.d., pp. 29–30.

¹³. Skik, Adnan. *The Humanistic Tendency in Gibran Youssef*. Egyptian General Authority for Authorship, Cairo, 1970, p. 89

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁵ Jamil Saliba. *Philosophical Dictionary*. Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, Beirut, Lebanon, 1982, p. 158

champion the causes of justice, freedom, and equality".¹⁶

A writer's commitment to human values stems from the depth of their conscience. The more awakened and engaged a writer's conscience is, the more fervently they advocate for goodness and justice. Through literature, these ideals transcend individual narratives, influencing societies and shaping global consciousness. Thus, literary writing becomes a powerful medium infused with compelling humanistic ideals, resonating across cultures and generations.

Creative Writing Between Globality and National Borders

Every national literature aspires to transcend its linguistic and regional boundaries, striving for recognition on a global scale. Achieving literary identity and securing a place among world works of literature necessitate a delicate balance between local authenticity and universal appeal. Literature, by its nature, evolves through different stages—flourishing in some eras while experiencing stagnation in others—yet its ultimate goal remains the same: to resonate beyond its immediate cultural context.

When discussing universality in literature, "the name of German writer *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe* inevitably comes to mind. In the eighteenth century, Goethe championed the concept of *Weltliteratur* (world literature) as part of an idealistic and utopian vision¹⁷". The term "world literature" describes works that have transcended national borders, achieved widespread translation, and gained global recognition. This status is often attributed to their artistic brilliance and their deep engagement with universal human issues. Among the greatest examples are the works of

William Shakespeare, Gabriel García Márquez, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, Federico García Lorca, and Nikolai Gogol.

Goethe first introduced the term *world literature* in the early nineteenth century, envisioning a literary landscape where the finest works from different cultures would coexist and interact. The Industrial Revolution, with its advancements in printing, publishing, and transportation, played a pivotal role in facilitating this exchange. These developments allowed literature to break free from its national confines and reach a broader audience. According to Goethe, great literary works have the power to speak directly to humanity, reshaping thought and emotion while offering new perspectives on reality.

This interplay between the local and the global remains a defining challenge for writers. A literary work must remain rooted in its cultural identity while also engaging with universal themes that resonate across societies. It is through this balance that literature achieves timelessness, securing its place within the vast landscape of world literature.

Goethe's vision of world literature was articulated in his conversations with his friend *Johann Peter Eckermann* in 1827, where he stated:

"I am convinced that world literature is beginning to take shape and that all nations are inclined towards this... We are now entering the age of world literature, and we must all contribute to accelerating the emergence of this age."¹⁸

Through this statement, Goethe predicted the rise of an era in which national works of

¹⁶ Najm Abdullah Kazem. *Articles in Criticism and Literature*. Alam Al-Kutub Al-Hadith, Irbid, Jordan, n.d., 2010, p. 57

¹⁷ Madiha Atiq. *Chapters in Comparative Literature*. Study, Dar Meem for Publishing, Algeria, n.d., pp. 67

¹⁸ Joudat Hoshyar. *World Literature: Its Concept and Issues*. https://m.ahwar.org[https://m.ahwar.org]

literature would give way to a greater, more interconnected literary tradition—one that transcends linguistic and geographic boundaries. He emphasized the importance of looking beyond one's national context, warning against insular pride:

“But if we Germans do not weigh our vision beyond our present surroundings, we will easily be content with arrogant pride. I also like to inquire about foreign nations, and I advise everyone to do the same for his part. The word national literature does not mean much today. We are moving towards the era of world literature, and everyone must contribute to accelerating the arrival of this era. However, while appreciating everything that comes to us from abroad, we must not put ourselves in its trailer, nor take it as a model.”¹⁹

From this perspective, Goethe explicitly called upon German writers—and writers from all nations—to elevate their creativity beyond local confines. He did not advocate for blind imitation of foreign literature but encouraged an exchange that would enrich and universalize literary production. His emphasis was on achieving global literary relevance without losing one's cultural uniqueness. For this reason, Goethe is regarded as “the actual founder of the concept of worldliness and the spiritual father”²⁰ of *world literature*. His vision continues to shape literary discourse, encouraging writers to engage in a global conversation while maintaining the distinctiveness of their cultural voices.

