

## The Structure of the Event in the Novel Al-Laz

Dr. Latrouch Nania

University of Mostaganem – Algeria

[latrochnadia@gmail.com](mailto:latrochnadia@gmail.com)

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### Abstract:

This study examines Al-Laz by Tahar Wattar, the second Arabic novel written in Algeria, focusing on the structure of events and the mechanisms shaping the narrative. The novel unfolds through the recollections of Sheikh Al-Ruba'i, whose memory reconstructs revolutionary events centered on the figure of Al-Laz, an illegitimate child marginalized by poverty and social rejection. Through a complex sequence of flashbacks, the narrative traces Al-Laz's transformation from deviation and survival strategies to revolutionary commitment after discovering his true lineage and embracing the national struggle. Events are tightly interwoven with characters, as each action arises from social conditions marked by colonial oppression, poverty, and ideological conflict. The plot develops through causality and logical progression, moving toward tragic climaxes such as the martyrdom of Qaddour and the execution of Zidan. Wattar's

narrative structure balances stability and transformation, depicting how

individual destinies evolve within a collective revolutionary context, ultimately affirming that sacrifice sustains the continuity of struggle rather than ending it.

**Keywords:** Structure, Event, Character, Constant, Variable

### INTRODUCTION:

The events of the novel Al-Laz, taken as a whole, constitute a sequence of recollections evoked by the memory of "Sheikh Al-Ruba'i." Through these memories, he journeys back to a time when "Al-Laz," an illegitimate child, endured a harsh childhood marked by alienation, theft, and drug abuse. These circumstances exacerbated the suffering of his mother, "Maryana," as his behaviour was condemned by all, and many had expected his demise during the revolution. Yet, through his intelligence, he befriended the military, infiltrated the office of the effeminate French

officer, and established an illicit relationship that improved his mother's living conditions.

He further exploited this influence to smuggle freedom fighters, after learning of his true identity—that of his father, "Zidane"—which instilled in him a spirit of struggle and strengthened his commitment to jihad for the independence of the country and the well-being of its people.

However, the French colonizer persistently uncovered his acts of betrayal. He was ultimately betrayed by "Ba'toosh" and captured by a patrol in the presence of "Al-Ruba'i" and his son "Qaddour." In front of them, "Al-Laz" utters the phrase, "Your time has come, all of you", before being taken to the torture centre. The officer employed every method, including enticements, to extract a confession.

"Al-Laz," however, outwitted him, attempting to evade interrogation and prolonging the process long enough for "Qaddour" to escape. He deciphered the coded message, fully understood its intended purpose, joined the ranks of the freedom fighters, and broke free from hesitation that "Hammou," inspired by revolutionary ideals, had previously rescued him from.

Upon learning of "Qaddour's" escape, the officer ordered the village to be surrounded and searched.

Meanwhile, Algerian soldiers stationed at the barracks seized the opportunity to free "Al-Laz," kill Sergeant "Stephan," and escape, leading to a state of emergency in the area.

"Hammou" carried this news to "Zidane" and his comrades, putting them on high alert to defend themselves and confront the enemy. The officer, increasingly suffocated and determined to exact revenge, accompanied by the traitors "Ba'toosh" and "Al-Chambit," went to the Ruba'i household. There, "Ba'toosh," under the officer's orders, committed a heinous act by violating his aunt "Hayzia," trapping himself in a cycle of guilt, pain, and remorse. The tragedy escalated with her brutal murder, and "Ba'toosh," consumed by conscience, sought atonement by directing his vengeance against the colonizer. He eventually killed the officer and detonated the military armories.

Through this act, he earned his place among the freedom fighters, closing dark chapters of injustice, betrayal, and crime. He narrowly escaped a planned death orchestrated by Algerian soldiers, securing a respected position at the time of independence.

After his escape, "Al-Laz" reunited with his father in the mountains. His father's joy was immense, and "Al-Laz" developed admiration for his

father's defiant and exceptional character, derived from his instructions to the revolutionaries, reflecting profound military and political awareness.

