

RESEARCH ARTICLE	 <b>The Hermeneutics of political discourse in the Algerian novelistic scene; A reading space in the novel: “What the President Narrated” by Habib Al-Sayeh as a model</b>
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<b>Abstract</b> The spectacle of political discourse is depicted in the novelistic space in compliance with the dedication of a rejection policy of everything that is under a centralized authority which was crystallized by ideological systems that include knowledgeable accumulations embodied by the legitimacy of the ruling power. In his novel “What the President Narrated”, Algerian novelist Habib Sayeh investigates the deviations of politics and its argumentative styles, evoking reality through its current intellectual patterns and critically engaging with its politicized pitfalls. Therefore, we are surrounded by wide-ranging interpretations of camouflaged political discourses that filled the text of the novel, and we seek to reveal its unspoken political connotations.	
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## Introduction

Political novels interrogate controversial ideas between the ruler and the ruled, building their fictional worlds upon ideological references in which literary discourses intertwine with politics. They gesture toward the coded realities of contemporary events, laying bare protracted conflicts through which the narrator traces the ideological charges hidden behind narrative structures, weaving rhetorical dialogues that resonate with political transformations. The novelist seeks to uncover their implications and the extent of their impact on the social and economic situation by breaching the barriers of formality, uncovering disputes, and shaking up society as a form of uprising against political oppression and denouncing injustice and authoritarianism.

## Definition of the Topic

Political discourse is considered as a mode through which critical issues are perceived, achieving interaction based on implicative language that portrays the rottenness of authority and its autonomy, detached from objectivity and

democracy, this discourse often assumes a coded form that denounces the need to halt the arbitrary situation, awakening societal awareness, and identifying its experiences as a means of "objection and a way to describe the ongoing conflict that society is experiencing with the tyrannical political authority and highlighting the way each of them views the other... It is also a latent revolution guided by the pen."<sup>60</sup> Through it, it conveys the suffering of society and its tense and inflamed relationship with the authority. This is achieved by exposing what is unspoken, rebelling against the sanctity of politics, and laying bare its truths.

The ideologies of political discourse are prominently reflected in the novelistic text "What the President Narrated", where the author interrogates the political reality upon which the novel is based. The novel presents ideological conflicts, in which the people are often subjected to the decisions of political corruption, which is mostly filled with fake news, especially during the era of popular movement (Hirak) against the president, which reflects the people's awareness and his demand for a democratic state. The author also alludes, through the characters of the President and Professor Moeen, to the Algerian War of Liberation and the extent of oppression to which the Algerian people were subjected. The novel carried contradictory ideologies and political debates grounded in social frameworks that delved into the societal consciousness, which witnessed a popular movement against the operations of oppression and tyranny, as an effective element in eliciting ideological charges and the political ideas they contain that call upon both history and politics, from which the novel drew inspiration in its intertwined events.

### Problem statement

In his narrative work "What the President Narrated", the novelist Habib Sayeh relied heavily on political discourse and its mechanisms, stating that politicians confront every intellectual and oppose them for corrupting the economic system and curbing freedom. This, the author depicted in an artistic form, required a critical inquiry, leading us to pose the following problematic questions:

What are the political connotations embedded within the various allusions of the political discourse? And what underlying structures are concealed behind its symbols, which are themselves veiled within cultural references?

### Significance of the study

In a dialogue that embodies the intellectual perspective of political discourse in the novel, the changes that affect its narrative structure, and the social problems it entails from the perspective of political authority and social thought with its societal transformations, as an artistic dynamic that addresses the political situation during a specific time period with its delineations and events.

The novel often overlaps with politics, in which it is immersed, by drawing a picture of the present reality, declaring its exposure and dismantling its protrusions with the diversity of its sociological and cultural data. According to Joseph Bluntier, the importance of the political novel is revealed as "a book that directly describes, explains and analyzes a political phenomenon,"<sup>61</sup> monitoring the dialectic of ideological conflict that refutes political decisions, whether national or pan-national, and combating bureaucracy and advocating for democracy.

