



THE CRISIS NOVEL IN ALGERIAN ARABIC-LANGUAGE FICTION

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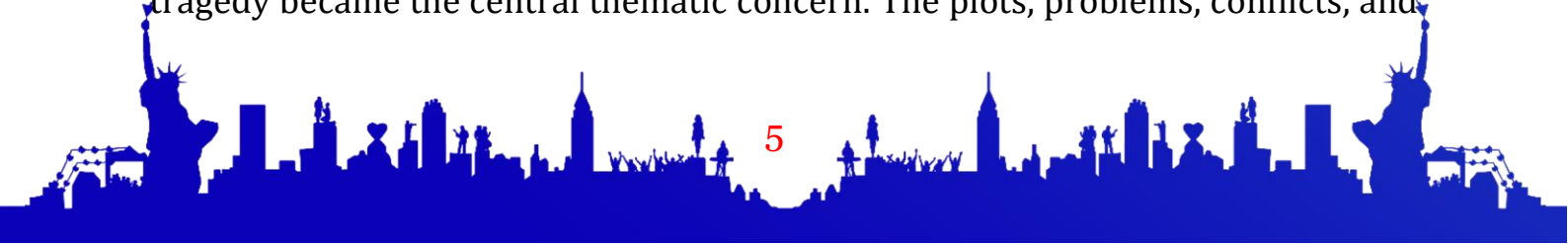
Annotation. In the final decade of the twentieth century, Algerian society experienced a complex and tragic period that entered the country's history as the "Black Decade." During this period, political instability, armed conflict, religious extremism, social tensions, and widespread violence profoundly affected not only every sphere of society but also the thematic scope, ideological orientation, and aesthetic principles of national literature. Literature became an important means of interpreting this historical tragedy, understanding the causes and consequences of society's moral and psychological decline, and representing the existential problems faced by individuals under severe sociopolitical conditions.

Keywords: *"Black Decade," sociopolitical crisis, crisis novel, tragic fate, Tahar Wattar, Waciny Laredj, political instability.*

Introduction: During the 1990s and the subsequent period, the Algerian novel largely preserved its ideological orientation. This tendency was shaped by the profound political and social crises experienced by the country, particularly the civil conflict of 1991–2002, widely known as the "Black Decade," the escalation of political instability, and the effective restriction of freedom of expression. These circumstances exerted a direct influence on literary production. Consequently, almost all novels written during this tragic period sought to interpret the problems confronting Algerian society through a distinct ideological framework.

One of the most prominent themes in the literature of this period is the tragic fate of the intellectual. Regardless of whether the protagonist is depicted as a professor, writer, journalist, artist, or civil servant, they are represented as an individual trapped between pressure from the authorities and threats posed by destructive forces. These characters are united by a shared destiny characterised by persecution, a clandestine existence, and the constant awareness of imminent death.

Main part: By the end of the twentieth century, Algerian fiction had entered a new stage of development, turning towards the literary examination of the national crisis and its consequences. As a result, the 1990s witnessed the emergence of the "crisis novel" (riwāyat al-azma, رواية الأزمة), in which the Algerian tragedy became the central thematic concern. The plots, problems, conflicts, and





modes of artistic representation employed in these works were constructed on the basis of this traumatic historical reality.