¹⁹ Daniel Henry Pageau. *General and Comparative Literature*. Translated by Ghassan Al-Sayed, Union of Arab Writers, Damascus, Syria, n.d., pp. 29

For Goethe, universality (*Weltliteratur*) was not just a means of achieving literary greatness but also a tool for fostering regional communication between neighboring European nations. He believed that literature could help correct misunderstandings and prejudices, creating a cultural dialogue that transcends national borders. Goethe emphasized that the defining factor of a national literature's universality lies in its ability to extend beyond its local context—both temporally and spatially—and to intersect with other literatures. It is through this intersection that a literary work gains significance beyond its immediate audience.

To differentiate between universality and nationalism, *Hussam Al-Khatib* defines universality as:

“The rise of a certain literature, in whole or in part, to the level of general global recognition of its greatness and usefulness outside the borders of its language and region, and the desire to translate it, get to know it, and study it; such that it becomes an effective factor in shaping the global literary climate for a certain stage, or over the ages.”²¹

By contrast, national literature remains confined within a specific country's borders. However, strong intellectual and artistic characteristics can allow national literature to transcend its initial audience, reaching readers across cultures and languages. History provides many examples of how literature has achieved universality. For instance, German scholars and translators played a significant role in promoting *Shakespeare*, sometimes even more effectively than the English themselves. Similarly, the world only

²⁰ Said Aloush. *Schools of Comparative Literature: A Methodological Study*. Arab Cultural Center for Books, Casablanca, Morocco, 1st ed., 1987, p. 47

²¹ Madiha Atiq. *Chapters in Comparative Literature*. Previous reference, p. 71.

fully appreciated the poetry of *Omar Khayyam* after it was translated into different languages, particularly through *Edward Fitzgerald's* English translation of *Rubaiyat*. These cases illustrate how literary works can rise beyond their local origins, gaining a global presence through translation and cultural engagement.

World Literature Standards

Classifying literature within the global literary hierarchy is a complex task. Scholars of world literature, such as *Hussam Al-Khatib*, have identified specific criteria—both literary and non-literary—that determine whether a work attains global recognition.

1. Literary Standards

1.1 Technical Quality

A literary work must achieve aesthetic, artistic, and intellectual excellence to be considered part of world literature. As *Abdo Abboud* states, a global literary work must provide “an aesthetic and intellectual addition to the literature in the world.”²² However, debates persist regarding what constitutes artistic quality, as standards vary across cultures and literary traditions.

While masterpieces like “*Shakespeare's plays*, *Khayyam's Rubaiyat*, and *Coleridge's poems* are widely accepted as universal, other works such as detective novels and thrillers have also gained global recognition, demonstrating that universality is not confined to traditional literary excellence. The question of what makes a work truly great—whether it is brevity or verbosity, explicitness or subtlety—remains open to interpretation.”²³

²² Abboud Abdu. *Comparative Literature*. Al-Baath University, Syria, n.d., 1998, p. 346.

²³ Madiha Atiq. *Chapters in Comparative Literature*. Previous reference, pp. 72–75

²⁴ Joudat Hoshyar. *World Literature*. Previous reference.

Notably, most literary works that achieve global status often align with the Western European and American literary models, raising questions about cultural biases in the definition of world literature.²⁴

1.2 Translation

Translation plays a crucial role in a literary work's journey toward universality. The more a text is translated, the greater its chances of achieving global recognition. *English* is the dominant language of world literature, followed by *French*, *German*, *Italian*, and *Spanish*. This trend suggests that universality is often linked to Western cultural dominance.²⁵

Many Third World literatures gain international recognition only after being translated into English or another widely spoken European language. This reinforces the notion that translation is not just a linguistic act but also a form of cultural gatekeeping, influencing which literary works gain international readership.