A messenger arrived to summon Zidane at the request of "the Sheikh," intending to lure him away from his leftist ideology toward a right-wing orientation. Zidane refused, remaining steadfast in his principles, which had cost him and his European comrades their lives. His sacrifice preserved the essence of the revolutionary cause rather than compromising its ideals—the spirit of the people striving for a better future, according to Zidane's vision.

The novel concludes with the death of "Zidane" before the eyes of his son "Al-Laz," marking the end of Sheikh Al-Ruba'i's recollection of the revolutionary events and returning him to his present, where he receives his martyred son "Qaddour's" letter, unaware of the circumstances of his death.

Finally, he faces "Al-Laz," engaging in dialogue—sometimes instructing, sometimes questioning—yet receiving only the habitual phrase that epitomizes his noble resolve and profound meaning: "Nothing remains in the valley but its stones."

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<sup>1</sup> Aziza Murridan, *The Short Story and the Novel* (Algiers: National Office for University Publications, 1985), 25.

## Event and Narrative Structure

In the novel, the event constitutes a fundamental basis for the architecture of the narrative and serves as a crucial element in ensuring cohesion among its various artistic components. It can be defined as "the subject around which the story revolves, upon which the development of situations and the movement of characters depend".<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is a collection of occurrences that the author reshapes, guiding them toward a new trajectory by infusing them with artistic and aesthetic nuances. This process elevates events beyond their external reality, integrating them into the realm of creativity where the author presents their vision and perspectives through the characters.

Consequently, events are closely linked to characters, in the same way that action is connected to the actor in grammatical terms. Characters influence the progression of events, animate them, and breathe life into them. "Therefore, distinguishing between the narrative character and the event is largely a formal distinction, dictated only by the need to simplify analytical processes." Furthermore, one of the essential conditions of an event is its functionality and organic integration.<sup>2</sup> These qualities are

<sup>2</sup> 'Abd al-Latif al-Farabi and Abu Yasin Shikir, *The Novelistic World of Ghassan Kanafani*, 1st ed. (Casablanca: Dar al-Thaqāfa, 1987), 27.

established from the outset of the novel, beginning with the initial seed that signifies dynamism and the commencement of action. Events then unfold, building toward the climax or denouement. "The climax, or the knot, constitutes the central axis around which the story converges, ascending toward it before proceeding toward the ultimate resolution or designated conclusion<sup>1</sup>".

Throughout its narrative trajectory, events often raise profound questions and carry significant implications, which careful analysis can uncover. They frequently reflect the author's vision and ideological background, manifested in the way external realities are structured and organized to convey the central idea that underpins the novel's creative work. In this narrative structure, the beginning and the end serve as two principal poles, defining the overarching contours of the work's artistic composition and the progression of its events.

### Events in the Novel *Al-Laz*

Discussing the novel *Al-Laz* necessitates examining both its beginning and its ending in order to understand the trajectory between them. Dialogue serves as a common thread linking the start and

conclusion of the novel, beginning with an invocation of mercy for the martyrs distinguished by courage and resilience: "Ah, may God have mercy on you, Al-Sab".

- Master of men.
- Ten bullets and he died standing.
- On the day his time came, the late man charged and cried, 'Zaghardi, my mother Halima, zaghardi<sup>2</sup>."

At the conclusion, "Al-Ruba'i" converses with "Al-Laz," who repeats the proverb signifying that, despite the density and abundance of events, they are transient, and that life ultimately belongs only to the strongest:

"-Ah, ah, when you wake up, Al-Laz, I will tell you all the details, and you will in turn recount the circumstances of my son Qaddour's martyrdom: You are now the best of us all, Al-Laz, because you feel nothing, because you still live the revolution—in fact, because you are the revolution.

- "Nothing remains in the valley but its stones<sup>3</sup>."

By employing dialogue as a vehicle to initiate the narrative, the author draws the reader immediately into the core of the story, preparing them to engage directly with the unfolding

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Khayr al-Shaykh Musa, \*On the Short Story in A Deputy's Diaries in the Countryside, 1st ed. (New Success Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Tahar Wattar, *al-Lāz*, 3rd ed. (Algiers: National Company for Publishing and Distribution, 1981), 7.