### Objectives of the study:

This type of study aims to interrogate new novels and disseminate them as a strategic cover that embodies political oppression. In this narrative text, the novelist employs a dialogic structure between two characters, each representing opposing sides of society, one holds a sensitive political position (the President), while the other is a teacher. The former, The President summons the teacher to document his hidden biography, which he hesitates to reveal due to the fragility of his authoritarian personality. In essence, he "seeks someone to listen to his second, long-suppressed voice."<sup>62</sup> The binary opposition between the two characters serves as a reflection of the current state of Algerian, if not broader Arab, life. Habib Sayeh adopts this discourse which is sometimes filled with sarcasm, and at other times with marginalized ideological patterns that expose the decay of politics and its representatives.

## 1. The Politics of centralized rejection in the novel "What the President Narrated"

### 1.1 Undermining the Marginalized Political Ideology of the Intellectual Class

The novelist Habib Sayeh sought to diagnose reality through its social and political practices in order to oppose centralized capitalist ideologies, establish a revolutionary ideology that contributes to undermining the pillars of capitalism, and embody a subversive ideology that defines the relationship between politics and society, aiming to eliminate political corruption in order to build a strong country, especially given that Algeria is a continent in its size.

The novelist Sayeh took the political event of "The February 22, 2019 movement" as an awareness phase that would change Algeria and improve its conditions, adopting the polyphonic dialogism in embodying his idea, which may seem ordinary at first glance; the character of Saleh Al-Zaghbi, the president, is a projection of every tyrannical president who dominates his people, especially when Saleh Al-Zaghbi asked to meet Professor Moeen, and his tone carried arrogance and contempt, as the driver said: "The president wants you to respond to his invitation immediately. The president does not like delays... So you sense that the driver's warning carries an implicit threat... Which president are you talking about? Come with me, and you will find out."<sup>6</sup> Does every president, once he feels in control, treat his people with contempt, otherwise the consequences are severe? This position does not apply to every president imbued with the national spirit, who views his position as a seat of responsibility, not a seat of tyranny.

The educational marginalization pattern is subtly implicit in this passage and throughout the novel, especially since the teacher is the primary target politically and socially because he is the voice of the nation and the bearer of its banner. However, the president summoned him over others because he knew of his integrity and honesty, intending to make him the chronicler of his biography. However, if he allowed himself to reveal his secret, his fate would be blackmail or even assassination. In this dichotomy, the president would be the sacred, while the teacher or the rest of society would be defiled. Thus, politics becomes an aspect of power, authority, and conflict between the positives and negatives of life, intricately scattered throughout the folds of the novel, which it arouses through this study resulting from the manifestations of political tyranny and awakening the sense of unionism, political struggle, and ideological awareness that "is based on intellectual dialogue committed to the heritage of this nation and its sanctities, and strives to achieve justice and equality for all its members."<sup>7</sup> The relations between the authority and the people are thus determined, and the conflict and social disparities are outlined, except that the relationship between General Al-Zaghbi and the teacher reflects the opposite of what we aspire to, as the teacher confronts Mohsen while he defends his master reveals his awareness of the necessity of positive interaction between the ruler and his subjects, and his rejection of the president's arrogant behavior.

"Nothing justifies humiliating others. In the jungle of power, you're forced to define your vital sphere like wild animals do. Ah! And when you devour those weaker than you in power or expel them from your surroundings?... This is a truth that the likes of the president are aware of. He is, for your information, a man of broad culture acquired from his experiences and readings. He is very passionate about reading... He suffers from a superiority complex... He even exhibits sadistic tendencies, especially when he gleefully talks about disciplining his opponents and subduing his lovers."<sup>8</sup> Here, General Al-Zoghbi symbolizes the state, while the character of the teacher Moeen represents the people. Al-Zoghbi's life, shaped by painful social circumstances, his parents' divorced, leaving his hometown to live alone. Then, he married a woman whom he loved very much, despite his association with mistresses. She died during childbirth and gave birth to Fadhlila, who later becomes the wife of Professor Moeen, and he watches her closely, far from her. He was once again deprived of her paternity, meaning that he lived alone. Thus, a deep-rooted inferiority complex took hold of him, which he tried to compensate for through bad behaviors such as drinking and promiscuity.