1.3 Publishing

The status of a literary work is also “influenced by the prestige of its publishing house. Major international publishers such as *Gallimard*, *Hachette*, *Minuit*, and *Seuil* significantly”²⁶ increase a text's chances of becoming widely read. In contrast, books published by smaller, lesser-known publishers struggle to reach global audiences. The publishing industry's role in shaping world literature highlights the intersection between literary merit and market forces.

1.4 Critical Reception

²⁵ Mohamed Snajela. *The Novel of Digital Realism*. E-book, pp. 16–17.

²⁶ Ahmed Manour. *The Crisis of Identity in the Algerian Novel in French: A Literary Study*. Translated by Sami Al-Droubi, Dar Al-Sahel, Algeria, n.d., 2013, pp. 386–387, 392

Translation and publication alone do not guarantee a work's universal status." A literary text must also provoke critical discourse, inspire other writers, and influence artistic and cultural production. A good example is *One Thousand and One Nights*, which achieved global recognition not only through translation but also because of its profound influence on literature, theater, film, and music.²⁷

Additionally, the media plays a significant role in amplifying a text's global reach. Literature that receives strong critical engagement and media attention has a higher chance of achieving world literary status.

These literary standards—technical quality, translation, publishing opportunities, and critical reception—demonstrate that world literature is shaped by both artistic achievement and the broader socio-cultural and economic systems that support its dissemination.

2. Non-Literary Standards

Beyond literary merit, several non-literary factors influence whether a national literature attains global recognition. These include a country's political and economic power, its cultural influence, and the extent to which its language is spoken worldwide.²⁸

Smaller nations with limited global influence often struggle to achieve literary universality compared to larger, more dominant nations. As *Hussam Al-Khatib* points out, a country's cultural superiority often leads to its literature being imposed on a global level, particularly in

former colonies and economically dependent regions.

Moreover, universality is not purely a reflection of literary excellence. Luck and coincidence play a role, and works that achieve worldwide fame are not always the most creatively significant. Instead, the **political and civilizational strength** of a nation significantly impacts its literature's global status. This explains why figures like *Victor Hugo*, *Voltaire*, and *Balzac* are elevated by France's global stature, just as *Shakespeare*, *Milton*, *Hemingway*, and *Edgar Allan Poe* benefit from the dominance of Britain and the United States.²⁹

This dynamic reveals an inherent **Western bias** in world literature. "The chances of Western literature achieving global status far exceed those of Eastern or Third World works of literature. The languages that dominate world literature—**English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian**—reflect this imbalance. Consequently, literature written in English, whether American or British, is often considered inherently global. The artistic quality of world literature has largely been shaped by Western texts such as *The Waste Land*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Coleridge's poems*, *The Presidents*, *Lily of the Valley*, *Eliza's Eyes*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*.³⁰"

However, **humanitarian themes** also play a significant role in achieving literary universality. Novels and literary texts that address universal human concerns—such as justice, suffering, love, and oppression—transcend national and cultural boundaries. The humanitarian aspect of literature attracts readers from diverse

²⁷ Mohamed Dib. *The Mohammed Dib Trilogy: The Big House*. Translated by Sami Al-Droubi, Dar Al-Wahda for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d., 1980, pp. 13, 14, 25, 30, 114

²⁸ Hanan Ben Njoud & Rachid Rais. "Paternal Authority and the Question of Representation in the Algerian Novel: A Reading of *No Place for Me in My Father's House* by Assia Djebar." *Al-Risala Journal for

Humanities Research*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 2021, pp. 301, 337

Assia Djebar. *The Gate of Memories*. Translated by ²⁹ Mohamed Yahyaten, Sidia Publishing, 2007, pp. 493–502

³⁰ Mohamed Snajela. *The Novel of Digital Realism*. Previous reference, p. 17.

backgrounds, imprinting these works with a lasting global legacy.

Ultimately, while non-literary factors such as political power and language dominance influence which works achieve world literature status, it is often the ability to engage with shared human experiences that ensure their literary immortality.