<sup>3</sup> The novel, 277.

events. The dialogue itself evokes a particular effect: at the beginning, it signals death, whereas at the end, it conveys continuity, encapsulating courage, perseverance, and resilience. It suggests that life persists even after death, and that even in Al-Laz's quasi-dead state of alienation, he perceives a reality surpassing ordinary experience.

Within this duality—a contrast realized in a single moment—the actual events of the narrative unfold, often framed through flashbacks to the revolutionary period.

Once "Sheikh Al-Ruba'i" releases the reins of his imagination, the initial threads of the narrative's actual events emerge, woven by Al-Laz after he has become a young man who endured a harsh childhood marked by rebellion and moral deviation. He is led by a patrol, "two soldiers dragging him while eight others urge him forward with punches and rifle butts".<sup>1</sup> A threatening remark triggers Qaddour's instincts, warning him of flight, prompting him to respond to this symbolic demand: "after he had thought, like a merchant, about what he should do to save himself and safeguard his future",<sup>2</sup> and the future of his love for "Zina bint Al-Sabti."

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<sup>1</sup> The novel, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Musayif, *The Modern Algerian Arabic Novel between Realism and Commitment* (Beirut: Arab Book House, National Company for Publishing and Distribution, 1983), 32.

He comes to realize that the revolution is a cause that concerns all social classes; it is the product of a people who enrich it with their labour, while the French colonizer infringes upon all the rights of the Algerian populace—"and Hamou helped magnify this issue in Qaddour's mind"<sup>3</sup> This realization compels him to join the mountains, a necessity from which there is no escape

The same path was followed by the character "Hamou," who "learned things with all their complexities through her class-conscious perception, sharpened by harsh life experiences"<sup>4</sup>.

Like his brother, whose life had been shaped by poverty, he came to embrace the role of the revolution, exploring its full dimensions. The events take another turn in the barracks, where "Al-Laz" is interrogated in vain, steadfast in his adherence to the principle of loyalty to the revolutionaries; he refuses to reveal the name "Qaddour." After the officer becomes preoccupied, "Corporal Ramadan" arrives, helping to secure Al-Laz's release, killing "Sergeant Stephan," while Al-Laz disguises himself in the uniform of

<sup>3</sup> Wasini al-A'raj, Tahar Wattar: *The Experience of Realist Writing* (Algiers: National Book Foundation, 1989), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Musayif, *The Modern Algerian Arabic Novel between Realism and Commitment*, 33.

the slain sergeant and escapes with the corporal.

The officer uncovers the situation and issues an order to surround the village and search for the fugitives, "Al-Laz" and "Hamou," as tensions escalate. Fearing Al-Laz's potential confession, the officer storms Al-Ruba'i's home and forces "Ba'toush" to violate his aunt, which he carries out without hesitation, trampling religious and social values. Following the horror of this tragedy, the events reach the peak of their calamity when she retaliates by stabbing him.

Thus, "Ba'toush" becomes an easy prey for the officer, who continues to exploit him, even demanding to sleep with him to satisfy his perverse desires. Fully aware of his degraded condition, resulting from his pursuit of rank and submission to compromises, Ba'toush experiences a surge of anger and resentment toward himself, ultimately taking revenge on the officer by stabbing him with a dagger and setting fires—acts that enable his eventual alignment with the revolutionaries.

The character "Zidan" also contributes significantly to the unfolding events, driving them forward toward the climax, particularly as he advocates a leftist

orientation as the most suitable principle for embracing the revolution and realizing the aspirations of the struggling people. During a discussion with his soldiers, contemplating the future, «a group of revolutionaries led by Sheikh Masaoud, the senior official sent by the Wilaya, arrived. Zidan felt the matter was serious, especially upon seeing that the group included Europeans he recognized as fellow fighters»<sup>1</sup>.

After a series of negotiations and confrontations between the senior Sheikh and Zidan, he concludes that the Sheikh's invitation aims to detach him from his political orientation and immerse him in the Sheikh's direction. The Sheikh insists, with a mixture of force and determination, that Zidan abandon his leftist stance, which contradicts the principles of the revolution and obstructs its success in serving the devout Algerian people; otherwise, he will meet his fate in a river of blood.