In addition to joining the ranks of the revolution, which created in him sadistic tendencies and a desire for revenge, Professor Moeen found himself besieged by a flood of thoughts and narratives, most of them stories of lamentation and sorrow. Through these confessions, the president implicitly offers apologies for crimes in which he appears to have been a founding perpetrator. "I know, because I am sure of it, that you will be keen, even if the matter is postponed a little, to formulate what was between me and you a contract of honor, in part, it is a certificate of apology to those we wronged. As for the protest movement, I realize, due to your awareness of its nature, that you, like the millions who participated in it, do not expect it to yield fully what is hoped for. You are facing a hellish system machine that I and those of my generation were among its makers"<sup>9</sup> No matter how much General Al-Zoghbi

outwardly acknowledges his mistakes, he insists on tipping the scales of power in favor of authority over the ruled, no matter how they try to create an image of justice. The centrality of power has spread throughout the folds of the novel, despite attempts to undermine it, which ultimately seem to be unsuccessful in their entirety.

The character of President Saleh Al-Zaghbi closely resembles that of the former president in that they do not have any offspring and are from the Western (Tlemcen) origins. Despite their professed embrace of the entire nation, they both feel lonely. Whenever the more centralized and absolute the dominance of those in power becomes, the more intense are the underlying feelings of fear and vulnerability emotions that cannot be openly revealed to anyone.

### 1.2 Bridging the gap between the ruler and the ruled and politicizing an interactive relationship between them

The relationship between the regime and the people often becomes tense, leading to dialogue-based disputes, in which each party imposes its principles, and seeking the most effective way to tip the balance in its favor through dynamic rhetorical maneuvers which all couched in divergent terminologies that ultimately express the same objective across the globe.

Political literature, especially the political novel, has contributed significantly in diagnosing this faltering argumentative dialectic and its repercussions, which have been a source of sociological tension and the lack of democracy. Although the balance of power often appears skewed in favor of the ruler, a closer examination of societal dynamics reveals that the ruler-ruled dialectic does not apply solely to presidents and their subordinates. It extends to anyone who holds power over others, whether by virtue of position or social status, which enables them to dominate and exploit others. Therefore, one cannot always pass a negative judgment on the ruler alone. Rather, the ruler may change, but the authoritarian mentality is widespread among the governed themselves. It is illogical for us to revolt against a corrupt person just because he appears to be so, so that some of us dominate others visibly. The complex of rule and authority is deeply rooted in the human nature as a whole, especially if the person lacks contentment.

The author deliberately depicts the collapse of authoritarian centralism through the president's confessional outpouring to Professor Moeen. The writer succeeds in drawing out political meanings through authoritarian practices embedded in artistic intricacies, as: "Writing memoirs is more dangerous than any interrogation imposed by the conscience upon its bearer."<sup>6</sup> Black comedy was embodied in the novelistic work, which showed the manifestations of political decadence dedicated to the inevitability of the revolutionary vision. This work channels popular aspirations for positive change, not out of hostile incitement motive, but out of a need to dwarf the tyrants and extinguish the dreadful ideas that have long haunted the street.

The writer, in his narrative journey, pointed out the narrow horizon that the Algerian citizen lived and still lives, whether during the revolution or amid the current black reality, which produced a generation that has lost confidence in demanding its rights even through peaceful means like "the popular movement" (Hirak). This followed the widening gap between the president and his people, the latter having withdrawn their trust from a leader who lacked awareness and could not address his nation except through messages sealed with his stamp. This provoked the people, who saw it as stupidity, and suspecting that someone was impersonating him, and running the country in his place, so they decided to boycott him, and reject his candidacy for a fifth term. However, the leader "Salih al-Zoghbi" also wrote a history filled with both victories and disappointments, most of which stemmed from his fear of dying while in power. He had "established a comprehensive system of administrative, financial, media, and police institutions, along with parties, unions, associations, business owners, close figures, and families connected by blood ties. He spent oil and gas revenues on this network to use it as a protective shield during crises and to mobilize it when necessary to crush any real opposition to his policy."<sup>7</sup>