Human Radiation and the Theme of Childhood and Paternal Authority in the Works of Mohammed Dib and Assia Djebar

The discussion of **human radiation** in Algerian novels requires an understanding of how literature has historically responded to crises, oppression, and the search for human dignity. From its inception, the novel has often been a **space of resistance and imagination**, where writers seek to reconstruct, reinterpret, or escape from the present. This is evident in the pioneering work of *Cervantes*, who, "through *Don Quixote*, responded to a crumbling Spanish Empire by longing for a past where the values of **honor, nobility, and virtue** prevailed."³¹ Similarly, *One Thousand and One Nights* offered an imaginative response to injustice, using storytelling as a means of survival and resistance against tyranny.³²

Literary texts, however, do not merely revive the past for nostalgic reasons; rather, "they search for **timeless human values**—values that remain relevant across different historical periods. As *Faulkner* sought to reconstruct the lost world of the American South, and the unknown author of *One Thousand and One Nights* evoked a mythical past.³³", Algerian novelists have engaged in similar literary endeavors to **preserve, critique, and illuminate** human struggles

In the context of Algerian literature, **Mohammed Dib** and **Assia Djebar** stand as two of the most influential novelists whose works embody deep humanistic concerns. Their novels reflect the **radiance of human experience**, particularly in their exploration of childhood, paternal authority, and the broader struggle for **freedom, identity, and justice**.

Both Dib and Djebar often place childhood at the heart of their narratives, using it as a lens through which human emotions, cultural conflicts, and personal awakenings unfold. Childhood, in their works, is not merely an age of innocence but rather a space of **formation, trauma, and resistance**.

- **Mohammed Dib**, in his Algerian trilogy (*La Grande Maison*, *L'Incendie*, *Le Métier à tisser*), presents childhood as a period shaped by **colonial oppression, poverty, and familial struggles**. His protagonist, Omar, experiences the harsh realities of life under French colonial rule, where the warmth of childhood is often overshadowed by the brutality of the outside world. Yet, through Omar's eyes, Dib captures **moments of resilience, hope, and the search for meaning**, illustrating how the child's perspective becomes a powerful **humanizing force** in literature.
- **Assia Djebar**, in works such as *L'Amour, la fantasia*, similarly explores childhood but intertwines it with **memory, history, and female experience**. Her protagonists, often young girls, navigate a world where paternal authority and colonial domination intersect, shaping their understanding of selfhood and resistance. Djebar's childhood narratives are deeply introspective, using personal

³¹ Ibid., p. 17.

³² Ibid., p. 18.

³³ Ahmed Manour. *The Crisis of Identity in the Algerian Novel in French: A Literary Study*. Translated by Sami

Al-Droubi, Dar Al-Sahel, Algeria, n.d., 2013, pp. 386–387

memory as a way to challenge historical narratives and highlight the **subjugation and strength** of Algerian women.

In both Dib and Djébar's works, **paternal figures** play crucial roles in shaping the protagonists' worldview. These father figures are often symbolic of **larger structures of power**, whether it be colonial rule, patriarchal traditions, or cultural expectations.

- **In Dib's novels**, the father is frequently an absent or struggling figure, caught between the demands of survival and the impossibility of providing for his family under colonial rule. This absence often leads the child protagonists to seek **alternative forms of guidance**, whether through maternal figures, elder siblings, or community solidarity.
- **In Djébar's writings**, the father figure represents a complex intersection of **love, authority, and repression**. Djébar's female protagonists often experience tension with paternal figures, as these relationships mirror **the broader struggles of women under patriarchal and colonial domination**. The father's authority is not only personal but also deeply political, reflecting the oppressive forces that shape women's lives in traditional societies.

The works of Dib and Djébar **radiate human experiences**, transcending their immediate historical and cultural contexts to speak to broader themes of **identity, freedom, memory, and resistance**. Their novels engage with both **local realities and universal human concerns**, ensuring that their literature is not just national but part of the global literary conversation.

This reflects the broader tradition of **humanist literature**, where writers use storytelling to **illuminate the struggles, hopes, and resilience of humanity**. Just as *Cervantes* used *Don Quixote* to navigate a world in decline, and

Faulkner reconstructed the lost American South, Dib and Djébar employ the Algerian experience as a microcosm of **universal human conflicts**.