As Zidan approaches the cave, he is instructed not to bring his son, "Al-Laz," a separation that pains him deeply, compounded by the difficulty of witnessing his son's potential death. However, the senior Sheikh brings his son to witness his father's

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<sup>1</sup> Idris Boudiba, *Vision and Structure in the Novels of Tahar Wattar* (Constantine: Mentouri University Press, 2000), 60.

execution by slaughter, shocking him profoundly.

«Al-Laz remained stunned, unable to believe his eyes. When the blood erupted from his father's nape, he screamed in terror:

Nothing remains in the valley but its stones.

Then all his muscles loosened, the ground spun beneath him, he stretched out his hands trying to grasp something, and then he collapsed»<sup>1</sup>.

With Zidan's death, the actual events of the novel come to an end, marking a truly tragic conclusion. The narrative, having reached this point through its dynamic progression and the phases of conflict, culminates in a final scene shrouded in darkness, leaving the last tableau of the novel steeped in blackness.

### **Structure and Plot in the Novel**

Change and development are inherent to life, and human beings are naturally inclined toward novelty and the new. Literature is one of the domains in which such influences manifest, whether in poetry or prose. The novel, as a form of prose art, is uniquely positioned to convey these influences, often intensifying their rhythm and impact.

Writers frequently seek the most innovative and broadly appealing forms through which to communicate their ideas and present events.« Many critics have argued that the value of a novel does not lie in the events it narrates but in the form in which those events are presented, for it is not crucial to know how they are ordered or structured»<sup>2</sup>

At the core of the narrative structure, one can discern essential meanings, which constitute the novelist's primary concern and the ultimate purpose behind choosing one particular form over another.

### **Structure in Al-Laz**

Tahar Wattar constructs the events of the novel on the basis of a chain of memories, taking Al-Ruba'i back to the revolutionary period to immerse the reader in the drama experienced by the majority of the characters—from the life of Al-Laz to the death of Zidan. Between these two poles, conflict unfolds in multiple forms and diverse patterns, described as «a confrontation between the Algerian revolutionary and the people on one hand, and the French occupiers and their collaborators on the other».<sup>3</sup>

This signifies that the novel embodies «a complex contradiction: a contradiction between two groups alongside differentiation within the

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<sup>1</sup> The novel, 273.

<sup>2</sup> 'Abd al-Latif al-Farabi and Abu Yasin Shikir, *The Novelistic World of Ghassan Kanafani*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Umar bin Qīnah, *On Modern Algerian Literature* (Algiers: National Office for University Publications, 1995), 229.

same group, with the conflict taking on political, national, and social dimensions». <sup>1</sup> The initial conflict emerges clearly in the early chapters, as characters engage in struggles among themselves or even internally, as in the case of Qaddour, where the conflict assumes a social character.

The revolutionary national conflict becomes evident in the characters' mobilization and their joining of the ranks of the revolutionaries to confront the oppressive French colonizers and achieve independence.

In pursuit of the meaning of independence, Zidan embodies a model through which an important political orientation is articulated—an orientation that undeniably played a role in the national movement, establishing revolutionary traditions that became a reality impossible to ignore or avoid. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the "senior Sheikh," who despises Zidan and seeks to assimilate him into a right-wing orientation, is a character «who accepts no solution other than this and refuses to concede under any circumstances. An Algerian is only accepted within the Front on the condition that he abandons his former party and embraces the principles of the Front. Anyone who resists this

directive is considered contrary to the political line established and treated as a traitor to the revolution»<sup>3</sup>.

Here, the conflict acquires a political and national character, reaching its climax in the tragedy of Zidan: «the scene of the slaughter of the revolutionary comrades was a tragic and bloody spectacle that drove Al-Laz to madness. Yet this tragic ending was not the end of the revolutionary struggle as his enemies intended; rather, it became fuel for the struggle and for the socialist revolution»<sup>4</sup>.