No matter how positive the intentions of politicians may seem, they are often schizophrenic. They see themselves as the pyramid and essence of society, which leads to an imbalance of power, so that the stronger party prevails. The systems of power have been shaken in the bonds of the narrative space, and political discourse has emerged from the depths of the system and history with its authoritarian repercussions "because it is concerned not with truth but with

power, obsessed with benefit rather than reality, and more preoccupied with a corrupt duality of victory and defeat. The novelist writes the history that the historian does not write, the history of the oppressed, the persecuted, and the marginalized, a tragic history that falls into oblivion, leaving behind scattered traces that the novelist seeks out and shapes into books unwelcome in the libraries of darkness.”<sup>109</sup>

No matter how much power flees from reality and hides behind its strategies that destroy identity and hang in the void, there must come an end to the scenario that establishes ideological systems that are in conflict over politics and its depths that are obsessed with power and creating systems that preserve the country's sovereignty and dynamism and protect it from fragmentation and loss.

## 2. Arguments of political discourse and the evocation of its current ideological structures

### 2.1 Political discourse as a camouflage of reality and its arguments

Every discourse operates within its own communicative sphere that generates mechanisms through which political discourses are stylized, aiming to argue with public opinion to create interaction between cognitive systems, and elevate the certain value of political discourse over other forms of discourses. This is achieved particularly through the language used to prepare the recipient into accepting the arguer's intention for a policy based on the goal of imposition and superiority, typically conveyed by political figures to their subordinates. This is especially significant in an Islamic society, where values of dialogue and consultation prevail. These values do not naturally align with the opposition-driven nature that has permeated Algerian public discourse, which has been tasked with changing the state of the nation, since the language of political discourse has undergone “radical transformations over the past two centuries, affecting both the core and peripheries of the political sphere. These linguistic shifts largely reflect, to a significant degree, the growing influence of Western cultural and material hegemony in Islamic societies, shaping the awareness and imagination of Muslims, leading to the emergence of an ambiguous language that they use to describe their conditions, affairs, and realities.”<sup>110</sup> This ambiguity is built upon the richness of political tactics, which the novelist masterfully embodied in his work. Politicians may often think that women are disposable furniture that can be bought and replaced, so they practice vice with them, and if a woman resists, they become angry and seek revenge on her. This, in fact, an excuse for them, not against them, and this is what the novelist depicted in his narrative achievement through the character of President AL-Zoghbi, who has numerous lovers. One of them, Sonia whom he called her “daughter of the catastrophe”, she was merely a refuge for his lust and nothing more. Even if she betrayed him, he would become upset, as shown when he addressed Professor Moeen angrily about the matter: “Daughter of the catastrophe! I knew she would use you as a matchstick to ignite my jealousy... She did it with you too! Then she tells me in a voice message that she found you to be a very kind and elegant man! ... I know she’s a treacherous bitch... So I won’t allow you to contact her again to hear from her any lies and misleading words about me.”<sup>111</sup> Although daughter of the catastrophe is the daughter of Minister Si Majid, a well-educated woman who aspires to obtain a doctorate (PhD), the general, Saleh al-Zoghbi, took her as a lover to entice her to achieve her goal. This suggests that political positions often carry a fantastical tinge that reveals a dark reality. Even the daughters of politicians are not spared from deception and exploitation, revealing that such individuals often use their positions as hotbeds to ignite the temptation of corruption and seduce the vulnerable, just as Saleh al-Zoghbi did to convince Professor Moeen that his lover, Sonia, with whom he spent ten years, was a vile woman who had betrayed him in the same manner she had betrayed others, despite being a minister’s daughter, she herself confessed, “The environment I move in is no different from a pigsty.”<sup>112</sup> This strongly confirms that not everyone who holds the position of minister or president is truly qualified for the role. Therefore, it is crucial to establish proper criteria for selecting those who represent the people and guide the country toward stability, otherwise, we cannot expect the country to thrive or to be set right.