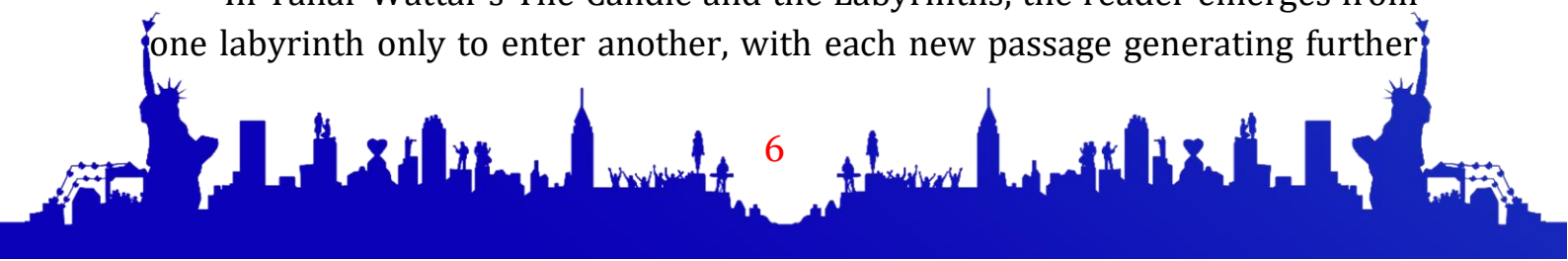
Political instability thus became one of the dominant themes of Algerian novels written during the 1990s. Writers belonging to different generations produced works addressing political violence and its social, economic, and cultural consequences. Tahar Wattar's *The Candle and the Labyrinths* (Al-Sham'a wa al-Dahālīz, الشمعة والدهاليز) and Waciny Laredj's *Lady of the Maqām* (Sayyidat al-Maqām, سيدة المقام), for example, seek to reveal the underlying causes of the crisis and expose the political practices that emerged in its aftermath. The same subject is explored in Ibrahim Saadi's *Fatwas of the Time of Death* (Fatāwā Zaman al-Mawt, فتاوى زمن الموت), Mohammed Sari's *The Tumour* (Al-Waram, الورم), and Bashir Mufti's *Ceremonies and Funerals* (Al-Marāsīm wa al-Janā'iz, المراسيم والجنائز).

In *Lady of the Maqām*, Waciny Laredj constructs the image of a resilient Algerian woman through the character of Maryam. Her personal tragedy is closely associated with the country's political system and the activities of extremist movements opposed to social and cultural progress. Maryam's fate therefore transcends the boundaries of an individual tragedy and acquires broader symbolic significance, embodying the suffering of Algerian women and intellectuals during a period dominated by political violence and ideological confrontation.

The destructive methods employed to achieve political and ideological objectives are not presented merely as incidental events or newspaper reports; rather, they constitute an integral component of the novelistic space. In depicting such methods as a devastating social force, the writer does not limit the narrative to acknowledging their existence but artistically interprets their historical, ideological, and political foundations. At the same time, the aesthetic qualities and artistic integrity of the literary work are carefully preserved.

Deeply shaken by these atrocities, the journalist eventually decides to leave her homeland. Through her conversations with survivors of sexual violence, she develops particular compassion for one victim from her native region and becomes a witness to her tragic life. In this respect, the novel presents sexual violence not merely as an individual crime but as a manifestation of the wider political, social, and moral crisis experienced by Algerian society. The female body consequently emerges as a symbolic space upon which the violence and ideological conflicts of the "Black Decade" are inscribed.

In Tahar Wattar's *The Candle and the Labyrinths*, the reader emerges from one labyrinth only to enter another, with each new passage generating further





questions. The poet portrayed in the novel is also among the victims of masked perpetrators of violence. Although evil appears to prevail over goodness within the narrative, the symbolic image of the candle continues to preserve the light of hope, knowledge, and enlightenment.

The events of the novel unfold during the period preceding the 1992 elections. The author's principal objective is not merely to depict the crisis itself but to uncover its historical, political, and ideological causes. For this reason, certain historical events are incorporated into the narrative primarily as artistic devices through which the deeper origins of the national tragedy are interpreted. The labyrinth symbolically represents political uncertainty, social disorientation, and ideological confusion, whereas the candle embodies intellectual resistance, moral perseverance, and the enduring hope of overcoming darkness.