From this, we can summarize the structure of El-Laz's trajectory as follows:

### **Life – Struggle and Contradictions – Death**

The lives experienced by the characters serve as the driving force for the unfolding events. The outbreak of the Algerian Revolution represented an explosion of harsh and difficult life pressures, which most characters expressed by joining the ranks of the fighters to attack the French colonizer, who had deprived them of their freedom and identity and immersed them in the mire of ignorance and poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Āmir Makhoulf, *The Novel and Transformations in Algeria* (Damascus: [Arab Writers' Union], 2000), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Bashir Bouijra Muhammad, *Character in the Algerian Novel* (Algiers: National Office for University Publications, 1986), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Musayif, *The Novel between Realism and Commitment*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Abd al-Hamid Bourayou, *The Logic of Narrative: Modern Algerian Studies* (Algiers: National Office for University Publications, 1994), 112.



The circumstances of the characters were similar, converging around the point of poverty, which became the motivation for desperate struggle using all available means guided by conscience and national sentiment. El-Laz was driven by the extreme poverty he and his mother endured, prompting him to resort to the barracks, exploiting the illness of the effeminate officer and their illicit relationship to smuggle Algerian soldiers and convey news among them.

“From such people, like El-Laz, the daily colonial practice produced this model, under which many Algerians fell victim to misery, hunger, unemployment, and depravity (...) It is therefore unsurprising that these outcasts lived without hope, having nothing to lose, and were doomed to constant despair, bitterness, and resentment toward everything and everyone “. <sup>1</sup> Similarly, “Meryana” (Mariam) was driven by poverty to turn women’s honour and chastity into a trade to earn her daily sustenance, assisted by the officer in contact with prostitutes, which improved her living conditions and economic status, allowing her to purchase necessities and even luxuries.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Landa, “The Revolutionary Theme in the Novels al-Lāz and al-Zilzāl,” *al-Tabyīn* (Algiers), no. 8 (1994): 40.

“Hamo” was also trapped by the chains of poverty, as he “worked in a bathhouse oven under harsh conditions to support his mother, wife, brother, and eight children for a meagre wage (...) but he soon abandoned this miserable life with all its hardship and pain and joined his brother Zidan in the revolution, becoming a leader of one of the guerrilla groups”. <sup>2</sup> At the same time, “Qaddour” alone enjoyed a relatively easier situation than the previous characters, making him hesitant to join the ranks of the fighters. He experienced an intense internal struggle, finding it difficult to choose between joining the revolution and remaining neutral—which would effectively align him with France—until he realized the gravity of the situation required action and engagement.

The character “Zidan” experienced poverty and felt the burden placed on “Hamo.” To alleviate this struggle, he moved to Paris and then to Moscow to join a leftist party, carrying the torch of social class consciousness, hoping to reduce the hardships of poverty for the people and eliminate class distinctions, “which made this character highly critical of the nationalist ideology represented by Sheikh, whom the Front had assigned him to assassinate”. <sup>3</sup> His fate was

<sup>2</sup> Idris Boudiya, *Vision and Structure in the Novels of Tahar Wattar*, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Bashir Bouijra Muhammad, *Character in the Algerian Novel*, 45.

ultimately shaped by his struggle to erase the effects of poverty that constrained Algerians.

Poverty led the character “Ba’toush” to pursue a path different from the other characters: “He adopted an uncivilized behaviour, daily violating spiritual, legal, religious, and human values, exploiting the limited military authority he attained after receiving low military ranks”<sup>1</sup>.

Based on this, poverty served as a driving force behind the revolutionary event, which “was not created by all sectors of Algerian society as the material reality suggests (scholars from the reform movement, men from the national movement, peasants, large and small traders, simple workers, owners of national institutions, and intellectuals); rather, it was made by socially marginalized drunkards (...) and poor people whose hearts were consumed with resentment toward the wealthy (...) as well as idlers roaming the streets despite the availability of work (...) as in the case of Zidan, who burdened his brother, the man capable of honest labour”<sup>2</sup>

The social condition of poverty led to the characters’ movements: El-Laz and Ba’toush moved to the French

barracks—the former aiming to spark the revolution, the latter to suppress it, “joining the French army and descending into the path of betrayal”<sup>3</sup>.