### 2.2 The Proliferation of ideological patterns in contemporary political discourses

Habib Sayeh’s novel “What the President Narrated” traces political issues that have disrupted the classical narrative charter, adopting an experimental approach by employing politics as a system that conceals obscured truths. These truths are revived through the novel’s narrative, with its contemporary features and existential dimensions, in attaining to derive a correct understanding of the relationship between the authority and its people, free from fallacy and doubt, which often lead individuals into intellectual stereotyping. This stereotyping ultimately pushes them to think

about immigration, which is a political issue signaling instability. The novelist took his novelistic text as a stage in which events move, expressing a bitter reality filled with ideological structures hidden by history and exposed by art. This is in line with his belief in the principle of “the right person in the right place”, as the president exploits his position to fulfill the needs of his associates and close friends, drawing closer to Sonia, showing affection toward her, and eventually getting her: “Because he is like a hungry wolf unable to restrain his blatant desire to take her in his arms and lay her down onto the sofa... So he began reminding her that he had intervened in favor of her father to help him obtain the ministry, that he had never denied any request for academic funding or her scholarship abroad... nor had he spared any effort with the Social Security Fund to ensure her late mother’s treatment at the largest hospital in Paris.”<sup>40</sup> The character of the politician Saleh Al-Zoghbi internalized the ideology of exploitation and authoritarianism, which was entrenched in his imagination, compelling him to humiliate others, misuse public funds to satisfy personal desires, and present himself as an invincible dictator. However, Sonia turned the table on him using his own sarcastic style by exposing him in front of Professor Moeen. She portrayed him as humiliated in front of her: “groveling at her feet like a tamed puppy... She never expected that a man who didn’t even know her, and who wanted nothing but only to fulfill a pressing biological needs, would be shocked to discover she wasn’t a virgin despite being unmarried. That night, she discovered for the first time that a man could have only one testicle.”<sup>41</sup> Sonia was able to mock Al-Zaghbi by revealing his secrets and showing the weakness of his personality, which had always appeared in a strong image. We notice the similarity of methods between them, because they both come from the same social class and because convincing the other aims to bring down the morale of the opponent and frustrate him, just as any politician does when he ignores his subordinates and tightens control over them.

The novelist’s justification through this artistic work, Perhaps, is to interrogate the underlying ideologies that lie behind the glittering speeches, which appear rich on the surface but their content is empty. The mechanisms of argumentation work together to give these speeches an influential, dialogic tone, interspersed with gestures such as influences, sessions, and field visits, which politicians deploy to absorb public anger, listen to the citizens, and record their concerns.

It is no wonder that the former president succeeded in winning over the people and maintaining their favor through four consecutive terms. In doing so, he effectively mastered the mechanisms of argumentative discourse. As soon as he fell ill, the rift became clear, and the people awakened to oppose his re-election bid in such a poor health condition. This resulted in the peaceful popular movement (Hirak), the foundation of which was manifested in transforming the country’s social, political, and economic situation. In this context, the novel “What the President Narrated” was one of the means of national ideological awareness, uncovering persuasive arguments in an improvised language that inspires continuity and promotes the orientation of the revivalist thought toward social justice.

### **3. Interpretations of political discourses and the revelation of their significances:**

#### **3.1 The Historical significances of political discourse in the novel:**

Political discourse is characterized by symbolic representations, resulting in dynamic expressive structures in which social, political, and cultural systems interact, concealing unspoken patterns within them. Interpretation of these discourses relies on the sociological, cultural, and even historical context. The latter, which carries hidden intentions while overlooking many of the desired events. This is because political discourse, by nature, serves a pragmatic function, making it essential to uncover its underlying meanings, particularly those that align with historical realities and are understood through the individual’s relationship with his or her history and society. Each reader receives a political text according to his or her mood and circumstances, whether within the country or abroad, whether driven by national or pan-Arab sentiment, and whether he or she belongs to the group targeted by the discourse.

The language of political discourse is the first building block through which the historical textual context can be understood. Habib Sayeh’s text discusses diverse historical and political events that are open to a wide range of interpretations. The novelist evokes the events of the Liberation War, alludes briefly to the era of the Black Decade (Algeria’s violent 1990s), and spotlights the popular uprising against the president through the peaceful popular movement (Hirak), in which each of these events carries multiple interpretations.