Their ability to balance **local narratives with global human concerns** ensures that their works remain relevant, not only within Algerian literature but as part of **world literature**, where human radiation continues to shine across cultures and generations.

Creativity is a journey of suffering and perseverance, a process of enduring its fiery trials, navigating the corridors of experimentation, and drawing from its intricate methods. It is the era of the novel, whether its detractors accept it or not—the era of searching for a distinctive narrative style that transcends the boundaries of the sentence, reaching what can be termed the **eloquence of discourse** as a cohesive whole. It is a unique poetics, evident in its texts, carrying within it the limitless potential for transformation and innovation.

This is precisely the case for **Algerian writers**, who derive inspiration from **reality and the diverse issues embedded within society**. Among these themes, **childhood and paternal authority** emerge as dominant motifs in narrative texts. This is particularly evident in **Mohammed Dib's *La Grande Maison*** and **Assia Djébar's *The Gate of Memories***, where both authors explore these issues through deeply personal and socially reflective lenses.

Mohammed Dib, throughout his extensive body of work, has tackled numerous societal concerns, yet one of the most striking themes in his pioneering novel, *La Grande Maison*, is **childhood**. This theme is not only a recurrent motif in Algerian literature but also a universally resonant one, mirroring the pervasive influence of **paternal authority** in Algerian society—a theme also explored in Djébar's *The Gate of Memories*. Both Dib and Djébar **blend reality with imagination**, channeling their lived experiences and creative visions into narratives

that strive to move beyond national borders and into the **vast expanse of world literature**.

A discussion of *La Grande Maison* inevitably leads us to its most compelling child protagonist: **Omar**. Mohammed Dib is widely regarded as a pioneer who has significantly enriched **Algerian literary heritage** through his contributions, particularly his renowned trilogy. In *La Grande Maison*, childhood is not merely a narrative element but a **symbol of human radiance**, reflecting the resilience and struggles of an entire generation.

Set during the **French occupation of Algeria**, the novel unfolds in **Dar Sbitar**, a domestic space where familial bonds are tested under the weight of **poverty and hardship**. Dib masterfully captures the **raw realism** of Algerian life under colonial rule, allowing the reader to **experience the despair, resilience, and humanity** of his characters. Through Omar's innocent yet perceptive eyes, the novel becomes a poignant testimony to the **social and political realities** that shaped Algeria's past, offering a literary bridge between historical memory and universal human experience.

One of the most striking elements in *La Grande Maison* is the **portrayal of childhood**, embodied in the character of **Omar**, a young boy of no more than ten years old, who experiences the harsh realities of **hunger and poverty under colonial rule**. His daily struggle revolves around **finding food**, as his greatest dream is a simple piece of bread to satisfy his hunger. Yet, beyond this basic need, Omar also dreams of a **life of dignity and freedom**, a desire that ultimately aligns him with the spirit of **revolution and resistance**.

Mohammed Dib masterfully develops Omar's character, drawing the reader into his world and allowing them to **follow his every step**—from wandering the streets of **Tlemcen** in search of sustenance to his rebellious antics at school. Despite his mischievous nature, especially

among his classmates, Omar remains a **symbol of an innocent childhood** caught in the grip of **colonial suffering**. While the novel is a work of fiction, its events deeply reflect the **harsh realities of Algerian society at the time**, portraying a generation struggling for **survival and basic human dignity**.

Dib also paints a vivid picture of **Omar's family and social circle**, highlighting their collective hardships. His sisters, **Ayousha and Maram**, alongside their mother **Aini**, embody the resilience of Algerian women amid adversity. Another key figure is **Hamid Serraj**, Omar's role model, who instills in him a **love for reading and education**. Through these interconnected stories, **Dar Sbitar** emerges as a **microcosm of Algerian society under colonial rule**, reflecting the widespread **calamities of poverty, deprivation, and forced labor**.

Despite fleeting attempts at change, the residents of Dar Sbitar remain trapped in a **cycle of hunger and hardship**, their suffering symbolizing the **broader struggles of Algerian society**. The novel, through its deeply human characters, becomes a **poignant historical testimony**, bringing to life the **universal themes of resilience, oppression, and the quest for a better future**.