Meanwhile, Hamo and Qaddour moved to the mountains to revolt against the colonizer, while Zidan went to Paris and then to Moscow. After developing social, political, and intellectual awareness, he returned to his homeland to rescue the people from oppression, backwardness, and class discrimination. He became a helper to both El-Laz and Hamo and the spiritual motivator behind their actions. The news from Zidan to El-Laz that he was his son marked a major turning point in his life, paving the way for struggle and resistance against anyone infringing upon the rights of the people, especially the French colonizer. Zidan’s provision of knowledge about reality to his brother Hamo significantly influenced his perspective on the revolution, and even the subjects of his conversations with Qaddour shifted to focus exclusively on national issues, instead of previously revolving around women and adventures.

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<sup>1</sup> Abd al-Malik Murtad, *Elements of Folk Heritage in al-Lāz* (Algiers: National Office for University Publications, 1987), 53.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Umar bin Qīnah, *On Modern Algerian Literature*, 230.

<sup>3</sup> Jawdat al-Rukkābī, “The Story of al-Lāz by Tahar Wattar,” *al-Thaqāfa Magazine* (Algiers), no. 33 (July 1976): 83.

Hamo assisted Qaddour in “breaking free from his class reality and embracing the revolutionary spirit, which he embodied by joining, thus altering many of his previous concepts about life”<sup>1</sup> Zidan remained the key influence, affecting Hamo, who in turn influenced Qaddour; Qaddour’s eventual separation from his class was a direct response to Zidan’s ambition, which despised social hierarchy.

Zidan’s assistant is the French woman “Suzanne,” who rescued him from the station of unemployment and ignorance, propelling him onto the train of political awareness and building his leftist ideology—a voice raised against anyone obstructing the path to equality and freedom. Thus, Zidan’s assistant was his profound consciousness of national issues and his steadfast adherence to his principles.

In the narrative, the presence of an assistant is counterbalanced by the opponent, represented by “the officer,” who embodies the French colonial authority that stood vigilant over the Algerian people, depriving them of freedom, stripping them of their identity, and robbing them of dignity, while immersing them in the cups of ignorance, poverty, and misery. Ba’toush and “Chambit”—

symbols of betrayal and cowardice—acted as obstacles preventing their compatriots from achieving the goal of the revolution, namely independence.

The principal antagonist to the central character was “the responsible Sheikh,” “Zidan’s long-time adversary (...) representing demagoguery, sectarianism, conservatism, feudal remnants, and selfishness. In the novel, he embodies all these flaws; he is a conspirator who settles personal and political scores, abuses power, and has no concern whatsoever for the revolution or those who carry it out”.

<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the structural trajectory, the narrative presents the rock of death: Qaddour falls as a martyr under mysterious circumstances that the events of the novel and the characters’ accounts do not fully reveal, except through his father’s questioning: “Tell me, El-Laz, my son, how did Qaddour, my son, die? They say he died on his way with you to the border. How did he fall as a martyr, El-Laz, my son? Did he ever speak to you about Zina?”<sup>3</sup>.

As for the character Zidan, he met his death at the hands of the Sheikh, having been aware in advance of this fate. The reader is made aware of his

<sup>1</sup> Wasini al-A’raj, Tahar Wattar: The Experience of Realist Novelistic Writing as a Model, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Landa, “The Revolutionary Theme in the Novels al-Lāz and al-Zilzāl,” al-Tabyīn Journal, 39.

<sup>3</sup> The novel, 276.

death and its causes, which were the result of his steadfast adherence to his marginalized principles

### **Features of the Narrative Structure:**

A close examination of the structure of *El-Laz* reveals the following features:

1. **Causality:** Every event in the novel represents a key link in a chain of events within a narrative architecture devoted to *El-Laz*'s story, imbuing it with a distinctive character. Simply seeing "*El-Laz*" observe "*Al-Ruba'i*" triggers his recollection of revolutionary events, as if he were the conduit for all occurrences. The characters are driven by deteriorating conditions of poverty, marginalization, ignorance, fragmentation, and suffering. Despite differences in form and intensity, these conditions influence their recourse to other locations—particularly the mountains—to generate significant events (the revolution). Some encounter assistants, while others confront opponents who obstruct the attainment of desired goals. For example, Zidan's struggle with the Sheikh directly contributes to the tragic outcome he faces, stemming from his ideological rigidity and refusal to compromise.