In Rachid Boudjedra's novel *Timimoun* (تيميمون), the events unfold in the heart of the Sahara Desert. Against the background of the vast desert landscape, the author portrays the violence and succession of murders that characterised Algeria during the 1990s. Although the desert is geographically distant from the principal centres of destructive activity, news transmitted through radio broadcasts and newspapers brings the horrors of the conflict into this remote region. Throughout the novel, eight news reports describe the destruction of schools and the killing of intellectuals, foreign nationals, and tourists. In this way, the writer artistically demonstrates that intellectuals and artists were among the primary targets of political violence, while ordinary citizens were by no means spared from the national tragedy.

Prominent Algerian novelists such as Waciny Laredj, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Rachid Boudjedra, Tahar Wattar, and Bashir Mufti made significant contributions to the literary tendency known as the "literature of ordeal" (adab al-miḥna, أدب المحنة) or the "crisis novel" (riwāyat al-azma, رواية الأزمة). Alongside these established writers, representatives of a younger generation also acquired considerable creative experience within this literary movement. The Algerian writer Soufiane Zedadka may be mentioned as one of the notable representatives of this emerging generation.

In classical Arabic literature, violence was frequently represented in association with oppression, fanaticism, the brutality of political authority, and religious or ideological extremism. Such manifestations were generally interpreted as the product of despair arising from the confrontation between intellectual thought and political power. One striking example is Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi's burning of his own books. This act has been interpreted as a symbolic





expression of the anguish, alienation, and profound disillusionment experienced by an intellectual in his relationship with the political authorities of his time.

A comparable tension between literary creativity and political or ideological authority can also be observed in modern Algerian literature. Following the publication of Habib Sayah's novel *The Time of Rebellion*, the author was subjected to various forms of pressure and persecution. Similarly, Rachid Boudjedra's novel *The Repudiation* (Al-Ṭalīq, التطلق) was permitted to circulate freely in Algeria only after the end of Houari Boumediene's rule. These examples demonstrate that the Algerian novel developed within a complex environment in which artistic expression was frequently restricted by political censorship, social pressure, and ideological control. In the works of other writers, however, Islamic political movements are represented not as autonomous central protagonists but as integral components of the broader social and political reality. This approach may be observed in Waciny Laredj's *Lady of the مقام* and *Memory of Water* (Dhākirat al-Mā', ذاكرة الماء), Hamid Abdelkader's *The Slip*, and Bashir Mufti's *Ceremonies and Funerals*. In these novels, Islamist political currents form part of the historical background against which individual destinies and social conflicts unfold.

The writers' attitudes towards this phenomenon are generally expressed through a critical narrative perspective. Nevertheless, their explicit and definitive ideological positions are not always openly articulated. Instead, their views are frequently conveyed indirectly through the construction of characters, the development of narrative conflicts, symbolic imagery, and the tragic consequences of political and religious extremism. This artistic strategy enables the authors to preserve the aesthetic autonomy of their works while simultaneously offering a critical interpretation of contemporary political reality.

Conclusion: Algerian novels produced during the 1990s were unable to disengage completely from ideological concerns. The principal reason for this was the series of tragic events experienced by the country, which left a profound and lasting imprint on its national literature. The political instability, violence, extremism, censorship, and collective trauma of the "Black Decade" substantially influenced the thematic scope, system of characters, narrative structure, and artistic principles of Algerian fiction.

Consequently, while the novels of the crisis period represented the tragedies of social life through artistic forms, they also preserved a distinct ideological dimension. Their authors not only documented the realities of the period but also sought to identify the historical, political, social, and moral causes of the national





crisis. Through the portrayal of persecuted intellectuals, victims of violence, marginalised women, and individuals trapped between political authority and extremist forces, these novels transformed collective trauma into literary memory.

The "crisis novel" may therefore be regarded as both an artistic response to a particular historical period and an important means of critically interpreting Algerian society. It contributed to the preservation of historical memory, exposed the destructive consequences of political and ideological confrontation, and expressed the psychological suffering of individuals confronted with violence and social instability. This demonstrates once again that ideology occupies a significant position in the Algerian novel and remains closely interconnected with its historical development, thematic structure, and aesthetic evolution.

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