The discourse of the liberation War carries confusing revolutionary connotations that established the principle of opposition between the Algerians and the French; where the intensity of the political discourse was most embodied. President Al-Zaghbi rose to the level of revolutionaries during the colonial period and was subjected to torture. He spent "weeks under torture to extract a forced confession from him that he was part of a cell that distributed leaflets condemning the coup. He had prepared for his tormentors a fabricated confession so that he could rest and then invalidate it by fabricating a new confession if they tortured him again."<sup>66</sup> The interpretation of the political discourse shifted across contexts. President Al-Zaghbi was distinguished by the firmness of his national sense despite his young age, and his readiness to sacrifice for his country without fear or deterrence from colonialism. The discourse in this context was evasive, indicating his commitment to the issues of his country. That revolutionary desire still resided within him, even after the change in balances and contexts. In his dialogue with Professor Moeen in his confessions about his wartime struggles, he said: "You reminded me of something painful, as it brings back to me the brutality of war and the cruelty of man in it. Although I do not have a clear image of the soldier from whose grip I snatched this machine gun while he was gasping for death in the battle of Souk Ahras... I knew officers and soldiers in the Liberation Army who were liquidated for their moral and political convictions regarding the war's outcome. They were honest before their own consciences"<sup>67</sup>

Here, the political discourse embodied the sovereignty of the Algerian people, the supremacy of public interest over personal gain, the sacrifice of oneself for the sake of the homeland, and the courage that was nurtured from early childhood. Many young men gave up their lives so that others might live and that conditions might improve, and so that the enemy may be expelled from their occupied land, and they have succeeded in doing so.

### 3.2 The cultural connotations of political discourse in the novel:

Culture is embodied in all aspects of life, especially political ones. However, what is strange is that while the person remains the same, their dispositions often change depending on the changing contexts of life and the influence of other cultures, which reflect the true nature of the political groups in misleading, influencing, and persuading the public. Speeches thus appear to address societal problems in an authoritarian phenomenon at its core, often creating within groups a conviction of the extent of their submission and support for him, whether out of fear, desire, or exaggeration and magnification of the contents of the speech. The leader's personality is characterized by an authoritarian tendency, and his speeches are generally sarcastic and hyperbolic. In his confession to Professor Moeen, whom he engages in a military conflict or battle, he must "confront the president in a hidden fight to prevent him from breaching his emotional boundaries, so he won't expand his dominance. He is fully aware that the president experiences a strange pleasure, almost sexual, in making you feel that you are in his hands and under his control, like a low-ranking soldier."<sup>68</sup> Thus, the leader's discourse carried a negative authoritarian dimension and was full of exclusionary connotations. It does not require delving too deeply into the implications of political discourse, which is ideological and leads to many paradoxes.

No matter how broad the relationship between literature and politics becomes, whether in war or peace, even if it was modest in the beginning, with the multiplication of crises across the Arab world, writers became committed to the issues of their nation, so the boundaries of cultural relations have expanded, and politics has become dominant in all literary arts, especially the novel with its depiction of the tragedies of peoples, whether during wars or in the relationship between rulers and their ruled. Politics is vividly manifested in the novel "What the President Narrated" through different perspectives, whose discourses varied with the diversity of social, political and cultural contexts. Thus, the novel carries ideological burdens rooted in different time periods, and its political characters range from the virtuous and positive to the wicked and negative, depicting the multiple stages of history.

### Conclusion:

Among the key findings we have reached in this research are the following:

- The dialectic of ruler and ruled is governed by ideological references that reflect a present exhausted by sociological conflicts.

- Political discourse represents a form of societal awareness that conveys the recurring relationship between leader and subordinate.
- Political discourse seeks to destabilize capitalist structures and eradicate political corruption.
- The logic of marginality reveals subversive visions that attempt to promote the concept of justice.
- The spread of the ideology of tyranny and exploitation in the political milieu motivated by the need to satisfy needs.
- Counter-argumentation is a strategy employed by politicians to justify their positions and tighten control over their subordinates.
- Revolutionary reversal is a confusing deterrent method that encourages political rectitude.
- The implications of political discourses include authoritarian phenomena that vary according to different contexts.
- The dominance of politics over all literary arts due to its control over life issues, as it is the pillar upon which all aspects of society are based with their many paradoxes.

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