2. **Determinism (Logical Progression):** The course of events reflects the nature and trajectory required by the initial event, which triggers subsequent events in a logical sequence. Bitter life naturally produces resentment rather than praise, colonialism demands revolution, and liberation must be reclaimed. The revolution aims for independence, and in any revolution (or war), martyrdom is a natural outcome that does not surprise—exemplified by Qaddour. Similarly, Zidan's fate is predetermined: death is the consequence of his refusal to comply with the arbitrary commands of "the responsible Sheikh."

However, this ending does not classify the work—or its author Watar—among writers "who express through tragic endings the real failure of their protagonists and the causes they defend (...) because Watar leaves us aware that the physical elimination of the heroes does not equate to the elimination of the struggle or the revolution"<sup>1</sup>. In the depths of Zidan's death lies the survival of many and the continued life of the central cause for which he struggled, even if the tragic dimensions of death cannot be denied, particularly when it results from a conflict among members of a

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<sup>1</sup> Abd al-Hamid Bourayou, *The Logic of Narrative in the Modern Algerian Short Story*, 110.

single people united against colonial oppression.

Since Zidan is fully convinced that his ideology is sufficient to confront the colonizer and to create a better reality, he continues to uphold it. The Sheikh's failure to understand this reality forces Zidan to choose between sacrificing principle or sacrificing his life; he chooses the latter. As Watar notes: "He determined his own fate consciously, unlike the tragic inevitability seen in Oedipus; the hero chooses his ideological path knowingly, shaped by this choice".<sup>1</sup> Thus, the final event of the novel results logically from preceding events.

### **Stability and Transformation:**

A close reading of the narrative structure of *El-Laz* reveals a duality of stability and transformation, which underpins its composition.

- **Stability** relates to the characters' identity, as they all descend from Algerian origins in opposition to the French colonizer, in addition to family ties: Zidan, his son El-Laz, his cousin Meryam, and his brother Hamo; Al-Ruba'i, his son Qaddour, and his nephew Ba'toush, son of his wife Hayzia. Stability also concerns the driving force of poverty, reflecting the overall deteriorating

situation, which affects all Algerians across social classes equally. Their shared action is the confrontation with the French colonizer and the defence of the homeland, i.e., participating in the revolution, which is their common goal, manifested in the site of convergence—the mountains.

- **Transformation**, on the other hand, concerns the trajectory and specificity of each character. Age, circumstances, and event trajectories vary: El-Laz begins as a rebellious character, later actively shaping events; Hamo transforms from a man preoccupied with women to one discussing the revolution as a critical and serious subject; Qaddour evolves "from a complacent petty bourgeois to a character working for the revolution, aware of its historical conditions"<sup>2</sup>.

Transformation also affects Ba'toush: "He was temporarily a traitor to his class, killing Meryam and joining the French barracks to serve as a pimp for the sexually deviant French officer who forced him into sexual servitude. He quickly regains class consciousness (...) Once awakened, he compares himself with Zidan and others, realizing his triviality (...) and flees to the forest. This flight is a return to

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<sup>1</sup> Idris Boudiba, *The Novel and Structure in the Works of Tahar Wattar*, 71, citing Ahmad Shniqi, "Interview with Tahar Wattar," *African Revolution* (Algiers), February 28, 1980, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Wasini al-A'raj, *Trends of the Arabic Novel in Algeria* (Algiers: National Student Institution, 1986), 505.

his original source and to his historical role, which he should have assumed long ago”<sup>1</sup>.

Zidan recognizes this historical position and engages in political struggle to create a historical event in Algeria after previously being unemployed. Transformation is also tied to time and place, as events occur across multiple locations.

Stability emerges from the interaction and coherence of characters in generating events and relationships. Characters cannot be conceived in isolation, and their convergence in shaping events is a given. Transformation, meanwhile, is necessitated by the nature of reality, as it is difficult—if not impossible—for characters to follow a single standard; the novel is a depiction of this reality as shaped by the author’s imagination and artistic tools.

The structure of the novel relies on plot development through the growth and sequence of events, constructing a dramatic framework that portrays the Algerian revolution and the ideological conflicts within it.

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