The writer focused on the social and economic situation of the Algerians during the occupation, and he embodied all of that in the character of the child Omar; "it can be said that the writer found in the child Omar an excellent model character to express in an appropriately symbolic way many of the ideas that were going through his mind and the miserable conditions that the Algerian people lived in during one of the darkest periods of their history, namely World War II, as the condition of the people was most similar to the condition of the child Omar in his orphanhood, his chronic hunger, and his confusion in understanding the conflict that was

happening around him between the world's great powers."³⁴

The theme of childhood is embodied in the person of Omar, who suffered poverty, hunger, and deprivation of a father. It was a childhood ahead of its time, bearing great tragedies and a responsibility that adults cannot bear. He is a symbol of the revolution and the conditions that Algerians lived through. This is evident from the first paragraph of the novel: "Bring us a little of what we eat... Omar said that, standing in front of Rashid Berri."³⁵ In another paragraph, Omar's ferocity in searching for a piece of bread by force is evident to us: "He went to another place. Other boys were chewing their bread. He wandered among them, dodging for a long time, then he pounced on their crowd with one leap, snatched a loaf from a short boy, and quickly disappeared into the middle of the school, where he was swallowed up by a whirlwind of play and screaming."³⁶

Mohammed Dib masterfully captures the complexities of **childhood under colonial rule**, portraying Omar as a boy who experiences both **small moments of kindness and deep-seated fear**. At Dar Sbitar, Yamina provides him with small comforts—rewarding him with **fruit, grilled peppers, and even pieces of meat or fried sardines** whenever he manages to bring home bread. These acts of generosity contrast with the **overwhelming hardships** he endures, emphasizing his **silent endurance and resilience**.³⁷

Omar's life is not only shaped by **poverty** but also by **responsibility beyond his years**. He shares his struggles with **Kaki**, another child burdened with hardship, and carries the emotional weight of **his ailing grandmother**, whose pleading eyes haunt him. Dib paints a

striking image of Omar's internal conflict—his **desperate urge to escape** clashing with his mother's silent authority:

*"The grandmother's eyes were pleading, Omar wanted to run to the street, to escape, he wanted to scream, but his mother's face stood between him and the door."*³⁸

However, beyond hunger and responsibility, **fear** is an ever-present shadow in Omar's life. When the **French police raid Dar Sbitar in search of Hamid Serraj**, the young boy is paralyzed by terror. Dib's **vivid, almost cinematic narration** allows us to step into Omar's world—his blood pounding, his frozen panic, his desperate plea for protection:

*"Omar found himself alone in the courtyard of the house, his blood pounding at his temples. Police... his heart was pounding and coming out of his chest. He wished he could scream, frozen in place: Mama. He lowered his brow and suddenly wailed, saying: The police... the police... here they are the police."*³⁹

At that moment, Omar reverts to **pure childhood vulnerability**, yearning for his mother's embrace, the only **fortress strong enough to shield him** from the **cruelty of colonial oppression**:

"He wished violently and fervently that his mother would be by his side, to surround him with the immense strength of a mother, to build a fence around him that no one could cross... The police frighten him

³⁴ Ahmed Manour. *The Crisis of Identity in the Algerian Novel in French: A Literary Study*, pp. 386–387

³⁵ Mohamed Dib. *The Mohammed Dib Trilogy: The Big House*. Translated by Sami Al-Droubi, Dar Al-Wahda

for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d., 1980, p. 13

³⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

*terribly... He hates them, these police... Where is his mother? Where is that sky that guards him?"*⁴⁰

Through these moments, Dib crafts a **deeply human and emotionally charged portrait** of childhood in occupied Algeria. Omar is not just a character; he is the embodiment of a **generation of Algerian children**, forced to grow up too soon, carrying the weight of hunger, responsibility, and fear in a world that offered them little refuge.

Childhood and Paternal Authority in the Works of Mohammed Dib and Assia Djebar

Mohammed Dib masterfully depicts **the suffering of childhood under colonial rule**, centering his narrative on **Omar**, a boy who, after the loss of his father, finds himself trapped in a **harsh and unrelenting world**. His mother, embittered by life's hardships, offers little solace, forcing him to seek refuge in the **merciless streets**, where war and poverty have also shaped his peers. Thus, **childhood emerges as the central force** driving Dib's narrative, particularly in *The Big House*.

This theme is especially evident in **Dar Sbitar**, a space marked by **poverty, chaos, and endless disputes** among neighbors, who share the same **burdens of unemployment, illness, and daily struggle**:

"That big, miserable house that is always full of noise and chaos, and endless disputes between neighbors... due to the large number of souls that the house contains, and to the difficulties of living that all its residents suffer

*from, unemployment, poverty, illness, and all forms of misery."*⁴¹

Through Omar's **innocent yet burdened perspective**, Dib creates a vivid image of Algerian childhood during the colonial era. His masterful descriptions reveal not only **external suffering** but also **internal conflicts** within the child. This is evident in a key moment where Omar observes his mother cutting bread:

*"Then he walked towards the room, and there he was, removing the curtain of the entrance and extending a loaf of bread to his mother. My eyes said: A demon! The boy realized what was hidden behind this character of love and tenderness, so he smiled and sat with those sitting at the table, and began to watch his mother, as she cut the bread on her knees."*⁴²

The contrast between **tenderness and hardship, love and survival**, defines the **emotional core** of Dib's portrayal of childhood. While Dib explores the **struggles of childhood under colonialism**, Assia Djebar focuses on **paternal authority and male dominance**, particularly in *The Gate of Memories (No Place for Me in My Father's House*, translated by Mohamed Yahyaten). This novel, widely regarded as **autobiographical**, presents a deeply personal exploration of **patriarchal control** and the **struggle for female identity**.

In what she describes as **her most personal novel**, Djebar examines **representation through paternal guardianship**, illustrating the **oppressive structures of male dominance** in Algerian society:

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴¹ Ahmed Manour. **The Crisis of Identity in the Algerian Novel in French: A Literary Study**. Previous reference, p. 392

⁴² Mohamed Dib. **The Mohammed Dib Trilogy**. p. 114.

*"In her most personal novel, Assia Djébar addressed the problem of representation through paternal guardianship and male dominance as one of its inherent structures."*⁴³

The novel's **autobiographical nature** becomes apparent in the closing section, titled *Silence or the Grave Years*. Djébar reflects on the nature of her story, questioning whether it is a tale of **exhausted love** or a **woman struggling against the weight of tradition and paternal control**:

*"Is this novel a story of exhausted love? Or the story of a slightly disturbed girl, I was preparing to say, of a sober demeanor - simply not liberated - from the southern Mediterranean, a design drawing for an opening or introduction to a broader autobiography."*⁴⁴

This introspective conclusion affirms that the novel serves as **a deeply personal testimony**, a window into **the life of a woman shaped by paternal authority, cultural expectations, and the struggle for self-definition**.

Both **Mohammed Dib and Assia Djébar** present **deeply human stories of suffering and resilience** but through different lenses. Dib's *The Big House* captures **the loss of innocence and the hardships of childhood** in a colonized society, while Djébar's *The Gate of Memories* reveals the **psychological and social constraints of paternal authority**.

Despite their distinct themes, both novels embody **a broader human radiance**, reflecting **universal struggles of identity, oppression, and survival**—whether through **a hungry child**

wandering the streets of Tlemcen or a young woman resisting the weight of patriarchal control.

"These early memories surface unexpectedly, driven by a sudden—though belated—urge to understand my presence here, as both a character and the author," she reflects, emphasizing that the events she recounts are rooted in reality. What stands out is the pervasive theme of paternal authority, a recurring motif in women's literature. She acknowledges this directly: "From the very beginning, everything seemed to revolve around my father—the father who passed away, never knowing that his eldest daughter had narrowly escaped death in the autumn before the Algerian War."⁴⁵

Clarifying further, she states: "And the role of the father? It emerges precisely in this context. Despite his progressive ideals, his belief in the French Revolution, and his commitment to education for himself and his family, he remains—whether knowingly or not—the guardian of the harem. As a husband, he evolves with the times, but as a father, it is his daughter who ultimately surpasses him, her hand still held in his."⁴⁶

She then delves into various aspects of personal freedom, exploring her efforts to break free from parental control, perhaps driven by an innate fear of her father's authority: "At dawn in the fall, I threw myself into the Gulf of Algeria. I was fleeing my father, whose power I feared. I traveled as far as I could, unwilling to confess—but what sin had I committed?"⁴⁷

The dominance of paternal authority remains a central force in the narrative, culminating in her painful realization: "I no longer have a place in

⁴³ Hanan Ben Njoud & Rachid Rais. "Paternal Authority and the Question of Representation in the Algerian Novel: A Reading of *No Place for Me in My Father's House* by Assia Djébar." *Al-Risala Journal for Humanities Research*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 2021, p. 337

⁴⁴ Assia Djébar. *The Gate of Memories*. Translated by Mohamed Yahyaten, Sidia Publishing, 2007, p. 493

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 493.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 494.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 496.

my father's house. I have become an outsider—not because my father died, exhausted in a so-called liberated country, but because in this land, daughters are still denied their right to inheritance by their father's sons.”⁴⁸

The writer seamlessly transitions from the role of announcer to that of narrator, author, and director, transforming memorial writing into a novelistic form where narration intertwines with an ascetic, Sufi-like self yearning for purification. This shift is evident in her reflection that she could have titled her work *Silently on Silk*.

While the novel explores various themes, the dominance of paternal authority remains central to the reader's experience. As Assia Djébar recounts, “In one of the darkest spaces where authority is exercised within the father's house, she submits to the father's rule as dictated by societal law, conforming to his control—a presence that feels intensely real as she narrates her past.”⁴⁹ The textual thresholds within the narrative reveal multiple layers of meaning, reinforcing the significance of this theme.

Furthermore, Djébar creates “a dual space where she can represent herself freely, independent of the rigid, authoritarian father.”⁵⁰ This deliberate positioning gives rise to a resistance against paternal authority, which is intricately linked to broader questions of power and its manifestations. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that *The Gate of Memories* presents paternal authority as a defining aspect of human radiance in Algerian literature, just as *The Big House* by Mohamed Dib highlights the theme of childhood as a crucial narrative force.

Conclusion:

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 502.

⁴⁹ Hanan Ben Njoud & Rachid Rais. “Paternal Authority and the Question of Representation in the Algerian

From the discussion above, several key conclusions emerge:

The Algerian novel emerged relatively late compared to the broader Arab novelistic tradition. Its development cannot be examined in isolation from the social and political conditions of the Algerian people, particularly under colonial rule, which significantly influenced all aspects of life.

Many literary texts have crystallized around themes of human experience, reflecting universal values that serve as a bridge between nations. These shared human dimensions transcend linguistic and cultural differences, contributing to the global recognition of literary works. The presence of such universal themes in creative texts allows national literature to extend beyond its regional and linguistic confines, achieving broader literary identity and international recognition. However, world literature operates within certain literary and non-literary frameworks, including translation, publication, and critical reception.

The concept of human radiance in literature, especially in the novel, is not a recent phenomenon but has evolved. This has driven Algerian writers to craft narratives rich in human themes and universal significance, aligning with broader trends in Arab literature. As highlighted in our discussion, *The Big House* by Mohamed Dib stands as a pioneering text, skillfully portraying childhood as a symbol of human endurance through the character of Omar. Likewise, *The Gate of Memories* by Assia Djébar offers a profound exploration of paternal authority, alongside other significant themes that contribute to the human dimension in Algerian literary works.

Recommendations and Suggestions:

Novel: A Reading of *No Place for Me in My Father's House* by Assia Djébar.” Previous reference, p. 301

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 502.

- Establishing this forum as a recurring event held at a fixed annual date.
- Expanding the scope of literary discussions to encompass various genres, including theater, short stories, poetry, and novels.
- Developing strategies to promote Algerian literary texts globally, ensuring they transcend national borders and gain broader international recognition

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